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Chapter 5
Constraints and Challenges of the Media in Child Rights Advocacy and Development in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Studies have revealed that children constitute more than one-third of the world's population and half of the world's population is under the age of 25. In the age of globalization, media institutions and services are controlled by the market forces. Critically speaking, media institutions have not lived up to their expectations towards child rights advocacy and development. This chapter discusses the plight of children in Africa. It argues for the child rights advocacy as well as discusses the challenges and constraints that hinder the media from performing their role adequately. It concludes that the mass media plays an important role in promoting and sustaining the child rights advocacy. The chapter recommends that all media houses must strive to live up to the expectations of the people no matter the constraints and challenges that might stand in their way.

INTRODUCTION

Media indeed is a powerful instrument in raising the awareness of people of their rights, most especially of the children (Guru, Nabi & Raslana, 2013). Broadcast Journalists have responsibility of uncovering stories (through dramas, documentaries and news) of abuses occurring in the society that involve children. In these cases of abuses in the society, infiltrating sensitive stories, such as, child abuse is a must. Stories such as these have an overwhelming impact on society's attitude towards children which greatly affect the way the adult behave. It thus becomes an issue of concern to media practitioners to raise awareness of these children's issues and to avoid further exploitation these children who are extremely damaged by the abuses they went through.

Oyero (2010) rightly states that, the media provides a unique avenue through which children related issues are brought to the fore of public discourse. In recognition of this fact, the Norwegian Government and the United Nations Children Education Fund (UNICEF) launched the Oslo Challenge to call to action to ensure that the overwhelming power of the media for good in the lives of children is identified, encouraged, and supported, while the potential harmful effects are recognised and reduced. In this regard, it is not inaccurate to say that Nigerian children are faced with various challenges during their journey through life. Nigeria ranks among the worst nations in many children-related world ranking indices ranging from child health, out-of-school children, to child labour, child development index, among others. Several children-related issues abound that require urgent attention of stakeholders within and outside the country in order for the country to redeem her image as one that caters for the needs and protects the innocence of her children. The media was thus challenged to promote good ethical conduct to avoid sensationalism, stereotyping, or undervaluing of children and their rights (Child Rights International Network [CRIN], 2009).

CONCEPTS OF A CHILD AND CHILD RIGHTS

There is no generally accepted definition of a child or who a child is. However, in order to surmount the difficulty in defining a child, Sadeeq (2016, p.45) highlightes that, it is surprising to note that under the common law, the definition of the word 'child' varies with the statutes, so that a child is a child in one statute but not a child in another. Indeed, there is a legislative hesitation as to whether a child is properly to be termed a child, a minor or an infant; nor is this the only terminology to be considered. There are also juveniles and young persons to be woven into the legal fabric.

Sadeeq (2016) states further that the common law position which stipulates that a person who has not reached the age of 14 is a child applies in Nigeria. However, the current laws in Nigeria that deal with the child are the Constitution, the Child Right Act of 2003 and Children and Young Person's Law. In the Children and Young Persons Law, child is defined as a person less than 14 years while a juvenile or young person is any person who has attained the age of 14 years but has not reached 18 years. Even though the Constitution of Nigeria does not contain any provision specifying who a child is, it has been submitted that by prescribing 18 years as the voting age in the Electoral Act, it suggests a child to be a person under the age of 18. Also the Child Right Act defines a child as any person under the age of 18 years.

Child rights therefore can be said to mean the rights enjoyed by children that is specifically linked to their status as minors and to their needs for special care and protection. Child rights can also be said to mean the claims that all children have to survival, development, protection and participation. It could also mean the totality of obligations owed to children by both adults and the states. These rights are contained in several local and international instruments and they include right to life, right to health, right to welfare, right to education and right to freedom from physical or mental harm among others (Sadeeq, 2016).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

North America, Australasia, and Western Europe have made progress as regards improving the lives of children, but the position of children in the countries of Asia, South America, Eastern Europe, and Africa remains tenuous. The concept of child protection is often a distant dream, and the very structures of society negate the attempts to alleviate the position children find themselves in.

Therefore, with the unending challenges facing the Nigerian child, the task is on the media to drive change towards improving the status of the Nigerian child by drawing public attention to positive issues that can enhance their quality of life. But surprisingly, the Nigerian media is not living up to its responsibility in championing the course of the Nigerian child. The media can help to improve the plight of Nigerian children through extensive coverage, sensitisation, and proper positioning of children-related issues. The nature of such issues is also important if the desired change must be achieved. Premised on this argument, this paper thus examines the plight of the Nigerian child and how the media can help in sensitising the public on issues through and coverage in Nigerian media outfits.

PLIGHT OF CHILDREN IN NIGERIA

Oyero and Salawu (2018) have noted that among the most destitute species on earth, the African child numbered in them in millions because they are born and bred in abject poverty, deprived of education, suffer from various ailments, malnourished and discriminated against, and even abandoned and vulnerable to so much abuses, such as, child labour, child soldiers in warfare, etc. The issue of education remains problematic. Even with significant improvement in access to primary education, completion rates have remained abysmal as a result of high level of attrition. A World Bank report in 2012 revealed that completion rate at primary level in Central African Republic and Chad in 2009 was not less than 40% (World Bank, 2012). Hence, it is a great challenge to access to secondary schools in Africa (African Child Policy Forum [ACPF], 2013). Coupled with a significant gender dimension, there is a huge deficit of secondary school education.

In addition, it was highlighted that substantial number of children in many countries are still left out of secondary school education with exception of a few countries, such as South Africa, which has achieved considerable high level of access to secondary school education amongst its girls (97%) and boys at (93%) (UNICEF, 2012). Access to education is poor at both primary and secondary levels. For example, net enrollment for primary education for boys/girls is as low as 39%/37% in Liberia, 43%/38% in Eritrea, 47%/34% South Sudan, and 53%/56% in Sudan (ACPF, 2016). "More than half of the 59 million out-of-school children live in sub-Saharan Africa" and these children have limited prospects for re-entering school (UNICEF, 2016, p. 44). There are also problems with quality of education in form of unqualified teachers, overcrowded class rooms, and unacceptably high teacher-pupil ratio.

The situation is worsen by low pay for teachers with its attendant consequences of low morale, absenteeism, and teachers seeking for extra means of income generation to make ends meet at the expense of teaching the pupils. Some even completely abandon the teaching professions in favor of more rewarding businesses. "Out of 53 African countries, 20 have pupil-teacher ratios at primary level that are far below the recommended ratio of 1:40. In some countries, teachers are compelled to cater for 80 pupils or more" (ACPF, 2013, p. 17). Millions of children are also caught up in emergencies as exemplified with the Central African Republic, Nigeria, and South Sudan, with their education completely decimated, jeopardised and set for serious decadence, while many children are drawn into fighting as soldiers or forced to support armed groups (Human Rights Watch, 2016).

Child's health also largely remains at low ebb. The percentage of children under the age of five dying during the neonatal period is increasing. In 2015, neonatal deaths accounted for 45% of total deaths, 5% more than in 2000. High numbers of

children are still dying before the age of 5 years with worst cases in Angola (157), Chad (139), Somalia (137), Central Africa Republic (130), Sierra Leone (120), Nigeria (109), and Benin (100) (UNICEF, 2016). Besides, opportunity for treatment and utilisation of health services is low. For example; "only about a quarter (26 per cent) of all HIV-positive children in sub-Saharan Africa had access to antiretroviral treatment (ART) in 2009" (UNICEF, Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS [UNAIDS], World Health Organization [WHO], and United Nations Population Fund [UNFPA], 2010, p. 5), though this increased to 40% in Eastern and Southern Africa (UNICEF, 2013, p. 11). However, the number of children living with HIV is still very high with countries such as Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, and Democratic Republic of Congo topping the list (UNICEF, 2016). Moreover, chronic malnutrition determined by stunting is a more challenging difficulty in Africa. About 38% of children in Africa could not grow properly due to malnourishment and this situation has not witnessed any significant improvement over the past 20 years. A lot of children in Africa also lack basic micronutrients such as iron, vitamin A, and zinc, which are essential for growth and development - an issue classified as "hidden hunger." Many children born are stunted with Madagascar having 49%, Niger 43%, Malawi 42%, Rwanda 38%, and Nigeria 33% (UNICEF, 2016).

Similarly, not much has been achieved of the children's right to freedom of expression and their right to be heard. Child rights to free expression and to be listened to is globally recognised and well-articulated in Article 12 of the UNCRC, Article 7 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and other documents.

Drawing from these provisions, Lansdown (2011) mentioned that children should be listened to, and their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, but the current situation is far from the case. Although there have been establishment of children parliaments in many countries, these parliaments are too elitist and the members, taken from the better-off urban schools, are not informed of the challenges faced by their poorer counterparts (McIvor, 2002). In many other places, children are not consulted even on issues that affect them. For example, more than 46% in West and Central Africa and 35% in East and Southern Africa maintained that decision-makers in their locality never consulted them whereas others were oblivious of existence of any consultative structure within local authorities. As for Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia and Malawi ranked the highest in term of countries where the number of children who said they were not consulted at all was found (ACPF, 2009). It is important not to compromise children and their critical needs as they constitute our future generation (cited in Oyero & Salawu, 2018).

In addition, Adeniran, Suleiman, Ajaga and Kayode (2015) made reference to Maplecroft's (2013) reports in which Nigeria was ranked among 11 worst countries with extreme cases of child labour. They noted that children wander aimlessly around

in dirty conditions, deprived of education and other basic human rights. Universal Basic Education Act of 2004 makes education free and compulsory for the first nine years of a child's educational career, yet about 11 million children of school age are reportedly out of school despite the enactment of the Act (Adedokun, 2013) and the situation has not changed till now. The rise in insurgency in the country has undoubtedly reduced child enrolment and attendance in schools as insurgents now target schools in perpetrating their heinous crimes thus prompting parents/guardians in susceptible areas to withdraw their wards from schools in the hope of keeping them alive. The abduction of over 200 girls in April 2014 from a school in Chibok, Borno State with most of them yet to be released 5 years after continues to hunt the country. Although some of them were said to have been released after series of negotiations and a huge undisclosed ransom paid to their abductors, the situation has affected girl-child education in the country. Yet to our chagrin, in February 2018, approximately four years after the 2014 Chibok abduction, in the nearby town of Dapchi another 110 school girls were abducted by Boko Haram. Also study has revealed that the increasing attacks on schools have negatively affected school attendance in three states with high rate of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria.

Awosola and Omoera (2008) related that, in Africa, the Organisation of African Unity, before it was renamed the African Union, in Addis Ababa in 1990 during its Heads of State Summit adopted a Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child. The charter, which was derived from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, takes into consideration the sociocultural characteristics prevailing amongst the African child. It notes that the situation of most African children remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic, cultural, traditional and developmental circumstances, natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation and hunger and on account of the child's physical and mental immaturity, he/she needs special safeguards and care.

To further the mobilisation of attention on the African Child, Nigeria and the Rights of the Child (1999) reports that the Organisation of Africa Unity (OAU) subsequently proclaimed in Abuja 1991, the 1990s as the "Decade of the African Child" and set June 16 of every year as the "Day of the African Child". The document also reports that every child must be protected against all forms of exploitation, indecent or degrading treatment including child labour, abuse and torture, sexual exploitation, sale, abduction and drug abuse. It goes without saying that every nation who is a signatory to the convention is expected to make concerted effort at protecting children against all forms of abuses, through the enforcement of relevant instruments.

Section 34 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria provides for the right of every individual to dignity of his/her person. This section further prohibits "all forms of torture, inhuman or degrading treatment, and slavery, forced

or compulsory labour". In other words, it ensures the child's right to dignity of his/her person. Accordingly, children should not be subjected to any form of torture or inhuman or degrading treatment, forced or compulsory labour. These saddening experiences have strong emotional impact on the victim. Often times, abused and neglected children are overwhelmed and shattered. This usually results in emotional imbalance, which eventually manifest in delinquency and deviance.

In Nigeria, for instance, youth crime and breeding of street children are direct consequences of child abuse and neglect. However, situation abounds where the government ratifies international conventions but fails to enforce such conventions locally. This is intolerable. A situation where the Child Rights Bill is passed and mere lip-service is paid to its implementation amounts to hypocrisy and apathy as far as issues of child abuse and neglect is concerned. Ademokun (2002) observes that there are cases of children in Nigeria being bludgeoned into child labour and prostitution by people who claimed to be philanthropists. Given these circumstances, the average Nigerian does not seem to be aware of the provisions of the Child Rights Bill needless to say the instruments before it. It is even more worrisome in the light of the fact that most forms of youth violence, unrest, riots are linked with child abuse and neglect. The media are undoubtedly persuasive instruments in man's struggle for self-liberation and development (Ademokun, 2002). In line with this, Steinberg (1972) advances that the mass media select and bring to waiting multitudes a constant flow of detail related to those fruitful dialogues of differences and concordance upon which free societies thrive (cited in Awosola & Omoera, 2008).

CHILD REPRESENTATION IN THE MEDIA

Over the years, studies have been done depicting the representation of children in the media across the world. A number of them recorded findings indicating that children's story remained on the back burner in the media and that most stories are outsourced stories, reflecting a tendency by media to react to issues rather than adopting a proactive role (Media Institute of Southern Africa, 2013). One of such is a study by Child Rights Alliance for England (CRAE) on children's portrayal in the British media, which acknowledged negative portrayals of children in the media - as troublemakers and deviant, or as victims (cited in Child Rights International Network (CRIN), 2009).

According to Lynn Geldof, UNICEF Communication Advisor for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, who says:

Media professionals are well placed to keep children's rights – and their abuse – on the news agenda, by scrutinising policies and legislation, and challenging those who fail to meet their commitments to children (Mediawise, 2010).

Journalists are champions of human rights. They act as the eyes, ears and voices of the public, drawing attention to abuses of power and human rights, often at considerable personal risk. Through their work they can encourage governments and civil society organisations to effect changes that will improve the quality of people's lives. Journalists, photographers and programme-makers frequently expose the plight of children caught up in circumstances beyond their control, or abused or exploited by adults. However, it is equally important to consider the 'children's angle' in more conventional news coverage. A good way of testing the value of changes in the law or fiscal policy, for example, is to consider the extent to which children will benefit or suffer as a consequence. The way in which the media represents, or even ignores, children can influence decisions taken on their behalf, and how the rest of society regards them. The media often depicts children merely as silent 'victims' or charming 'innocents'. By providing children and young people with opportunities to speak for themselves - about their hopes and fears, their achievements, and the impact of adult behaviour on their lives - media professionals can remind the public that children deserve to be respected as individual human beings (Mediawise, 2010).

The Media and Children's Rights

Commissioned by UNICEF and based on the practical experience of working journalists, *The Media and Children's Rights* is an attempt to assist media professionals and others to consider how the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child might impact upon the way children are represented in and by the media. Its purpose is to generate responsible coverage of children and the impact of adult behaviour and decisions on their lives, as well as to encourage media professionals to consider how best to protect the rights of children and help children to play a role in the mass media.

However, *Mediawise*, in collaboration with UNICEF, has developed principles and guidelines to help journalists report on children's issues in a way that enables them to serve the public interest without compromising the rights of children. Below are lists of principles and guidelines for reporting children:

Principles and Guidelines for Media Reporting on Children

According to Mediawise (2010), media reporting on children and young people should never put them at risk. UNICEF has developed principles and guidelines

to help journalists report on children's issues in a way that enables them to serve the public interest without compromising the rights of children. These are six over-arching principles; six guidelines for interviewing children; and seven principles for reporting on children's issues.

Five Principles for Reporting on Children

1. Respect the dignity and rights of every child in every circumstance.
2. In interviewing (and reporting on) children, pay special attention to each child's right to privacy and confidentiality, to have their opinions heard, to participate in decisions affecting them and to be protected from harm and retribution.
3. Protect the best interests of each child over any other consideration, including advocacy for children's issues and the promotion of child rights.
4. When trying to determine the best interests of a child, give due weight to the child's right to have their views taken into account in accordance with their age and maturity.
5. Consult those closest to the child's situation and best able to assess it about the political, social and cultural ramifications of any reportage.

Six Guidelines for Interviewing Children

1. Do no harm to any child; avoid questions, attitudes or comments that are judgemental, insensitive to cultural values, that place a child in danger or expose a child to humiliation, or that reactivate the pain of traumatic events.
2. Do not discriminate in choosing children to interview because of their sex, race, age, religion, status, educational background or physical abilities.
3. No staging: do not ask children to tell a story or take an action that is not part of their own history.
4. Ensure that the child or guardian knows they are talking to a reporter. Explain the purpose of the interview and its intended use.
5. Obtain permission from the child and his or her guardian for all interviews, videotaping and, when possible, for documentary photographs. When possible and appropriate, this permission should be in writing. Permission must be obtained in circumstances that ensure that the child and guardian are not coerced in any way and that they understand that they are part of a story that might be disseminated locally and globally. This is usually only ensured if the permission is obtained in the child's language and if the decision is made in consultation with an adult the child trusts.

6. Pay attention to where and how the child is interviewed. Limit the number of interviewers and photographers. Try to make certain that children are comfortable and able to tell their story without outside pressure, including from the interviewer. In film, video and radio interviews, consider what the choice of visual or audio background might imply about the child and her or his life and story. Ensure that the child would not be endangered or adversely affected by showing their home, community or general whereabouts.

Six Guidelines for Reporting on Children

1. Do not further stigmatize any child; avoid categorizations or descriptions that expose a child to negative reprisals - including additional physical or psychological harm, or to lifelong abuse, discrimination or rejection by their local communities.
2. Always provide an accurate context for the child's story or image.
3. Always change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as: i) - a victim of sexual abuse or exploitation, ii) - a perpetrator of physical or sexual abuse, iii) - HIV positive, or living with AIDS, unless the child, a parent or a guardian gives fully informed consent, iv)- charged or convicted of a crime.
4. In certain circumstances of risk or potential risk of harm or retribution, change the name and obscure the visual identity of any child who is identified as: i) - a current or former child combatant, ii) - an asylum seeker, a refugee or an internally displaced person.
5. In certain cases, using a child's identity (their name and/or recognizable image) is in the child's best interests. However, when the child's identity is used, they must still be protected against harm and supported in the event of any stigmatization or reprisals. For example: i) - when a child initiates contact with a reporter, wanting to exercise their right to freedom of expression and their right to have their opinion heard, ii) - when a child is part of a sustained programme of activism or social mobilization and wants to be identified as such, iii) - when a child is engaged in a psychosocial programme and claiming their name and identity is part of their healthy development.
6. Confirm the accuracy of what the child has to say, either with other children or an adult, preferably with both. When in doubt about whether a child is at risk, report on the general situation for children rather than on an individual child, no matter how newsworthy the story.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Social Responsibility Theory

Scholars have highlighted that the idea that emerged from the Hutchins Commission report of 1947 formed what is known today as the Social Responsibility theory of the press. The hub of the Social Responsibility theory is that the media should be used for the public good. It emphasises the need for an independent press that scrutinises other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news reports. Though it canvasses for the freedom of the press, such freedom places obligation on the press; it should be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society (McQuail, 1987).

Social Responsibility theory calls on the media to be responsible for fostering productive and creative "Great Communities" (Baran & Davis, 2003, p.109), and it suggests that media should do this by prioritizing cultural pluralism- by becoming the voice of all the people - not just elite groups or groups that had dominated national, regional or local culture in the past. It also points out that the media, in carrying out their obligations, must adhere to the highest ethical standards.

McQuail (1987, p.16) summarized the basic principles of Social Responsibility Theory as follows:

1. To serve the political system by making information, discussion and consideration of public affairs generally accessible.
2. To inform the public to enable it to take self-determined action.
3. To protect the rights of the individual by acting as a watchdog over the government.
4. To serve the economic system; for instance by bringing together buyers and sellers through the medium of advertising.
5. To provide "good" entertainment, whatever "good" may mean in the culture at any point in time.
6. To preserve its own financial autonomy in order not to become dependent on special interests and influences.

In a nutshell, social responsibility is ethics that guides any action, be it in media or other organisations that put an obligation towards environment, society, culture and economy. The media like any other sector should not harm, but should promote environment and socio-cultural aspects in relation to the economy of the place. Just exactly, the media is saddled with the responsibility of creating awareness about the rights of child in our society, it must cover all cases of abuse and advocate, likewise, giving voice to the voiceless Nigerian children, and letting their voices be heard.

CHILD RIGHTS ADVOCACY: EMERGING AREAS OF IMPORTANCE

In line with UNICEF Global Communication and Public Advocacy Strategy and local priorities, UNICEF has highlighted the situation of women and children in Nigeria, especially those affected by the emergency in the northeast, to both domestic and international audiences, influencing policy and resource mobilisation decisions. UNICEF led international coverage of the crisis in the northeast, becoming a voice for children affected by the conflict, so that their concerns on education, protection and hygiene are presented. UNICEF facilitated a visit of Malala Yousafzai, Nobel Peace Prize winner and education activist, which created a strong advocacy momentum for education in the northeast. Visits by UNICEF senior staff, and UNICEF's press releases on the use of children as human bombs, further sparked the interest of the international media to cover the crisis and generate visibility on the issues children are facing. UNICEF Nigeria organized more than 20 strategic media dialogue meetings, including field visits, for Nigerian journalists and editors to raise awareness and generate action on children's issues including malnutrition, early childhood development, HIV/AIDS, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Media representatives at the events committed to covering children's issues. Over 40 international and national media visits, 20 press releases, events, briefings and press conferences resulted in 3,400 tracked UNICEF media mentions, almost all positive or neutral. UNICEF specialists were interviewed by media more than 215 times (UNICEF, 2017, p.6). The following areas of importance are highlighted for advocacy:

1. *Climate Change and Children:* UNICEF has deployed over 2,200 water supply systems, only technology options with clean energy, such as solar powered schemes and hand pump boreholes in flood-prone areas with adaptive technology options for sanitation and water supply facilities in communities and public institutions as part of resilience building. Also, populations in at-risk communities (especially children and adolescents) were trained on disaster risk reduction and resilience building.

2. *Accelerate Integrated Early Childhood Development (ECD):* In a 2017 conference, UNICEF increased engagement in early childhood development, especially in early learning through pre-primary education. Increased awareness on the need to invest early in every Nigerian child was achieved through a high-level ECD national conference initiated and funded by UNICEF in collaboration with the World Bank and the Global Partnership for Education and led by the Government of Nigeria. The ECD programme aims to strengthen convergence under the child-friendly community approach focusing on the whole child

especially young children. This is being modelled in southern Borno and is scalable at the community level through integrated Qur'anic schools beyond formal education.

3. *Refugee and Migrant Children:* Nigerians represented the highest number of identified migrants (14,000) arriving irregularly in Europe, with more than 600 unaccompanied or separated children, according to data from the UNHCR and IOM. Most children are originally from two southern states, Edo (72 per cent) and Delta (12 per cent). UNICEF requires additional resources to collect and analyse child-specific data on child migration to provide more in-depth evidence-based information on the living conditions of children in countries of origin and to inform good practice programming.

4. *Urbanisation and Children:* Based on the analysis of the situation of urban children carried out in 2017, the salient challenges requiring urban programming for children are: (i) the triple threat of urban diseases, urban lifestyles, and nutrition; (ii) road traffic accidents, particularly while going to school or playing in unsafe play spaces, and; (iii) child labour, which in urban Nigeria mostly occurs as domestic servants in wealthy urban families, informal work, and child prostitution (UNICEF, 2017, p. 6-7).

5. *Crackdowns on Child Rights Activists:* According to the Child Right International Network [CRIN] (2018), Children's freedom of expression is curtailed if the activities of representatives and activists are also restricted. CRIN has previously reported on the worrying attempts to censor or repress on child rights activists in different regions in the world.

6. *Children and Freedom of Expression:* Children Advocacy Network (CRIN) (2018) hinted that, everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers" (Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Art. 19). The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice. (Convention on the Rights of the Child, Art. 13).

In light of all of the above, CRIN (2018) declared that, Child Right International Network [CRIN] is especially passionate about press freedom because change is not possible without the 'democratisation of information', and that if people don't have access to information about children's rights, including children, then those rights can't be upheld.

MEDIA CONSTRAINTS AND CHALLENGES

The vast and fragmented nature of Nigeria's media, the volatility in the media market and the sheer number of media houses and media activities (at national and state level) make it an extremely complex sector to navigate. Some of the key challenges include countering the pervasive lack of media interest in child issues, and devising appropriate 'partnership' approaches that ensure wide media reach and buy-in while at the same time catering to the need for 'exclusive' media content. And where existing or potential opportunities are concerned, the media named a few literature festivals, certain national child-focus days etc. that could provide a temporary opening to raise the level of child rights coverage in Nigeria.

In addition, it is a clear fact that the Nigerian media houses are facing a lot of pressures in the discharge of their duties from political leaders and other private interests. These constraints limit their abilities in the development of the society; however, they must not allow these challenges to get into the way of their job. Though the media organisations in Nigeria are either privately or publicly owned, the reason for their existence is not to serve as a propagandist machinery of their owners. Media houses sociologically and philosophically exist to serve as the custodian of the rights of the masses and they are supposed to champion the cause of the masses, from the remotest portion of the society to the highest level. They are the Fourth Estate of the realm and they must stand up to the task when the situation demands (Kadiri, Muhammed, Raji, & Sulaiman, 2015).

For the mass media to live up to the expectations of the masses, their rights must be guaranteed by the state. However, the mass media is restricted from having access to information that has the potential to develop the society. The military decrees from past military eras still witch-hunt the mass media practitioners in the discharge of their duties. The press in Nigeria is still being checkmated by various previous decrees of the past military administrations in the country. Despite the fact that Freedom of Information bill has been accented to by the Federal Government, yet intimidation, harassment and incarceration of journalists still abound.

There are hundreds of district, state and national child rights networks in Nigeria; yet only few is dedicated to focusing specifically on connecting child rights advocates to the media. National-level child rights networks are usually theme-based and comprise numerous independently functioning district and state-level networks, with leadership structures varying across networks. Many networks in Nigeria have informal partnerships with media professionals/media houses and sometimes include individual journalists as members. A select few also engage in formal partnerships with the media.

However, the reality of achieving this is not so simple due to some factors that inhibit the media. Some of the factors identified by Internews Europe (2014) as cited in Uzochukwu, Morah and Okafor (2015) are as follows:

1. Lack of children voices: A patronising attitude towards children and youths severely limit the space that children get in the mainstream media and all but excludes their voices from public debate on child rights.
2. Lack of coverage: there is absence of meaningful, realistic and socially relevant media coverage or information flow on issues pertaining to child's right and protection.
3. Lack of professionalism: reporting on children issues and child's right is not widely recognized as a specialised field and this means that many journalists are not motivated or even capable of producing in depth coverage of children issues. This neglect starts from journalism schools and extends to almost all newsroom.

THE WAY FORWARD

The communication media has tremendous capacity of reaching out to a vast majority of people cutting across all barriers to communication. It has a responsibility to provide a balanced coverage of human rights violations and sensitise the various stakeholders regarding their social obligations with respect to arresting the problem of human rights violations. Mass media is providing limited services by highlighting the violations of human rights, sensitising the insensitive, stimulating action beyond discussion and initiating cases in which the culprits were brought to book. Siddegowda and Srinivasa (2015) cited Justice Reddy, who highlights that the social responsibility of media is thus:

The freedom that the media enjoy is the freedom for and on behalf of the people. Media play the role of communicator and as such they have to inform and not to misinform, dis-inform or non-inform the people on issues of vital importance. They have to educate, motivate, persuade and entertain. They must have their fingers on the pulse of the people and they have the pious obligation not to jeopardize or harm the welfare of the people. As the fourth organ, the media have also the responsibility of building the nation. They can promote economic development, social justice and reforms; bring about religious and communal harmony. The media can aid and assist in implementing development programmes meant for alleviating poverty, and for promoting health, education and literacy programmes. (Reddy, 2002, p.21)

Therefore, media practitioners must ensure they report news of both the urban and rural inhabitants. They must make sure that the news reported are those that have the tendencies of having positive impact on the lives of the people in general and with a special attention to children and their rights. Newsworthiness of the stories reported must not be based on the value-orientation of the Western media. As Sub-Saharan Africans and Nigerians in particular, we have robust cultural heritage upon which these rights must be based and disseminated to our people. News presented must be based on the values that it can have on the lives of the people in the rural and urban setting of Nigeria and Africa at large. However, if the information disseminated must have effective impact on the lives of the people, then it must be disseminated in the languages they understand most. Media houses must endeavour to reach the rural and urban dwellers in languages they speak for their easy comprehension.

Apart from reporting information about rural and urban dwellers, media practitioners must ensure that the information they report are from both the private and public establishments. The media personnel must ensure that they reduce their over-dependence on only one source of information. Journalists must involve themselves in investigative journalism, which is the cornerstone of development in any society. Getting different angles to a story has the potential of spicing up the news story thereby making it interesting for the end users, yet serving the public interest and the right to know. All geared towards informing on the rights of children and advocating for them.

CONCLUSION

This paper has argued and discussed that the rights of children are not well protected as expected in Nigeria and Africa as a whole. Children are still subjected to various maltreatments and abuses, such as, child labour, street hawking, trafficking, and many more unaccounted for maltreatments. Children are denied adequate representation by the media in their reports, and they were neither given appropriate prominence in their coverage. Their voices were barely heard, only when they are deemed as crime suspects or perpetrators. This scenario is not a good one for the Nigerian and African child in general. If we believe that children are tomorrow's leaders, there is a need to invest in them by ensuring that their rights are met. The media, therefore, need to wake up to its responsibility of informing and creating awareness among society in the plight of children by giving them adequate and appropriate coverage so that government and public attention could be directed to them.

Furthermore, the role that media plays in the development of a society cannot be over-emphasized; therefore, every media house must strive to live up to the expectations of the people no matter the constraints and challenges that might stand

in its ways. The media is the last bastion of hope for Nigerian children and the bonds of the society. As the Fourth Estate of the realm, they must be willing to perceive children rights and advocacy as newsworthy events that must be given a thorough coverage with due consideration to their societies, environments and development needs of their people.

Finally, even if individuals and organisations work to eliminate all forms of child exploitation, this paper concludes that such efforts will only have a lasting impact if the media is able to raise awareness and mobilise public opinions to this end, even with the support of the government. Journalists should therefore place child rights' issues on their priority list by giving children fair representations in both the print and electronic media in Nigeria.

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