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STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF CHILDRENS' AND YOUTH ISSUES IN MEDIA, PUBLIC AND POLICY DISCOURSE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY: LESSONS FOR ADVOCATES

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CHAPTER TWO



STRATEGIC POSITIONING OF CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH'S ISSUES IN MEDIA, PUBLIC AND POLICY DISCOURSE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF DEMOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY: LESSONS FOR ADVOCATES

Adebayo Fayoyin

**"If a tree falls in a forest and no one hears it, does it make a sound?"
African proverb**

Introduction

The demographic context - Nigeria's youthful population

Nigeria is a demographically diverse country with many issues affecting different population groups: children, adolescents, young people, youth, women, men, older population and key populations. When issue-attention is concerned, this demographic diversity creates major opportunities and challenges for media, the public and policy makers. The focus in this chapter is on how to position issues that affect the younger population which is demographically significant. From the 2013 Nigerian Census figures, children and young people constitute over 47 per cent of the 167 million population of the country. Besides, at least 100 million Nigerians are aged under 30. It is projected that the population of young people aged 10-24 will be 73 million by 2025 and 116 million by 2050. Given that the definition of youth is up to 35 years, the younger generation now constitutes up to 60 per cent of the population. The strategic significance of this population segment necessitates greater prioritisation of their issues in public discourse.

Children and adolescents: Nigeria is signatory to regional and international norms on children rights such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Part of the obligations of State Parties to human rights treaties is ensuring the promotion of children's rights to survival, development, protection and participation. However, maximum realization of

children's rights in Nigeria's federal system, with its complex cultural, traditional, religious and legal systems, and multiplicity of stakeholders poses challenges for advocates. According to UNICEF (2010, p.25): "The health and well-being of mothers and their children are closely linked and while reflecting the health state and priorities of the current generation, they also provide the foundation for the health of future generations." However, maternal mortality ratio (MMR) is 545 (dead mothers) per 100,000 live births, while neonatal mortality rate is 40 (dead babies) per 1000 live births and under-five mortality is 124 (deaths before age 5) per 1,000 live births. The main causes of infant mortality are pneumonia, diarrhoea, malaria, neonatal causes, compounded by under-nutrition and vaccine preventable diseases. Over 17.5 million children are categorised as orphans and vulnerable. Of these 2.23 million have been orphaned by AIDS-related causes.

In general, children rights are seen as privileges to be dispensed by specific gatekeepers in the country. The Children Act of 2003 identifies major areas of protection for children: prohibition of child marriage, child betrothal, infliction of skin marks, abduction, forced, exploitative, and hazardous child labour, child hawking, begging for alms, prostitution, unlawful sexual intercourse and other forms of sexual abuse and exploitation prejudicial to their welfare. Moreover, the country is expected to change its policy and legal instruments progressively in line with international standards and obligations, but beyond having policies formulated, advocates also face the challenge of policy implementation.

Young people and youth: The national youth development situation analysis observes that young people are key actors and a driving force for national development. However if mismanaged, there could be catastrophic consequences of Nigeria's burgeoning youth population. This population is affected by a multiplicity of problems that need significant public and policy attention. At least 40 per cent of the population of young people aged 15-25 are jobless (UNFPA, 2012. p.60) while according to the National HIV and AIDS Reproductive Health survey sexual and reproductive health, including HIV deserve more attention (Population Council, 2012). HIV prevalence between 15-19 years and 20-24 years are 2.9 per cent and 3.2 per cent respectively. Various segments of the population group are exposed to risky sexual behaviour such as engaging in multiple and concurrent relationship, low risk perception and inconsistent condom use. Furthermore, at least 47 per cent of young people need various forms of protection measures. The epic manifestation of this challenge is the mindless and inhuman abduction of nearly 300 school girls from Chibok, which made national and international headlines.

In summary, Nigeria is currently undergoing what demographers describe as a 'youth bulge', which requires significant attention for sound policies in the area of health, education, economics and good governance. Without taking specific social and economic policy actions, the country will not be able to reap its demographic dividend. Like most African countries, Nigeria's youthful population needs considerable

investment if the country is to be transformed. Achieving this requires enhanced strategic portrayal of the inimical issues within national and public discourse for appropriate policy response to be generated (UNFPA, 2013). However, the optimal development of these groups is constrained by different systemic and programmatic challenges which call to question the effectiveness of media and communication approaches employed to amplify their issues at national and community levels. Against this backdrop, the chapter examines the communication programmes undertaken to position concerns about children, young people and youth in public discourse. It also reviews what kind of attention the communication programmes receive. The following section provides some contextual orientation for the study. The aim is to offer a theoretical framework for the analysis undertaken and the recommendations made thereafter.

Conceptual Context: Issue-attention dynamics

The challenge of getting social problems into public arenas has been addressed from diverse analytical standpoints and in different contexts. A comprehensive interrogation of the nuances of the vast intellectual discussion in this research area will be beyond the scope of this study, yet following is an attempt to review key positions.

Our starting point is the notion of 'issue-attention cycle' developed by Downs (1972, p. 54). The model suggests that issues go through a five-stage attention cycle which includes: pre-problem stage, alarmed discovery, euphoric enthusiasm, gradual decline and post problem stage. While Downs does not propose that all issues go through a definitive linear progression of the five stages, he agrees that issues may recapture public interest once they have reached national prominence. Other policy theorists (Zahariadis, 2007; Sabatier, Weible, 2007; Schindlamayr 2001) have underscored the importance of linking the issue-attention cycle to essential policy elements, such as policy subsystem, political processes, activism by advocacy coalitions, and public opinion. Two additional factors identified by Downs as imperative to the process of moving issues through the attention cycle are the size of the population affected by a problem and the intrinsic qualities of the issue. Our analysis shows that besides sheer size, the demographic significance of children, young people and youth qualify issues about this population group for significant and continuous attention in public discourse, but the current level of attention belie this. Thus, in addition to issue portrayal, domestic politics and the role of coalition frameworks are essential in the process of positioning issues for public and political response.

Insights from agenda setting are also fundamental in understanding how issues get on the agenda in any society. First, it is important to note, as Dearing & Rogers (1996) observe, that agenda setting is an on-going competition among issue proponents to gain the attention of media professionals, the public and the policy elites. Their study establishes the intrinsic connection among the different agenda in the society, primarily media agenda, public agenda and policy agenda. It is also generally argued that the mass media are fundamental in the formation of public opinion and public

agenda building; however the relationship between the media and other elements of the policy change process is largely unclear.

John Kingdon (1995) expounds agenda setting from a policy domain, explaining how issues get on the policy process agenda. The theory identifies three main streams in the policy making process, namely; problem, politics and policy streams. The streams operate independently as political events flow on their own dynamics and their own rules. Based on what is called a “policy window”, the author argues that an issue is more likely to be given attention within the political space when two or all streams connect. Thus, it is the coupling of streams that helps to attract attention for an issue (Zahariadis, 2007, p. 71). This approach also examines the role of policy entrepreneurs which helps to build momentum for issues. From this perspective, it is clear that the process of influencing political decision making and public agenda is not a linear stimulus-response relationship. Getting issues onto the policy agenda is a complex process involving collective action by a variety of stakeholders. These may need to be persuaded of the merit of issues before such can filter through to the agenda. Thus getting issues on to agenda is also subject to 'political manipulation' of different political influencers and other contextual variables.

Agenda setting has also been considered from a media perspective. The agenda setting hypothesis was developed by McCombs & Shaw (1972) when they had examined the correlation between media agenda and the public's agenda. It is based on the underlying assumption about implicit in the media is the capacity to focus attention particular issues and to make them more prominent. It has been noted that “the mass media have the ability to transfer salience on their news agenda to their public agenda.” (Griffin, 2012: 378). Although media agenda setting was originally situated within the context of 'powerful effects' model, there is abundant evidence of limited causal relationship between media agenda and policy change. In a more recent articulation of the theory, McCombs (2005) further proposed five stages on how media agenda contributes to public agenda. In principle, the agenda setting hypothesis posits that the media are fundamental to shaping public debates and keeping issues on the public agenda (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007; Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002, Kosicki, 1993). That said, it is necessary to link media agenda setting function and issue-attention cycle to policy processes such as policy subsystem and public opinion. It can be argued that issue portrayal is fundamental, and the salience of issues within the media is important to issue attention but the process of getting public and policy attention is beyond media sound bites. Social issues tend to be intensely political in a demographically diverse environment.

Based on Frank Luntz's mantra - “it's not what is said that is important; it's what people hear” - shows the importance of how messages are packaged (Bruell, 2014). Framing theory calls attention to this as well. It offers some insight into the fact that information packaging is crucial when seeking to attract attention to issues. Its essence is how issues are depicted and coded rather than which issues or objects are more or

less reported. Primarily, it deals with how symbols and images are used to evoke specific action from the audience. Although as a theory of media effect, news framing has been criticised on a number of fronts, including theoretic vagueness, incomparable methods, fractured paradigm, scattered conceptualisation, weak definition and deficient operationalization (Weaver, 2007; Entman, 1993), its principles are relevant to how development agencies interact and try to influence the mind-set of various decision makers through the strategic manipulation of symbols. Daniel Kahneman Nobel Laureate for Economic Sciences developed the Prospect theory to capture framing effect. According to him, issues can be framed in different and multiple ways and the nature of frame tends to affect public response. His research showed that the intensity of frames by any given factor can yield corresponding amount of stimulus (Kahneman, 2011). The lesson for issue attention is that enhancing, sharpening and widening frames go a long way in positioning issues with various audience groups.

Hilgarttner and Bosk (1988, p.54-58) studied how social problems become objects of social attention from a sociological perspective. They argue that public attention is a scarce resource and only a small group out of a population of social issues attain what they call 'celebrity status' amongst items being considered for social and political action. They propose a framework for issue selection. This highlights the value of drama, novelty, culture and politics, institutional capacity and the role of advocacy groups - when it comes to gaining attention. In their opinion, "many social problems that are largely unsuccessful in most arenas can be kept alive by small persistent advocacy groups" (Hilgarttner and Bosk 1988, p. 66). These findings are consistent with Shiffman (2009, 2007) who identified several reasons why specific issues become objects of global health response. Transnational processes which set the norms that countries follow play a role. Likewise the provision of financial resources from donor agencies act as a form of incentives for policy change. Political entrepreneurship, and shifting domestic politics also play their part. Regarding HIV in particular, how it attracted global attention despite the existence of other public health challenges with greater attendant health burden, Shiffman (2007) identifies the persistence of policy communities such as networks of individuals, organisations, the establishment of institutions that sustain its portrayal, the power of ideas and creative framing. The fundamental conclusion from the study is that public health communication, and essentially, strategic positioning, can no longer be secondary in global health programming.

Also relevant to issue-attention dynamics is the role of the digital media in contemporary public sphere and in a development context. Digitalised media have affected how issues are positioned in the society. Wilson and Murby (2010, p.33) argue that the merger of social media and communication is changing the vital part of life creating a new world of possibilities. Thus, they conclude that with so many people "blogging, tweeting, uploading, downloading, crowd-sourcing, wiki-ing, linking in, geo-referencing, i-chatting, skypeing, flipping, videotaping and many more," the

possibilities for new media in social enterprise could lead to a new social eco-system. New media also have great promise for advocacy and activism on social issues across the world. Brodock, Joyce and Zaeck (2009) found that increased digital activism is associated with access to multiple social media platforms. The authors note that with increased access to various new media formats, more people are becoming digital activists and mobilising public opinion for diverse social actions and issues. This has led to suggestions on the erosion of the traditional agenda-setting and gatekeeping function of the mainstream media and the emergence of new patterns of issue attention dynamics.

From this review, a number of lessons emerge for advocates who are interested in positioning social issues in public discourse. First, public attention is a finite commodity. The media still need to be courted to gain public attention but the media in this digital era has become more fragmented and democratised. Social issues compete for attention, thus to enhance the liveliness of attention, advocates need to understand the complexity of issue attention especially as occurs in its context. Second, without effective framing, it would be difficult for advocates to effectively position social issues in media and public discourse. Third, the mass media alone cannot guarantee that issues will receive public or policy attention in a contemporary world. Fourth, evidence from public policy making suggests that the 'coupling of streams' (problem, policy and politics) by policy entrepreneurs plays a major role in influencing policy agenda. Finally, we submit that the 'what' (the issue to be communicated) and the 'how' (the way in which issues are portrayed) are important in achieving strategic positioning of social issues in society. In this case, the concerns of children and youth are fundamental and how they are portrayed is equally important. In the following section, we shall present some of the communication approaches that have been adopted by development agencies and their partners in promoting children and youth issues in the country.

Public Communication Programmes to Position Children and Youth

Targeted information dissemination

Development agencies produce and distribute to various publics, information packages on children, adolescent and young people. Such documents include thematic briefs, situation assessment, abstracts, human interest stories, findings from research, score card, infographics, performance dashboard, population data, health survey reports, policy briefs and flagship publications. The documents contain useful data, statistics, and information for public, media and policy engagement. Many bilateral and multilateral development agencies, non-government organisations and foundations have also invested in printing collateral materials targeting the general public on specific issues. One of the platforms for wider information dissemination on children and young people is the establishment of the child rights information bureau within the Federal Ministry of Information. The bureau is responsible for promoting issues relating to the survival, development and promotion of children in the country with various stakeholders. The establishment of the social mobilisation

technical committees (SOMTECS) chaired by the directors of the Ministries of Information has also enhanced public communication and community dialogue on the concerns of children and young people. In addition, development agencies use various alternative media to position the issues that affect these populations. For example, in promoting HIV issues, advocates resorted to the use of public campaigns including Public Service Announcements (PSAs), and other information and education materials. Edutainment is a major mode of communicating social issues and engaging with the public. This involves the injection of educative messages into entertainment forms. Nollywood has become a tool of addressing a range of problems -from child abuse, to HIV and other public health issues associated with children and youth rights. National and international non-government agencies also deploy elements of non-violent struggle comprising use of emblems, logos, songs and dance, road shows, and displays of portraits. While these interventions have achieved specific programme outputs, impact at the broader level of social change and social justice has been less noticeable. Thus, beyond information dissemination for awareness creation, other proven methods that enhance strategic engagement, social accountability and public dialogues for policy and social change need to be scaled up.

Aggressive story pitching

To influence media agenda and coverage of specific social issues, aid agencies design and implement a host of media outreaches which involve aggressive story pitching. These are opportunities provided to help media practitioners find angles and hooks for stories to be published or productions to be broadcast. Such targeted pitching approaches necessitate the establishment of databases which interested media practitioners can access. Agencies also engage with journalists, publications, broadcasters, and editors directly. To improve the knowledge base within the media, aid agencies organise focussed discussions between media practitioners and experts on public health and those social problems affecting the target population group. Examples of thematic discussions include girl child education, exclusive breastfeeding, emergency and humanitarian response, roll back malaria, polio immunization, HIV prevention, child marriage eradication, maternal mortality reduction and youth development. During such sessions, project experts and organisational spokespersons and their partners are invited to present overviews of situations, programme activities and results of planned interventions. Project-visits have also been facilitated to help selected media practitioners understand children and youth issues. Visits put them directly in touch with subjects of human interest stories. In some cases, story pitches are based on what development agencies had identified as 'success stories'. Although such media advocacy approaches highlight the issues in question, many of them tend to be public relations tactics intent on promoting a positive image for organisations. Besides, these media advocacy campaigns may also be geared toward fund raising. Aggressive story pitching also fosters distinctiveness among aid agencies who work on similar issues and compete for attention. These have implications for media practitioners who inadvertently become publicity agents for development organisations.

Formation of media alliance

In an attempt to concretize media advocacy for children and youth issues, development agencies have supported the creation of media networks for various issues. There are media networks addressing different aspects of children and youth issues. These include health correspondents, children editors, education correspondents, and even journalists against AIDS. The objective of such networks is to develop a core of interested journalists and media practitioners who will be dedicated in reporting and advocating for those issues. For example, Journalists against AIDS has helped to improve media coverage of HIV in the country and contributed to more informed reporting by media practitioners involved. Moreover, the formation of media alliance for child rights has resulted in more investigative reports on child rights violation in various parts of the country. Media awards are used as incentives to sustain media interest in less attractive social issues like mortality and morbidity. However, it has been argued that external motivation is a weak form of interest stimulation in the coverage of children and youth issues.

Engagement with media gatekeepers is an important tactic of alliance building with the media. Due to their pivotal role in the news operations process, media advocacy efforts target media gatekeepers – media executives including proprietors, editors, sub-editors and key influencers in the news making and broadcast content management process. Direct engagement with media gatekeepers has allowed many development agencies to influence news reports, editorials, entertainment pages, specialized pages or broadcasts media. Development agencies also establish institutional collaboration with communication training institutions as a way of influencing budding media practitioners. For over ten years, UNICEF has been engaging with different communication institutions, an initiative which has created a partnership with 30 institutions implementing capacity building programmes with students and practitioners at various levels. Overall, media alliance contributes to improvements in reportage of children and youth issues. Nevertheless, advocates need to adopt creative strategies to sustain media engagement in view of the high turnover of practitioners from various beats, which is a significant challenge in media relations for development purposes.

Use of evidence and experts

Development agencies generate specific data, systematic reviews, and operations research on various children and youth issues being advocated. For example, to promote legal reform for children rights, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, Children and Social Development and other partners commissioned thematic research on child protection and rights violation in the country. This involved regional studies on the situation of child rights, the patterns of child rights violation and recommendations on how to improve the legal framework for children. The study also included an assessment of the traditional child rights protection processes for insights on the cultural patterns of child rights protection in the country. Information from this research served as the basis of legal reform and advocacy for the adoption of the

Child Rights Act. In addition to the generation of evidence for policy and media engagement, aid agencies use intellectuals and technical experts to advocate with different target groups and stakeholders and to influence public opinion. Examples of experts' deployment include presentations to senate committee, house of representative committee and state committees on child and youth issues. The rationale for choosing intellectuals and technical experts for such tasks is the high level of public confidence. But their political affiliation, among other factors, sometimes affects their capacity to exercise the needed influence for the issues.

Internal advocacy of government institutions

Various government agencies have undertaken varied forms of internal advocacy and mobilization of government institutions to galvanize intergovernmental support for children and youth issues. For example, the Ministry of Women Affairs, Children and Social Development implemented series of internal communication activities with other government agencies to facilitate the passage of the Child Rights Bill. Activities carried out comprise cabinet briefs, interpersonal contact with directors of other government departments, lobby of cabinet and parliamentary members, orientation sessions, compatibility reviews, internal dialogues, and targeted visits to various sessions of national and state assemblies. The establishment of the child rights implementation committees at the national, state and local government levels even before its institutionalization in the Child Rights Act of 2003 was intended to facilitate intergovernmental mobilization in support of child welfare in the country.

Special events

Special events are a major avenue for influencing public opinion and engaging with different stakeholders on children and youth issues. Relevant national and international commemorative events include National Children's Day, Day of the African Child, International Children's Day of Broadcasting, Breast-Feeding Week, Child Health Week, International Children's Day, International Youth Day, Girl-Child Day, World Water Day, Women's Day, 16 Days Of Activism, International Health Day. These special events have been used to reinforce important messages on different aspects of children and youth problems in the country. Non-governmental organisations also use international commemoration to galvanize support from key stakeholders, and government machineries to expedite action on legal and policy changes. During such events appropriate thematic and collateral materials are produced and disseminated to relevant public institutions. Besides, special events are opportunities for social activists to organise protests marches, rallies, and demonstrations by various publics and stakeholders to position their causes and concerns in the public eye. In some cases, this is combined with a direct mail on the theme and the messages of solidarity by key messengers, issue ambassadors and advocates. Publicity and mobilisation stunts implemented during special events have resulted in media coverage, but many have tended to be one-off and not quite effective beyond the episodic media mention they attract.

Deployment of Celebrities

Celebrity advocacy involves leveraging the power of celebrities in promoting different development and public health issues. It is associated with the use of star power, media appeal, public valorization, celebrity effect, iconic mystique of celebrities on social issues. This is another mode of intervention employed by development agencies to position children and youth issues in the mind of their publics. UNICEF, UNAIDS and Save the Children have appointed several celebrities as special messengers and goodwill ambassadors of their issues. Examples include renowned musician Femi Kuti, international footballer Kanu Nwankwo, and Nollywood actress Stella Damasus. Regional and international celebrities such as Yvonne Chaka, Chaka, The Big Brothers for Africa, Mia Farrow, and Angelique Kidjo have been supportive of children and youth advocacy in Nigeria. Some of the tactics used by celebrities to promote these issues include public speeches, public appearances and performances, citations, project visits, statements of commitment, endorsement of agencies and solidarity messages. The value of celebrities attracting attention and media coverage to issues is well noted, but the impact for long-term and sustainable positioning of these issues is in question. Social issues require sustainable attention. Beyond the spectacle and ephemeral 'buzz' generated by celebrity advocacy, impactful change at policy and public level is necessary.

Advocacy by First Ladies

Nigeria's First Ladies over the years have taken up social and policy advocacy for issues concerning different populations. Many of their projects are associated with children and youth issues. These include The Child Care Trust by Stella Obasanjo, Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation by Turai Yar'Adua and Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation by Amina Titi Atiku Abubakar. The pattern has been replicated in other African countries; other first ladies on the African continent have also supported children and youth issues. Although first lady activities have been known to emanate from genuine intentions to promote the welfare of children and young people, they have been subject to skepticism and criticism - viewed as insincere by sections of the public. Many such pet projects ended with the tenure of their sponsor.

Children & Youth Participation Initiatives

The use of children and youth as advocates for their rights and issues has increased in Nigeria. To strengthen their voice in their attempts to promote their issues several participation initiatives have been established. These are opportunities to involve this target population group in critical social activities. For example, The National Children Parliament was established through a collaboration between UNICEF and the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. Children and Social Development is a forum where children and youth issues are discussed before they are presented to the national parliament. The Children's Parliament is now entrenched; it has been established in all 36 States of the federation and the Federal Capital Territory. Nigeria has its own chapter of 'Speak Africa', a platform sponsored by UNICEF and the African Union

for young people to deliberate on their issues among themselves and with the public. Development agencies have also established school clubs to promote different thematic issues among children and young people. Within the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) Scheme which attracts youths from the older age bracket, the reproductive health, HIV prevention intervention was established. Its goal is to facilitate peer education among young people on issues around reproductive health. Another youth participation initiative is the “Voices from the Street”. It is a media intervention to hear children's concerns being expressed in their own environment. The project uses edutainment, skits and public performances including football to mobilize support for these children. The Voices of Youth supported by UNICEF has also been a forum for promoting the development, protection and participation rights of young people. All these initiatives are seen within the broader framework for social inclusion, participation and social mobilization. However, it is necessary to ensure that they don't end up as tokenistic and manipulative.

A review of media and public attention to children and youth

The deployment of mobilisation and social influence tactics outlined above has led to some level of media and public support of children and youth issues and facilitated policy and political response in some areas. However, there is overwhelming evidence that the level of attention is still wavering and insufficient.

From an analysis of 600 stories covering a five-year period coinciding with the passage of the Children's Act, Oyero (2010, p.35) found that there were only 193 stories published on children by two leading national newspapers, Daily Times and The Guardian. The study demonstrated that Child Rights issues were not given any significant attention by the media. This led to the conclusion that children and young people are 'invisible and voiceless' in Nigerian news media. The finding is consistent with those of Asemah, Edegoh Ogwo (2013, pp. 56-58) who observed that the mass media have not been effective in advancing Human Rights in Nigeria. While noting that the characterisation of children is largely patronising, the authors argue that the mass media should be massively employed to wage war against gender discrimination and violence against children and women. The paper also recommended greater participation of children and young people in campaigns and attempts to mobilise the public against inimical practices like child labour and school dropout. Other studies, Nwodu and Ezeoke (2013, p. 42) and Awosika and Omoera (2008) have noted that the mass media devote insufficient prominence to children and young people in Nigeria. Following their analysis, they advocated for intense media engagement in the coverage of activities relating to the survival, development and protection of children and young people.

Media reportage of public health issues that largely affect young people and youth also follows a similar wavering cycle of attention. For example, a content analysis by Population Council (2012) of sexual and reproductive health, HIV and AIDS as they affect adolescent and youth demonstrated a huge gap in the coverage. Of the 746

stories published by six newspapers in 2012, only 50 of the stories focused on adolescent and young people. In addition, the stories were regarded as conservative in their approach to sexuality issues. They were not bold enough in advocating the right of adolescent and young people in taking charge of their sexuality. Overall, the study lamented the poor level and quality of reportage of sexual and reproductive health and HIV issues as they affect adolescents and young people. However, Komolafe-Opadeji (2008, pp. 3-7) argues that reporting on HIV in the country has improved, especially when focusing on young people. Similarly, Journalists against AIDS in an assessment of the coverage of HIV noted improvement in the quantity and quality of media coverage of HIV issues in the country. Nonetheless, all the studies agreed on the need to sustain media coverage of HIV and sexual and reproductive health in the country through accurate press reporting, enhanced collaboration with media institutions and more targeted information dissemination.

Another interesting strand on the narrative is the image and portrayal of young people in media and social discourse. It is argued that media portrayal of youth and young people tends to reinforce the stereotypes of youth as a problem to be solved rather than a resource to be harnessed. In a study on youth violence in Nigeria's Fourth Republic, Mohammed (2014, p.5) submits that young people are largely associated with violence, murder, robbery, rape, riot cultism and ethno-religious violence which has serious political and development ramifications. According to the author, the mass media contribute majorly to the upsurge of this phenomenon through the brutalities and violence that is aired on television and films. This assertion is simplistic and difficult to prove.

Ekwenchi and Adun (2013, p.173) examine the representation of youth in some popular Nollywood films and concluded that the pattern of portrayal reinforces the stigma of youth as 'hate figures' to be despised and scorned by the viewers. The dominant male characters in the stories are depicted as "skirt-chasing, hormone bound, irreverent and dishonest," an image that is capable of stigmatising them and inciting the disavowal of the viewer (p.174). They argue that even at the resolution of the stories, young people are still stereotyped as not to be trusted, scornful of adult values and should be consigned to 'rogues gallery.' While there may be other media packages that portray youth in a different light, this study reflects extensively on the literature that profiles youth as problems and dangerous trouble makers.

In order to generate 'real time' (2014) perspectives from young people, the author undertook an exploratory research on the topic as part of the process of writing this paper. Key informants interviews were conducted with 50 Nigerian members of the Africa Youth and Adolescent Network for Population and Development (AFriYAN). They were asked for their perception of the kind of attention they get in media, public and policy domains. The young people interviewed were of the view that the attention from media and public domains were both inadequate and worrisome. One informant said: "You get more stories of rape, unemployment and many degrading issues, and

annoyingly it ends there. Nothing more.” Another young person said: “It feels like the media are dismissive of youth issues. Young people hit the headlines when negative things happen. It also feels like the public does not care much about its live-wire – children and youth.” Though not rigorous in design, thus too limited to be regarded as being representative of the reality of the population, the finding aligns with earlier articulation that youth do not receive optimal attention in the media and public discourse to inform policy agenda.

From the foregoing, we submit that despite the myriad of communication and mobilisation efforts to position children and youth issues in Nigeria, the level of media and public attention seems fragmentary and inadequate. In general, this important demographic is romanticised as 'leaders of tomorrow' (Muhammed 2014, p.5, Yakubu 2013, p.1) while experiencing many disempowering situations and conditions today (UNICEF, 2014; 2010). Millions of the youthful population are victims of violence, abuse and other forms of exploitation that undermine their holistic development. This calls to question the level of prominence that such important issues attract in the society and the effectiveness of the public communication approaches implemented to amplify their issues in public discourse. The demographic significance of this population in Nigeria's transformative agenda is evident. Our study shows efforts being made to enhance commensurate levels and quality of attention in media, public and policy domains, yet this seems to fall short. This justifies the need for more action to ensure that children and youth issues are effectively positioned in public arenas. Based on the following, this paper proposes a scaling up of the following recommendations.

Recommendations

1. The force of big data

Research and strategic information have been acknowledged as being important elements of international development programming. Shiffman (2009, 2007) affirms the power of ideas as being imperative to positioning public health issues on the international health agenda. However, we suggest a much stronger emphasis on the use of evidence, research and big data in the positioning of children and youth issues for a higher level of social, policy and political action. In contemporary decision making, big data has become a new feature of public affairs. Expounding on the value of big data, Mayer-Schonberger and Cukie (2013, p. 40) posit that data is no longer regarded as static or stale but now a major raw material in business and a vital tool for creating new economic value. They argue that big data is poised to shake up everything in life from business to the science of healthcare, government, education, economics, the humanities and every aspect of the society. Moreover, big data is now seen as an important resource which needs to be mined and effectively utilized for social change. The optimism about the use of big data has been extended to health and international development. A World Economic Forum (2012) report on, *Big Data Big Impact: New possibilities for International Development* underscores the great potential of using new data methodologies to advance development issues. This is why scaling up the use

of strategic information through big data is essential in promoting population and public health issues. The existence and use of big data in development is consistent with data journalism which focuses on letting numbers tell stories. Mindful of media's attraction to issues of greater magnitude, we argue that with the existence of massive data on wide patterns of occurrence (national, regional and global), media reporting of various children and youth issues, can be enhanced. Nevertheless, we note limitations of the use of big data in decision making on various levels, especially in areas of political influence, policy change and cultural transformation. These are complex processes which are profoundly difficult to determine by big data algorithms and predictive modelling approaches. To a large extent, policy change defy the linear Newtonian impulse of 'data in decision out' while cultural change cannot be converted to binary probability calculations. Despite the obvious limitations of data-driven decision making noted above, the big data era still presents fundamental opportunities for advocacy and for advocates.

2. Compelling human stories

As observed above, data is crucial in social influence, but hard and cold statistics do not have an impact on the heart without creative communication (Ayres 2007, Fayoyin 2013). It has been argued that human beings are not moved to action by data dumps, complicated power point slides or spreadsheets packed with figures (Harvard Business Review, 2011. p. 143, Heath and Heath, 2008,p.205). Rather, people are moved by emotion and compelling human stories. The emotional impact of story-telling in communication has prompted many agencies to convert their data into stories using various forms of visualization software and compelling human interest stories to connect with emotions of decision makers. Thus, the combination of the force of ideas and creative story telling (targeting the head and the heart) will go a long way in positioning children and youth issues with different audience groups.

3. Creative issue framing

Linked to issue mapping is effective framing through adequate use of language and creative packaging. Framing helps to heighten the level of emotional connection to social issues. While field experience has demonstrated that for the media, social issues in question are not always as 'juicy' or 'sexy' as political or business issues, we propose that deeper knowledge of the issues and more creative communication will improve how the issues are promoted and positioned.

When targeting decision makers, children and youth advocates need messages that resonate naturally with other issues of concern at the selected level of influence. Courses in health communication, media advocacy and public communication need to prioritise participatory modes of communication which strengthen multiple conversations around these issues. Development workers and agencies need to move from linear mode of communication to interdependent conversations around issues of concern. Advocates need to maximise the pervasiveness of the digital media and

the democratization of new media technologies for compelling issue framing and positioning. Additionally, a critical element of effective issue framing is the powerful use of language as it has been widely established that language is a major factor in swaying public opinion. Child rights advocates would need to be more creative in how they convey their messages to various target audiences.

4. Neutralising opposition

Many children and youth issues have the potential of being embroiled in controversy, even opposition due to adversarial party politics. Advocates need to be mindful of this, and learn how to manage adversarial advocacy and counter movements. From a conceptual viewpoint, opposition advocacy is not new. The context for advocacy and social change is replete with counter movements and counter constructions to social issues. Opposition comes from the least expected quarters such as experts and intellectuals, either due to intellectual disagreement or divergent views of science. Opposition might be based on personal preferences of decision makers or the need to be politically correct. Resistance to issues may also be rooted in intellectual, ideological, religious, political, personal or philosophical differences. In fact, one could argue that the very existence of opposition and resistance, is what justifies the need for advocacy.

Many children and youth issues have been subjected to counter advocacy and controversies that undermine the effectiveness of the policy and political response. For example, children rights have been a major source of debates and opposition in Nigeria. Specifically, during the process of reforming the child rights laws in the country, one of the sticky points was the “compatibility” of international child rights norms with traditional cultural and practices regarding children. Similarly, providing comprehensive sexuality education has been embroiled in twisted public debates. It is sometimes equated with sex education and the distribution of condoms in schools; worse still the various efforts are sometimes considered as (inadvertent) license for sex amongst the age-groups at risk. Even relatively straightforward programmes and interventions like prevention or elimination of mother-to-child transmission of HIV, exclusive breastfeeding and polio immunization have been subjected to stiff opposition for varied reasons. The coordinated anti-vaccination campaign is worthy of note.

There is evidence that the anti-vaccination campaign had significant effects on the impact of the polio programme in Nigeria (Fayoyin 2014, IMB 2013). This was based on rumors that the vaccines were laced with anti-fertility drugs intended to reduce the population of northern Nigeria (Chen, 2004, p. 206). The controversy led to the abandonment of polio immunization in some northern parts of the country in 2003 and 2008. The nation has since recovered from these set-backs, evidence that resistance can be tackled. Thus, in addressing oppositions, advocates need a good analysis of opposing views, their position and changing patterns. Opposition to social issues is never static. In some cases, it rebrands and even adopts arguments of mainline

advocates. Such situations call for sophisticated arguments and multiple discourses to mitigate the impact of opposition. Ultimately, youth and children advocates need to prioritise how to ameliorate counter frames and non-supportive constructions of their issues.

5. Building coalition of support

Influencing three distinct though related agenda (media, public and policy) as this study proposes is complex. It requires engagement with different actors as recognized by network approaches. Policy making processes are influenced by different actors such as government institutions (executive, legislature, judiciary), political parties, supra national governmental and non-governmental institutions, the mass media, and policy communities. (Sabatier, Weible 2007; Adam, Kriesi 2007). Others are private sector institutions (with different *raison d'etre*), public sector organizations and non-state actors. These stakeholders come to the issues with varied intentions. Their interests are sometimes complimentary, at times conflicting. Yet, positioning children and youth issues in media, public and policy domains often requires them to work together, so children and youth advocates must network strategically.

Actors and advocates need each other. They should develop and maintain strategic engagements through which they can mobilise other necessary allies, form required coalitions and groupings to advance their causes. Supporters can thus be converted to champions who become advocates for specific issues.

Mobilizing political actors is also essential. Politics is a major determinant in attention that issues receive, therefore children and youth issues advocates must be politically savvy to position their issues in public discourse. In an editorial Piot, Russell & Larson (2007) traced the connection between politics and science in achieving public health outcomes. They argued that building on the history of political action around health issues, “engagement of political leadership at all levels is, without doubt, essential to effectively addressing significant public health issues” (p.1936). Clearly, issue positioning requires high level of political negotiation. Essential skills required in this process are social influence, diplomacy and political communication. Similarly, effective navigation of policy and political dimensions of issue positioning demands multiple forms of argumentation and deployment of reason.

6. Leveraging Transnational Influence

Social issues have international and global dimensions. Children and youth issues are now framed by international human rights norms and treaties, which require international obligations. We therefore argue that children and youth advocates need to continuously use international instruments, agencies, actors and platforms to position such issues in policy and media discourse. Shiffman (2009) has established that transnational influence was influential for the adoption of maternal mortality policy in five countries while Keck & Kathryn (1998) found that transnational networks including human rights organisations, policy think tanks, intellectuals, media

and intergovernmental institutions contributed to achieving social change in specific social issues at the national and community level. Nigeria is a signatory to the CRC, CEDAW, Africa Charter on Children Rights, and many other instruments. These instruments and their reporting obligations could be leveraged to highlight children and youths issues.

Conclusion

Addressing the challenge of the youthful population is fundamental to Nigeria's development. This is why the strategic positioning of their issues can no longer be secondary in public and health communication interventions. Our analysis has shown that several public communication approaches have been implemented by development agencies and their partners in influencing media, public and policy domains. However, evidence suggests that the level of attention is inadequate and incoherent. The study offers some recommendations to stimulate more attention for children and youth issues in the country. Specifically, advocates need to integrate the power of ideas with appropriate framing, meaningful public participation with aggressive mitigation of adversarial campaign, whilst maximizing the coalition of support from local and global partners, especially those with transnational influence. The coordinated implementation of these recommendations should enable children and youth advocates to get substantial traction for the younger generation in the country.

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