

Media Advocacy, Development Journalism and Child Right issues in Nigeria

Oyesomi Kehinde, Olusola Oyero, Okorie Nelson

Department of Mass Communication, College of Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.

***Corresponding Author:**

Okorie Nelson

Email: nelson.okorie@covenantuniversity.edu.ng

Abstract: In the sphere of journalism, child right issues are perennial issues that have raised mixed feelings and reactions among media experts and scholars. The thrust of this paper examined the use of development journalism to promote media advocacy for child right issues in Nigeria. Against the backdrop of development media theory and the agenda setting theory, which moves that child right issues are developmental issues that demand adequate attention from the media, it become expedient that media reports on child right issues should be treated as issues of national interest in newspapers, magazines, radio station and television station. It was recommended that child right issues such as early child marriages, child labour and child trafficking should be reported and analyzed in the Nigerian mass media; individuals that perpetuate such crimes should be punished and deterred from further acts.

Keywords: Media advocacy, development, journalism, child right and Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Child right issue is a perennial issue that has been discussed and debated among media experts, educationists and social scientists. Notable scholars see the abuse of a child as a crime against humanity. Oyero observed that children are ‘voiceless’ and ‘invisible’ as there is a gross under-reportage of children’s issues having measured the extent of coverage given to children in some newspapers [1]. It is also disheartening to note there are several cases of child marriage, child trafficking and child labor in the Nigerian society[2].

This situation undoubtedly is alarming and calls for urgent intervention. Perhaps, it was this concern that prompted the passage of the Child Right Act in sixteen states of the Federation. For example, some states like Imo State have made it compulsory that all children go to school and it was a crime if parents or guardians were not in support of such directive. Importantly, there are various expectations of the mass media in protecting the rights of a child. Some of these expectations are found in various conventions and laws aimed at the protection of the rights of a child. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, Oslo Workshop/Resolution, Child Care and Protection Act, European Convention on the Exercise of Children’s Rights, Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media are some of the avenues used to express concern for children and media expectations about them.

Against this background, the locus of this paper examines the use of development journalism for promoting media advocacy for child right issues in Nigeria. In addition, this paper was organized in a number of rubrics; it x-rayed the rights of a child using Nigeria as an example. It also examined the need for development journalism in the Nigerian society and how development journalism can be used to promote and protect the rights of a Nigerian child.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Among the dominant theoretical perspectives that could be harnessed in the analysis of this work, the following perspectives or models, which are of immediate relevance to this areas are; The Agenda Setting media theory and the Development Media theory.

Succinctly, agenda – setting implies that “the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society [3]. In raising such vital issues to the platform of discourse and draw attention to it, the media succeeds in their efforts among other ways, via the quantity / frequency of reporting, the prominence given to the reports, indicated through headline displays; pictures, layouts in newspapers, film, graphics prime time allocation on radio and television. In essence, there is a need for media experts and communication professionals to use their functional role of agenda setting for the prime place of child right issues so as to increase the

awareness and knowledge of child right issues among individuals in the country.

Development media theory, which serve as part of the theoretical framework of the paper is largely normative. Its key tenet stipulates that the mass media especially in developing countries (like Nigeria), to be considered relevant and responsible, they must identify with our national interest and contribute to the socio-economic development of the Nation in which they exist [3,4]. In relation to this paper, child right issues are developmental issues that demand adequate attention from the media. Reports regarding child right issues should be treated as issues of national interest in newspapers, magazines, radio station and television station.

RIGHTS OF A CHILD

The rights of a child may be defined as the entitlement of a child that is backed up by law which serves to protect the male child or female child from abuses and other activities that may constitute danger to the child. The rights of a child based on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child [5].

The United Nations on the Rights of the Child is a treaty/pact that was signed and implemented by member nations which is aimed at protecting and preserving children from all forms of abuses. The United Nations urged member nations to domesticate the UNCRC in their various countries.

Child Rights Act (2003) lists the rights of a child as [16]:

- Right to Survival and Development: Every child irrespective of his or nation, tribe, religion, status, background and other determinants have the right to live as well as grow into an adult. In simple terms, a child has the right for his/ her life not be terminated by anyone.
- Right to a Name: A male or female child from age 0- 18 years has the right to a name that differentiates him or her from another. This means that every child must have a name that he or she would be referred to.
- Right to Private and Family Life: A child has a legal entitlement to have a home and a family where he or she resides. This means that a child must have privacy in his or own family or home and nobody has the right to intrude into that privacy.
- Freedom of Association and Peaceful Assembly: A child has the right to freely relate with anyone irrespective of his or her race, sex, religion, cultural background, age without any hindrance. That is, a child has the right to make friends with anyone he chooses to and also have the right to live in a peaceful society or family as the case may be.
- Freedom to Thought, Conscience and Religion: A child has the privilege to think about whatever he chooses to think about; he/she has the right to a conscience that is, the right to have a sense of morality in determining what is right or wrong and also a child has the right to choose whatever religion he or she wants to practice without adult, parental or guardian interference.
- Right to Freedom of Movement: Every child has the right to be free to move from one place to another without any hindrance.
- Right to Freedom from Discrimination: A child has the right to be free from any form of segregation or unfairness in the society. That is, the society has no right to be unfair to children and treat them like less human beings.
- Right to Dignity of the Child: Every child has the right to be treated with self respect that is, the society especially parents, guardians and society has the responsibility to treat children with respect that is, and they should be spoken to anyhow because it could affect their self esteem. Even in the kind of jobs they may be made to do which is obviously wrong but in that, the children should not be made to do jobs or work in places that will stain their dignity; one of such jobs is child prostitution, child trafficking, child abuses and so on that can reduce the dignity of a child.
- Right to Leisure, recreation and Cultural Activities: Every child has the legal entitlement to have a good childhood in form of leisure, recreation and cultural activities. This means that a child should be allowed to rest after school hours or any other day, also should be allowed to play and taken to recreational centers like beaches, amusement parks, museums, cinemas and other relaxation centers. Also, they have the right to participate or know about cultural activities that is, they have the entitlement to know about their culture which consists of their beliefs, language and they should be allowed to learn how to speak their mother tongue including folklores or stories that is culturally -based.
- Right to Health and Health services: A male or female child according to the UNCRC has the right to be healthy and also to be provided with proper health services right from the day of birth to adulthood. Parents and guardians are charged to engage in healthy practices that will benefit the child. Such practices includes: immunization against polio, ante-natal and post-natal care.
- Right to Parental care, Protection and Maintenance: Every child as charged by law has the right to a good parental care that includes proper upbringing, protection from harm and maintaining the child to attain maturity.
- Right of a Child to Free, Compulsory and Universal Primary Education: Universal primary

education is a must for every child. Therefore, every child has the right to be educated at least at the primary level. This means that every parent or guardian should ensure that his or her child irrespective of the gender to be educated.

- Right of a Child in Need of Special Protection Measure
- Right of an Unborn Child to Protection against Harm: A pregnant woman is charged with the responsibility of protecting her unborn child by going for her ante-natal check-ups where the medical practitioner will carry out a scan to be sure the child is well placed and other health services. The mother must also not engage in some practices like not doing some things like taking drugs or alcohol that will affect the unborn child.
- Contractual Rights of a Child

Oyero [1] gives the “historical antecedents to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child stating that there is the need to appreciate the overall connection between instruments concerning human rights and international organization that regulates the special position of children over time. He added that UNCRC antecedents in terms of years are as follows: Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child (GDR) in 1924, Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, Declaration of the Rights of the Child (DRC) in 1959 and Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1989”.

It states that [6] “the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed a Universal Declaration of Human Rights where signatories including most of the countries of the world agreed that all human beings irrespective of race, political regime they lived under had a number of basic rights and freedoms that no state can take away from them”. It further states that forty-one(41) years later in 1989 the General Assembly adopted the UN Convention on the Rights of a Child. He further emphasized that the convention provided a special range of inalienable rights for those under the age of 18 years.

THE NEED FOR DEVELOPMENTAL JOURNALISM

Development issues have become recurrent in discourses across the globe particularly in developing countries such as found in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Modern scholars no longer see development as mainly matters of gross national product, technological advancement and widespread industrialization.

Wilson states that some of the large issues of development include [7]:

1. self reliance: independence in agriculture and other needs
2. education and the elimination of illiteracy;

3. Economic recovery and the eradication of poverty
4. Decentralization
5. Cultural identity in the large world family
6. Modernization of production process, and human rights, social justice and peace.

To address these issues affecting the developing countries, there is a need for development journalism. Soola [8] reasoned that development journalism should be seen as a new form of investigative reporting that examines, evaluates and reports the relevance of a development project to the national and local need. In other words, development journalism comprises the reporting of ideas, programmes, activities and events, which are packaged to improve the living standard of the citizenry, especially in the rural regions. It is this type of thinking that made Okorie [9] to assert that “journalists should apply their agenda setting function to educate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards eradicating of prejudices and abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of inferiority”

Importantly, development journalism is rooted in the sphere of development communication. Development communication simply refers to communication for development purposes. The concept of development communication share similar perspectives with the development media theory. The tenets of the development media theory are strengthened by the stance of Okorie [10] who believes that development communication promotes “the use of principles and practice for exchange of ideas to fulfill the development objectives”. The core of development communication can be linked to media advocacy, which is premised on a strong belief that communication is indispensable in dynamic consensus, and that dynamic consensus is a necessity for social change and development. Okorie [10] citing Ricardio identify three roles of communication for development that can be linked with media advocacy. There are:

- a) Making things visible by the way of using information to explain developmental programs with the aim of creating new perspectives
- b) Fostering policy acceptance- enacting and promoting policies. This is where the role of communication becomes crucial in creating conducive environment for acceptable development programme implementation and execution by target communities, information have also extends to making the people know and understand the basis of development programmes and projects in respective communities.
- c) Facilitating platform processes: given a voice to different stakeholders to engage in platform where negotiation among different parties can take place.

In essence, it means that development communication promotes media advocacy; development journalism fosters advocacy journalism.

DEVELOPMENT JOURNALISM, MEDIA ADVOCACY AND CHILD RIGHT IN NIGERIA

Mass media are generally defined as those channels of communication which are capable of reaching heterogeneous audiences simultaneously with uniform messages. These media include radio, television, newspaper and magazine [11-12].

Mass media offer the following functions [13]:

- 1) inform (a teacher function)
- 2) surveillance (a watcher function)
- 3) service the economic system
- 4) hold society together (act as sort of a cultural glue)
- 5) entertain
- 6) act as a community forum (media equivalent of town hall meeting or group discussion)
- 7) set the agenda
- 8) service the political system

Thus, the media men should survey the environment and report significant issues relating to child right in the country. The role of the media extends to beyond mere spotting of danger and relaying the warnings on child right abuse. The mass media are obliged to perform some domestic surveillance as well as help in the gathering and supplying of information that will aid the community to operate on a day to day basis. UNICEF [14]

‘a well- informed, conscious population is not only better able to look after its own interests at a personal or family level and in such matters as employment and income generation, hygiene, health and education; but it is much better placed to hold to account its government. For the mass media to perform these functions effectively there must be media diversity or pluralism as well as legal guarantees and practical respect of the principle of freedom of expression. Other essential conditions stressed includes: a high professional code of ethics, technical expertise and a market environment favorable for media operation. In addition, the media should make available a platform where the public as well as children will have access to and are well served by the mass media and other less formal; means of communication ’

In the same vein, UNICEF [15] identifies certain responsibilities of the mass media, which includes:

- i. Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefits to the child.
- ii. Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange, and dissemination of

- iii. such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national, and international sources;
- iv. Encourage the production and dissemination of children’s books;
- v. Encourage the mass media to have a particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;
- v. Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her wellbeing,

Oyero [1] citing Hammarberg outlines the other responsibilities for the mass media. He asserts

‘The media are charged with the responsibility to monitor abuses and progress in terms of reporting violations of children’s rights in the media, the yards tick against which reality could be measured; the media also have the responsibility to respect the integrity of child by recognizing the vulnerability of children in certain circumstances including their capacity/strength for development and should be careful not to violate the integrity of individual children in their reporting on, for instance, crime and sexual abuse; media should be allowed to participate in the media that is, the views of children should be sought, heard and given due respect especially freedom of expression, thought, conscience and religion; and to protect children against harmful influences through the media that is, should encourage guidelines to protect children at large from injurious media output, for instance, certain violent and pornographic materials.’

Oyero [1] also adds that media advocacy can help in promoting and respecting the rights of children or any other development issue. Thus, the core responsibilities of development journalists are discussed below:

- i. Journalist must inform in such a way that debates can be facilitated in order to solve problems and help Nigerians to understand and communicate underlying invisible systems behind child right issue.
- ii. Journalists must openly pursue child right issues by providing more information and adopting different types of coverage.
- iii. Journalists must dig deeper into issues affecting the welfare and development of the Nigerian child. The views of children should be sought, heard and given due coverage in the Nigerian mass media
- iv. Journalists must monitor abuses and progress in terms of reporting violations of children’s rights in the media, the yardstick against which reality could be measured.

-
- v. Journalists must monitor the actual implementation of the rights of the child in the different states of the nation.

CONCLUSION

Journalists have the responsibilities to perform the watchdog, leadership and informational role in the society. In addition, a development journalist must perform the informational role that promotes media advocacy for social change and development. It is expedient that development journalists promote the interest and welfare of the Nigerian child. This is in line with international conventions and laws that promote child right and human capital development in the international community. Child right issues such as early child marriages, child labour and child trafficking should be reported and analyzed in the Nigerian mass media; individuals that perpetuate such crimes should be punished and deterred from further acts. Importantly, development journalists must spearhead campaigns that promote child right issues in Nigeria.

REFERENCES

1. Oyero O; Child rights coverage in Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers (1999-2003): a comparative study. USA: VDM. 2009.
2. Oyero O; Presenting Children's Rights' Issues in Nigerian and Ghanaian Newspapers. Fort Hare Papers. 2011;17:84-111.
3. Folarin B; Theories of mass communication: An introductory text. Ibadan: Sterling- Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd., 1998.
4. Mc Quail D; Mass communication theory: An introduction. London: Sage Publications, 1987.
5. UNICEF. Convention on the rights of the child. 2011. Available online from <http://www.unicef.org>.
6. Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Available online from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Universal_Declaration_of_Human_Rights
7. Wilson D; New perspectives in applied communication. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig) ltd. 2005.
8. Soola EO; Development communication: The past, the present and the future. In Soola, E.O. (Ed), 2003.
9. Okorie N; Development journalism and Africa: Tackling violence against women. *Africana*, 2011;5(2):171-184
10. Okorie N; Localism in communication for the development of developing countries. *Journal of Global Communication*, 2009; 1(2):31-39.
11. Uttara M; Different Types of Mass Media, 2011.
12. Mass media. Available online from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass_media
13. Eight functions of mass media. Available online from <http://hope.journ.wvu.edu/tpilgrim/j190/190.8functionslist.html>
14. UNICEF; The State of the World's Children. 2001
15. UNICEF; A world fit for children. New York: UNICEF., 2011.
16. Child Rights Act. Nigeria, 2003