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CHAPTER FOUR

MASS MEDIA, DEMOCRACY AND THE IMPERATIVES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: AN APPRAISAL

AUWAL, Ahmad Muhammad



INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian media has over the years been significantly active in the country's political and democratisation processes. Without a doubt, mass media are the pillars upon which democracy stands, thrives and survives. Thus, the significance of mass media in a democratic setting cannot be underscored. Against the backdrop of the foregoing, this paper examines the relationship between the media, politics and democracy in Nigeria; outlining the roles played by the media in the past and present dispensations, especially in promoting good governance.

Despite the provision of section 22 of the 1999 constitution of Nigeria which places an obligation on the press to uphold the responsibility and accountability of government to the people, there is no specific provision in the same constitution guaranteeing such freedom for the media in carrying out this obligation. Thus, factors such as the lack of absolute press freedom and media owners' economic and political interests among others limit the extent to which the media can go in fulfilling their constitutional and social obligations in the society. Moreover, democracy can hardly survive and achieve its yearnings in any society where there is no accountability, transparency and the inclusion of majority of the people in governance and in determining the input into the process of development; all of which are guaranteed through a free and independent media. On their part, however the media particularly place emphasis on government accountability, instead of civic or individual responsibility as the task of promoting good governance lies not only with the government.

Justification, Objective and Methodology

While the contribution of the media in promoting democratic values, good governance and sustainable development has been widely acknowledged, there are concerns in Nigeria and other parts of the world about the efforts been made by the media to promote these virtues through their

power to inform and influence. Amid the foregoing, this paper aims not only to analyse the essential elements of democracy and good governance, but to also examine the extent to which the performance of the media in Nigeria contributes to strengthening democratic ideals and good governance towards attaining sustainable development. However, this paper is exploratory, as it utilises the descriptive research method (whereby relevant literature, documents and records were consulted and analysed based on existing realities) to appraise the performance of mass media in consolidating democratic ideals and the promotion of good governance in Nigeria. In addition, an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the role played by the media was carried out in order to proffer viable measures for improved performance.

Conceptual Clarity

A variety of meanings, relevance and characteristics have been ascribed to the term 'mass media,' amongst which is referred to as a collective means of communication with two broad categories print and electronic by which the populace is kept informed about day to day happenings in the society (Auwal, 2014; Asemah, 2011b). Put differently, it refers to as the whole gamut of information dissemination institutions and agencies in a political system. The media operate by dispensing information to the populace on all aspects and actions of state and governance (Utor, 2000 as cited in Abagen, 2009).

Conversely, democracy is derived from the Greek word *demokratia*, which means “rule of the people”. This is clearly affirmed by the popular maxim of Abraham Lincoln: “democracy is government of the people, by the people, and for the people”. While perceptions about democracy vary, it could be examined from two angles - as a “concept” and as a “process”. As a concept, it is viewed from a theoretical point. Here, democracy lends itself to theoretical meaning rather than its practical application, implying that nation-states which lay claim to democracy are not actually practicing democracy in the real sense (cited in Idemudia, 2008). As a process, democracy is conceived as a long-term process of re-organising the institutions of a civil society (Okunade, 2001). Further, the *Human Development Report* (1993) asserts that democracy is more than drawing up constitutions, designing new election procedures or holding elections as one-time events, it is “a way of life” (as cited in Okunade, 2001). Democracy only becomes a process when its essential attributes are wholly respected and practiced in a society, guaranteeing freedom of choice, expression and opinion, and equal opportunity for all. It should check the actions and inactions of the institutions of government, strive to curb corruption, promote accountability and transparency in the process of governance.

Good governance is a term used to describe how public institutions conduct and manage public affairs and resources (Jayeoba, 2017). It is used to portend the ability and capability of public office-holders to ensure the political, socioeconomic, cultural and even environmental well-being of citizens in the context of pursuing development and good standard of living in all spheres within the realm of the political system (Agere, 2000). This according to Praveen (2016) involves the process of making and implementing decisions, not about making 'correct' decisions but about the best possible process for making those decisions. Drawing from the World Bank Report of 1989, Adebayo (2001) delineates the elements of good governance to mean greater accountability by public officials, transparency in governmental procedures as well as predictability in government behaviour and in political system. By itself, good governance is antithetical to poor governance (Akindele, 2007).

In seeking to make a contribution to existing literature on how the media can strengthen democracy and promote good governance, a point of departure can be to ask what form of

development Nigeria has under governance without absolute press freedom or what Oculi (2013) describes as “governance without democracy, resulting in corruption and borrowed representative democracy.”

Theoretical Underpinning

In keeping the public informed, educated and entertained, the mass media sets standards for public conduct thereby making possible the participation of citizens in governance. As such, the role of the mass media in strengthening democratic ideals, especially in the direction of attaining good governance and sustainable development cannot be ignored. To determine the relationship between the media, democracy and governance, as well as set a direction for the media in line with the developmental needs of the society, this paper anchors on the democratic-participant theory. This explains the part the media plays in facilitating the active participation of citizens in the process of governance, as a way of exercising their sovereignty all of which are essential elements of democracy and good governance. However, the main thrust of democratic-participant theory lies in its insistence that the existing bureaucracy as well as commercial and professional hegemony in media systems be broken down, so as to guarantee easier media access for all potential users and consumers (Folarin, 2002). Although the practical expressions of the theory are many and varied, user participation and interaction, in addition to content plurality at the grass-roots level, constitute the focus of this theory.

Propounded in 1987 by Dennis McQuail, the democratic-participant theory advocates the principles of democratisation of the media for the purpose of accessibility by all and sundry (Asemah, 2011); and the theory simply lays emphasis on the need for popular participation and plurality in ownership and access to the media. The bottom line is that, every individual and social group should have access to the media so that they too can air their views about happenings in the society. While the framework of this and other normative theories of the press were formulated largely from a North American perspective, taking note of the distinctive feature of media systems in other parts of the world (archive.org) an attempt is made to analyse the Nigerian media and position in enhancing the democratic principles of participatory/inclusive governance, the rights to freedom of speech and expression, majority rule and minority rights, among others all of which are essential for the attainment of good governance and sustainable development.

With reference to the ownership structure of the media and service to the public, the theory calls for greater attention to the needs, interests and aspirations of the public in a political society. In the place of monopolisation, it calls for pluralism; in the place of centralism, it advocates for decentralisation and localism. It also calls for horizontal in place of top-down communication. In essence, the theory accords priority to the associational mode over the command mode, and even the service mode of socio-political communication (Folarin, 2002). The associational mode, according to McQuail (1983), assumes equality between the sender and receiver; the service mode assumes reciprocity of interests between the two; while the command mode assumes superiority of the sender to the receiver in a one-way communication track. However, the democratic-participant theory may be regarded as the press equivalent of “grassroots democracy,” because under this theory, individual's right to communicate is defended. It is in this regards that the tenets of the theory are found to be relevant to the study, especially as the media is considered significant in providing opportunities for the participation of citizens in governance by consolidating the freedom of speech and expression.

Interrogating the Nexus between Mass Media, Democracy and Governance

Given that democracy is conceived as a system that operates on the principles of equality, participation, majority rule and minority rights, rule of law and due process, respect for human rights and free and fair elections; there is the need for an institution such as the media to facilitate the entrenchment of these values in the society. Also, the active participation of the people in government, signifying the exercise of their sovereignty as stipulated in the constitution is achievable through the media which provide free flow of information and viable platforms for the expression of views and opinions. For democracy to thrive in any given society (Jega, 2014), the media must provide people with access to all the information needed to guide and safeguard their electoral choices. Thus, the media serve as the bridge between government and the citizens in a democratic system. The media, according to Ate (2007), connect government and the governed, and electorate to the candidate in a democratic setting. The central message about media and governance is that the latter dictates the former in the society and both play complementary roles in serving the populace. This forms the basis of the inseparable relationship between the media, democracy and governance.

There is a peculiarly intimate relationship between the political and communication process; and no institution as sizeable and as influential as the media can escape involvement with government and politics. The media are not only channels for the transmission of political information and debates, but also significant players with a direct stake in government regulatory and economic policies, as well as government attitude towards free speech and dissent. Moreover, the tripartite relationship which embraces democracy, politics and development are expected to be catalysed by the fourth estate of the realm the mass media (Idemudia, 2008; Olayiwola, 1991; Tivlumu & Terlumun, 2010). Although factors such as mutual distrust, excessive secrecy especially on matters of national interest, undue restrictions imposed on the media through obnoxious legislations, extra-judicial actions, among others, characterize the relationship between the media and the Nigerian government particularly in the past. This is not far from what Abone and Kur (2014) describe as “a cat and mouse affair”.

Amidst the challenges influencing this relationship, the media are indispensable in the efforts towards sustaining democratic values and promoting good governance in the society. The press has tried its best since independence to monitor governance to uphold the responsibility and accountability of government to the people (Bamidele, 2012). Since the democratic dispensation which started its run in May 29, 1999, the success of democracy is easily identifiable from the measure of press freedom in the polity. Thus, democracy requires a free press (Baran, 2004). It is however instructive to infer that, if democracy is to survive and be a fruitful concept, the role of the media in sustaining it cannot be overemphasized; and if the media is to have any meaningful role in democracy and governance, they must be free from undue control of government (Ayoola, 2008 as cited in Sowunmi et al., 2010). The ultimate goal of media in any society is to serve the public interest, and it is therefore evident that a complementary relationship exists between the media, democracy and the process of governance.

The Role of Mass Media in Strengthening Democracy and Enhancing Good Governance

In a democratic society like Nigeria, the role of mass media is anchored on their famous status as “Fourth Estate of the Realm”. To corroborate this, the 1999 constitution, stipulates under section 22 that “the press, radio, television and other agencies of mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the Government to the people”. This constitutional provision clearly explains the obligation of the mass media in a democratic society.

In a democratic environment (Olusola, 2008), the media's purpose extends beyond the basic functions of information, education and entertainment. The media also has the responsibility of sustaining and nourishing the ideals of democratic ethos and, to constantly assure and guarantee the protection of freedom of individuals and that of the media themselves, which is the heart of popular participation in liberal democracies. The press can promote democracy by educating voters, protecting human rights, promoting tolerance among various social groups, and ensuring that government is transparent, and accountable, etcetera.

The press helps to keep the public informed, it entertains, educates, sets standards and establishes values for public conduct (Akinwale, 2010); and the popular reference to the media as 'fourth estate' points to their capacity to perform the role of watchdogs, by monitoring those in authority, exposing their limitations and providing checks and balances to the other three estates: the executive, the legislature and the judiciary (Nwagbara, 2010). Through the aforementioned functions, the media sets an agenda, organises public debates and discussions, and interprets issues to put them in proper perspective in order to make meaning to people (Harcup, 2009; Sambe, 2008). Whether electronic or print (Asemah, 2011), the media has responsibilities to the society political, social, educational and religious (Akinwale, 2008). The mass media's duty to individuals, as well as to the society at large is immeasurable. In fact, the media is an important asset to society, and when utilised properly, can serve as viable tools for socioeconomic and political development (Utor, 2000 as cited in Abagen, 2009).

Mass Media and the Quest for Sustainable Democracy and Good Governance: Examining the Journey So Far

In their study on the role of mass media in consolidating democracy, Santas and Dogara (2016) observe that the media contributed immensely to the return of democracy in Nigeria. Thus the media through their critical analysis of the military juntas, mobilization of the citizens to participate in entrenching democratic values, exposing cases of corruption, made public officers accountable to the people. Despite the great performance of the media in promoting democracy, they are faced with challenges which border on issues of ethnicity, lack of adequate modern communication gadgets, hassles from pressure groups and the government, ownership questions, corruption and security issues among others. Today, we can safely boast that democracy is gradually taking root in Nigeria with the successful transition from one democratically elected government to another. However, we cannot say Nigeria's democracy has developed, as the media must work assiduously hard to sustain the democratic successes we have achieved thus far. To further consolidate the success recorded by the mass media, the government must take some deliberate and concrete steps in overhauling the entire media industry in the country.

Similarly, Senam and Udo (2015) assessed the contributions of critical journalism to democratic governance, and report that, given the dynamic nature of a technology-driven society, journalism is beyond the conventional practice of reporting based on the 5Ws1H and requires more of an in-depth analysis of the information so reported. Critical journalism, according to the authors, has played an invaluable role in the sustenance of democratic governance, especially between 1999 and the present era of democratic governance. Such roles include checkmating excesses in governance, and bridging the communication gaps between the government and the governed. However, the quality and nature of freedom in a nation's media speaks volumes about the quality of the nation's democracy. Despite the problems facing the Nigerian media, critical journalism greatly contributes to enhancing democratic governance. To continue to remain relevant in this crusade, journalists should strive beyond merely reporting based on the 5Ws1H approach, but

engage in in-depth investigation and unbiased analysis to upgrade the standard of conventional journalism to critical journalism.

In a review of the role of media in good governance, Dunu (2013) argues that media's potential to contribute to good governance depends on the extent the media reflect and enforce the principles of good governance as an institution. For the media to contribute effectively in enthroning good governance they must as a matter of responsibility apply the basic principles of patriotism, accountability and transparency in the discharge of their duties while upholding sanctity of truth and fairness at all times. The media themselves must be credible example of good governance concept, by upholding professional ethical rules set up through self-regulation, and constantly enhance professionalism, be accountable to the public in the way it informs, educates and entertains. In summary, the media should recognize that they are accountable for their actions to the public, their profession and themselves.

In examining the activities of the media in the fight against corruption and the promotion of accountability in leadership, Santas (2014) recounts that the Nigerian media has recorded success in bringing public officers to account by exposing corrupt practices among government functionaries. However, transparency and accountability are essential pillars of democratic governance the world over, and these virtues are significant in measuring the success or otherwise of any democratic system. Apart from the activities of anti-graft agencies in combating corruption, the mass media are often looked upon as an important institution in the fight against corruption in any system. This draws from their watchdog function of monitoring the actions and inactions of those in power.

It is evident from the reviews that since independence, the Nigerian media has been at the forefront of the struggle for the enthronement of democratic values and good governance in the society. The media have undoubtedly evolved and become more active in influencing and shaping the society, especially as their roles complement in nurturing the essential elements necessary for the survival of democracy in the contemporary. In relation to governance, the media holds government accountable by highlighting and exposing the activities of public office-holders at various levels. However, persistent arguments on whether or not the fourth estate in Nigeria is living up to expectations in the quest for true democracy, good governance and sustainable development, exists among scholars and professionals in the media industry. Thus, it is the conviction of this paper, that in spite of challenges, the media is doing reasonably well in this regard, but with too much emphasis on government accountability, rather than civic or individual responsibilities, considering that the tasks of promoting democracy, good governance and development lies not only with the government but citizens as well. Citizens also have a role to play in complementing the efforts of government. Accordingly, this paper examines the performance of mass media in the promotion of democratic ideals such as the freedom of expression; transparent, accountable and inclusive governance; credible electoral process; respect for human rights and the rule of law all of which are requisite for achieving good governance and sustainable development in the society.

Freedom of expression, transparent, accountable and inclusive governance

Freedom of expression, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness remain connected to democracy and good governance. This is because development is unattainable without good governance, and good governance on the other hand, is unrealistic without the inclusion of citizens, and transparency and accountability are uninsured without the guarantee of freedom of speech and expression which empower the citizens to question the actions and inactions of

governance. All these are democratic virtues which guarantee good governance and sustainable development that are promoted and achievable through the conscious use of the media.

A significant development that took place in Nigeria which seeks to promote the earlier mentioned democratic virtues, was the passage of the Freedom of Information Bill into an Act in 2011. This makes possible, access to records and information that are in the possession of state agencies, in addition to strengthening the universally held concept of the public's right to know. Moreover, the fundamental objective of the Act is to promote openness, transparency and accountability in government activities. According to Akper (2012), access to information, as provided by the Act will promote good governance and other democratic values necessary for the sustained development of the country. Another feat worthy of mention is the step taken by the present administration to provide frequent updates on governmental activities and programmes via social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, U-Report, among others. This affords citizens the opportunity to share their opinions on what the government is doing for or against their interests. The effectiveness of these platforms in providing a two-way communication channel also points to the fact that the media play significant role in ensuring transparency and accountability in governance. Although concerns have also been raised on the misuse of these platforms by users; yet this development has gone a long way in ensuring the active participation of citizens in governance.

As widely acknowledged, the role of the media in fostering participation is vital. Media reports on aspects of the decision-making process also give citizens a voice in the process. The media enable participation in two ways: as a *facilitator*, providing platforms for the citizens to have accurate and sufficient information that help them make rational and informed decisions and take the right course of action beneficial to them; and as a *feedback mechanism*, providing the means for citizens to register their feelings and express their assent and dissent concerning issues. One example was the concerted effort made by the media in raising public debate and discussions across the country on the third term agenda of President Obasanjo. This resulted in public outcry against the third term attempt which led to its demise. Another recent example of such role which affected the outcome of fuel subsidy issue was popularly referred to as the 'occupy Nigeria Saga'. The Nigerian media's relentless campaigns and the provision of various platforms for debate and discussions not only guarantees public participation in national issues, but equally affects their outcomes (Dunu, 2013). The recent agitations on social and conventional media by Nigerians for the scraping of the police Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), and the incessant calls to action against the ongoing slave trade in Libya and the xenophobic attacks on Nigerians in South Africa, among other issues have made government and relevant stakeholders take necessary steps and actions towards addressing these issues. This is due to opportunities provided to citizens by the media, to voice their opinions, assent and dissent especially on issues which directly or indirectly affect them. Also, this engenders the participation of citizens in the decision-making process.

Similarly, the introduction of the "whistle-blowing policy" (to aid the anti-corruption war of the present administration) intended for promoting transparency and accountability in our sociopolitical engagements as a nation through the participation of citizens, is being promoted by the media. However, there are outcries that the policy was meant to selectively witch-hunt some individuals, particularly from the opposition. Corruption has been and continues to be a destructive element in the governance and perception of Nigeria in the committee of nations (Sowunmi et al, 2010). On record, there has been the recovery of N640 billion and arrest of over 500 people in money laundering battles in the last 12 years (Folarin, n.d.). On September 27

2006, the EFCC leveled allegations of varied cases of grave acts of corruption against 31 serving state governors at the floor of the National Assembly (*The Guardian*, as cited in Folarin, n.d.). The enormous contributions of the media over the years in anti-corruption efforts, especially through their surveillance and watchdog functions cannot be overemphasised. In 1986, for example, the media played a crucial role in the success recorded by security operatives to arrest the two notorious gangsters Lawrence Anini and Monday Osunbor. Likewise, the press exposed by bringing to public notice, the controversial award of N628 million for renovation of the official quarters of the first female Speaker of the Federal House of Representatives, Patricia Etteh and her deputy, Babangida Nguroje (Santas, 2014).

In the last few years, the media exposed the scandal allegedly committed by the then Aviation Minister, Stella Odua for the purchase of two armored BMW 760Li cars worth over two hundred million for her private use. Although she later claimed that the cars belonged to the federal government. Similarly, the bribe allegedly solicited by a lawmaker, Faruk Lawal who chaired the oil subsidy committee from an oil billionaire - Femi Otedola to drop his company out from a list of companies to be investigated for oil scam in 2012, was brought to public attention by the media. Between 2014 and 2017, the media brought to public attention, cases of money laundering and mismanagement of public funds, leading to the arrests and probe of some serving and ex public office-holders, including:

- the PDP spokesman, Olisa Metuh for alleged fraud and money laundering;
- former governor of Zamfara State, Ahmed Rufai Sani for alleged mismanagement of N1 billion loan meant for the repair of Gusau Dam;
- the former National Security Adviser, Col. Sambo Dasuki and his several accomplices' arms scandal or "armsgate," for allegedly diverting the sum of \$2.1 billion and N643 billion set aside for the purchase of equipment for counter-insurgency;
- the immediate past governor of Plateau State, Joshua Dariye for allegedly diverting the sum of N1.126 billion ecological funds;
- the former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Diezani Alison-Madueke, for alleged mismanagement of public funds;
- the former Director-General of Nigeria Maritime Administration and Safety Agency (NIMASA), Patrick Akpobolokemi and six employees of the agency for an alleged mismanagement of N754,740,680 belonging to the agency;
- the former Minister of Interior, Abba Moro for the 2014 Immigration recruitment scam;
- the serving Senate President, Dr. Abubakar Bukola Saraki, for alleged false declaration of assets by the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) even though he has been vindicated by the CCB;
- the probe and dismissal of the former EFCC Chairman, Ibrahim Lamorde over an alleged fraud;
- the suspension and ongoing probe of the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, David Babachir Lawal over allegations of violations of law and due process in the award of contracts under the Presidential Initiative on the North East (PINE); and the Director-General of the National Intelligence Agency (NIA), Ayodele Oke for the discovery of foreign and local currencies by the EFCC in a residential apartment of Osborne Towers, Ikoyi Lagos over which the NIA has made a claim (*Daily Trust*, Feb. 1-10, 2017; *The Guardian*, May 20, 2017; *The Nation*, Jan. 20-26, 2016).

In their efforts to engender transparency, accountability, and a corrupt-free society for the entrenchment of good governance, the media continues to follow-up most of these cases, including court proceedings to ensure that citizens are duly informed about the activities of public office-holders and the successes or failures recorded by anti-corruption and other law enforcement agencies. Additionally, the media played a major role in the successes recorded by the anti-graft agencies (including EFCC, ICPC, and by extension, the judiciary) in the past and present administrations. Apart from keeping the public informed about the activities of the anti-graft agencies and giving clues on corrupt practices, the media also provide enabling platforms for individuals and other stakeholders to express their views concerning the manner in which these cases are being handled by the anti-graft agencies, especially the delay in the trial and prosecution of accused persons by the judiciary. Accordingly, Sowunmi et al. (2010) explains that:

Journalism serves as an impediment to corruption in some ways. Most spectacular among them is when corrupt bureaucrats or public office-holders are impeached, prosecuted or forced to resign after their misdeeds are exposed to public light. However, journalism also acts directly to curb corruption in other, less spectacular but, arguably, equally important ways. Reporting, for example, may prompt public bodies to launch formal investigations into allegations of corruption. Furthermore, news accounts disseminate the findings of public anti-corruption bodies, thus reinforcing the legitimacy of these bodies and reducing the ease with which interested parties who hold power can meddle in their work. Conversely, when journalism exposes flaws and even corruption within the various bodies of the state (the courts, police and anti-corruption task forces) corruption is put on check. If the resulting public pressure leads to a reform of those bodies, the long-term effectiveness and potential of the media to act as a counterweight against corruption is strengthened.

The role of the media is critical in promoting good governance and curbing corruption. The media not only raises public awareness about corruption and its causes, consequences and possible remedies, but also investigates and reports incidences of corruption. The effectiveness of the media, in turn, depends on access to information and freedom of expression, as well as professional and ethical cadre of investigative journalists (Stapenhurst, 2000 as cited in Sowunmi et al, 2010). A free press signifies an open society where decisions are made according to democratic traditions and not according to the dictates of one person (Singh, 2008); and the press can only perform its sacred duties as the fourth estate if it is free and independent in reporting its views and news. Certainly, the media is vested with so much power that we have come to accept that without them, democracy tends towards failure (Asemah, 2011b), as the press is regarded as the “oxygen of democracy”. It is the responsibility of the media to increase the level of public awareness and mobilization for effective participation in the shaping of democratic values through education and political enlightenment, thus setting agenda for public discussion on one hand, and influencing what policymakers consider important, on the other.

When citizens are better informed and have the freedom to express their views about societal issues, they become empowered to participate in governance and to also question the integrity and or credibility of public office-holders. This, in turn, engenders transparency and accountability.

Credible electoral process, respect for human rights and the rule of law

The media has a responsibility to ensure fairness in the electoral process, respect for human rights and the rule of law than other societal institutions. This, according to Haruna (2014) is because most people learn about issues and events from the media; and the media have immense power to set society's agenda because they are arguably the most important sources of information and knowledge. The media are very important assets a society should have because they stimulate growth and provide platforms for the exchange of ideas and debates. The importance of media to the electoral process and in ensuring respect for human rights and the rule of law cannot be overemphasised, as they contribute significantly to the political processes at national and international levels. The media three basic functions in this regard include: surveillance of the world to report on-going events, interpretation of the meaning of events, and socialisation of individuals (Olayiwola, 1991).

For a nation to have a free, fair and credible electoral process that owes respect for human rights and the rule of law, the positive input of the media is not negotiable. As highlighted earlier, it is through the media that citizens gain access to information on relevant issues in a timely and objective manner. This affords them equal opportunities to applaud or agitate for issues and causes that enhance their growth. Specifically, the importance of the media in ensuring free and fair elections is not left out, as the press occupies a strategic position in voters' education and mobilisation. The media, for example, was used to mobilise Nigerians to come out and vote during the 2007, 2011, 2015 general elections in order to enable a smooth transition from a civilian to another civilian rule. Although there were allegations of election rigging and malpractices along the transitional course, yet the media remained dutiful by avoiding actions that could have derailed the entire transition (Inuwa, 2007).

In spite of the biased and partisan nature of the coverage of political activities, as well as the electioneering campaigns of the 2011 and 2015 elections, resulting in post-election crises in some parts of the country, the media played a major role in ensuring that Nigeria remains united amidst security challenges. The incorporation of new technologies into the electoral process (like the biometric card reader and the use of broadcast and other social media platforms during and after the elections, especially in the collation and announcement of results), and the efforts of the media in educating, as well as mobilising public support in the entire processes, point to the fact that the media remains dutiful in promoting democratic values and enhancing the credibility of Nigeria's electoral process. The recent agitations by civil society organisations and pressure groups for the scraping of state electoral commissions and for local government autonomy, are among other instances where the contributions of the media in providing platforms for concerned stakeholders to debate towards enlightening the general public, remains sacrosanct in a bid to promote good governance.

Concerns about respect for human rights and the rule of law are inseparable, considering that the former is only achievable in a society where the latter prevails. Human rights, on the other hand are immutable, unalienable right that cannot be denied anyone. They are rights and privileges that are given by nature to man by virtue of being human. These include right to life, freedom of association, freedom of speech, freedom of movement etcetera. These rights are also enshrined in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria. The role of media in safeguarding and upholding these rights is well defined, but there has been a lot of debate over the recent change in the media landscape and its consequences on human rights coverage. The media inform and educate the people of their rights and suggest ways and means by which they can solve their problems, and thus empowering them to protect their rights. In Nigeria for example, there are presumptions, that ethnic tendencies

and ownership considerations influence the reportage of human rights abuses (Venkateshwarlu, 2012). When we talk of human rights abuses, we refer to situations where humans are denied their natural rights.

In some ways, the Nigerian media has lived up to expectations by safeguarding human rights and pushing for respect for the rule of law. The media has consistently, kicked against extrajudicial killings of civilians by security operatives in different parts of the country. Cases of domestic violence against women and children have also been exposed via media coverage. In some cases, appropriate measures are taken against perpetrators of these acts, resulting from media reportage. Through the media's primary function of information dissemination and education, knowledge is provided to all citizens on different platforms so that the citizens learn to respect the rule of law. Apart from informing and educating the people on the importance of democracy and exposing its core values for people's mental development, the media do serve the purpose of keeping government officials within constitutional bounds. One recent example where the media (in this instance, social media) helped to uphold respect of rule of law was in the brutal massacre of the four university undergraduates in Port Harcourt. Without the evidence from social media platforms, the perpetrators of the crime would still be free (Dunu, 2013).

Impediments to Media's Performance in the Quest for Sustainable Democracy and Good Governance

In view of the foregoing, it is instructive to note that the media are also faced with challenges which impede on their effective contribution to democracy and good governance. This includes but is not limited to interests (both economic and political on the part of owners) and the lack of absolute press freedom, among others.

Ownership is one of the means through which proprietors (government and private) exercise control over the conduct and content of the media (Straubhaar & Larose, 2004); and one of the oldest regulatory traditions affecting current developments in the information society is the extent to which concentration of ownership is permitted. Considering that government and private media are financed by owners, workers are in some ways forced to dance to the tune of their employers or financiers (Sambe, 2009). Similarly Iredia (2016) summarises the central idea behind ownership control or "preferences," thus:

In political reporting for example, the inability of the media to meet public expectations in Nigeria is partly due to ownership control which tends to hinder excellent performance in the business. Thus, the Nigerian experience has been that the proprietor of a media organisation can determine at will editorial policy, direction and indeed the entire content of his medium, making it hard for Nigerian broadcast stations to maintain balance and objectivity in their coverage especially where their sponsors are either candidates at an election or have considerable interests in certain political parties and their candidates.

It is however the conviction of this paper, that ownership control technically serves as a deterrent to the freedom necessary for effective performance of mass media in an emerging democracy like Nigeria. In consonance, Tinubu (n.d.) recounts that while it is true that section 22 of the 1999 constitution calls on the media to play a watchdog mechanism in our democracy, the current ownership profile of the media puts a fundamental check on that very prospect. There are those who have argued and are right that section 22 prevents the media from being effective as an audit mechanism in a democracy.

While ownership preference affects editorial independence on one hand, there exists several statutes (such as the criminal code, penal code, defamation and seditious offences Acts, etc.) and strategies (cases of assault, harassment, threats, imprisonment or keeping behind bars without trial, killings of journalists; and in some cases, seizure of publications, operational license or closure of media houses, as witnessed in past civilian and military administrations) that have negative effects on the fourth estate and watchdog functions of the media in enhancing good governance, on the other. Even though freedom of expression (from which the press derives its freedom) is guaranteed in the constitution, Asemah (2011c) argues, there are techniques used by government in most parts of the world to cynically dodge what has been guaranteed in the constitution. The Nigerian constitution places an onerous task on the mass media as contained in section 22, but without corresponding legal backing to carry out this task. Thus, when a journalist freely airs out his opinion on any issue especially as it affects the government, the journalist has no basis for defence because press freedom has no legal protection as it is only a mere statement. This has over time, remained a major problem hindering the effective contributions of media to development in Nigeria.

Accordingly, press freedom is essential in every Free State and democracy, as the survival of the latter depends on the volume of information flow. It is the case that press freedom is not negotiable if the press is to effectively carry out the role of enhancing good governance (Jacdonmi, 2008). In every society, press freedom is essential to transparency, accountability, good governance and rule of law. It cannot be suppressed without dire consequences for social cohesion and stability. When it is sacrificed, whatever the reason invoked, the chances are that conflict is not far down the road (Kofi Anan, as cited in Okoye, 2008).

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the foregoing, the media contributes significantly to socio-political development in the society; and it is barely possibly for any society to achieve its yearning and aspirations without the media. The journey of Nigeria from developing to developed nation depends on the role played by the media. In reality, transparency and accountability in governance (all of which are essential elements of a democratic governance and society) can only be achieved through proper utilisation of the influential power of the media. The contribution of mass media is therefore imperative to achieving good governance and sustainable development in Nigeria.

Like press freedom, good governance is an ideal system which is difficult to achieve in its entirety. In other words, no country or society would claim to have achieved good governance in totality. Notwithstanding challenges, the media constantly strives to fulfil the principles which legitimise their operations and make them relevant in the long journey towards building an ideal environment for the thriving of democracy and good governance. The media has tried to highlight and focus some of those issues that could have direct impact on the struggle for development. Consequently, this paper recommends as follows:

- i. The media should focus on issues specifically those socioeconomic in nature, instead of trying to divert attention to irrelevant ones. Achieving good governance requires the understanding and participation of every member of the society. The media is considered to be the most powerful weapon to make this a reality.
- ii. Strict adherence to professional ethics and the principles of social responsibility on the part of media practitioners will go a long way in entrenching democratic values and in enhancing good governance and development. Accuracy of facts, fairness, balance and

objectivity must be evident in their coverage, analysis and interpretation of economic, political, social, and other issues of public concern. As the saying goes, “charity begins at home.” Practitioners must at all times strive to remain impartial and non-partisan in carrying out their constitutional and social obligations in the society.

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