PROMOTING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: THE MASS MEDIA CHALLENGE

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Abstract

Good governance is an essential framework which serves as a means of achieving wider goals such as social and political development, alleviation of poverty and protection of the environment. It is about security of life and property, peace and prosperity. Without good governance, social, economic and political progress is difficult to attain and impossible to guarantee. In fact, it is the bedrock of any modern democracy. Promoting good governance is not an easy task as it is much more involving than organizing elections and appointing people into public offices. A free and critical media is essential to the growth and development of any democracy. As a watchdog of the society, the media owe it as a duty to monitor governance closely and hold public office holders accountable to the people who elected them as required by the constitution. Given the appropriate situation, the media are key factors in the overall strategy to promote good governance, rule of law, ensure probity and accountability, wipe out illiteracy and eradicate poverty. It is against this backdrop that this paper examines these and other challenges facing the media and how to meet them.

Introduction

A former Anglican Church dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, London, William Ralph Inge, once wrote: "A good government remains the greatest of human blessings, and no nation has ever enjoyed it". Inge's many years long statement still holds true till date as most nations of the world continue to experience bad governance due to lack of leadership. Recognizing this problem, American essayist Brooks Atkinson concluded in 1951, "we need supermen to rule us - the job is so vast and the need for wise judgment is so urgent. But, alas," he said, "there are no supermen" (Awake! December 22, 1990).

The search for good government has led humans to repeatedly devise new forms of government to meet the needs of the times. Brogan of the University of Essex alluded to this fact when he said "If man, the political animal, is to save himself and his civilizations, he cannot yet rest from seeking new forms of government to meet the ever-new needs of his times" (Op. cit.).

In Nigeria, the absence of good leadership over the years has plunged the country into a pitiable situation, culminating in the institutionalization of corruption and notorious governmental inefficiency in the polity. The last four decades have borne witness to a steady decline in values, quality of governance, commitment and the integrity of our environment. As the renowned professor Akinkugbe, put it, "our society has become negatively permissive and much passes for norm today that would have caused a raising of eyebrows in yonder years" (Daily Independent, November 5, 2004:B10).

Our eight years of democratic experience have engendered a renewal call for a true re-generation of the nation. This true re-generation, many believed, could be attained if our leaders are prepared to purge themselves of negative tendencies and imbibe ethics in their daily activities. According to Oputa, retired Justice of the Supreme Court, "We have failed in our quest for nation-building because of lack of leadership. A committed leader is what we want. With good leadership, things will change" (Oputa, 2004:9).

Today "more than ever betoreTTlieTe'is a consensus of opinion among Nigerians that the country needs good leaders at all levels of government to drive the democratic change and enthrone good governance. As agents of social mobilization and national development, the mass media can help to stimulate the effective and efficient management of society through the provision of topical ideas and information.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is based on the social responsibility and agenda setting theories of the mass media. The Social Responsibility Theory as enunciated by Siebert et al (1956:76), explains the main preoccupation of the press (mass media) as servicing the political system by providing information,
discussion and debate in public affairs. Enlightening the public so as to make it capable of self-government and safeguarding the rights of the individual by serving as a watchdog against government.

The Agenda Setting Theory, according to Severin and Tankard Jr. (2001:219), refers to the media's capability through repeated news coverage of raising the importance of an issue in the public's mind. Most of the time the agenda setting function is carried out through the process of gatekeeping. McQuail (2005:512) describes gatekeeping as a phenomenon which had long been noticed and studied in the context of election campaigns and the main issues of the day, are reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues. As gatekeepers, reporters, editors and journalists are interested in the dynamics of giving expressions to issues by display, prominence, constancy, editorials, news commentaries, analysis, cartoons and events, the tucking in of stones inside pages or outright spiking of stories and even photographs (Ekeli, 2007).

**Concept of Good Governance**

Good governance is a controversial concept, especially to the ruling class in developing countries, which is often reluctant to be held accountable. Yet, it is at the heart of the process of sustainable development. In fact, major donors and international financial institutions like the International Monetary Fund or World Bank now insist on reforms ensuring good governance as a condition for granting aid and loans.

Best (2007), defines good governance as, the running of the affairs of government in positive and progressive manners beneficial to the governed, and which delivers the public goods'. Good governance, according to Wikipedia (2007), is characterized by participation, rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency, and accountability.

It is also characterized by democratization, maintenance of law and order, accountability and transparency, competence, due process, separation and devolution of power, a free press and a virile civil society arena, competition for power and the existence of a credible opposition. All these characteristics assure that corruption is minimized, the views of minorities are taken into account and that the voices of the most vulnerable in society are heard in decision-making. Good governance helps to diffuse tensions and remove problems as they evolve. Decision makers take the right decisions as and when due.

However, in today's Nigeria, political office holders have a wrong and misplaced concept of governance. It is obvious that what drives most people to seek elective post is the "spoils" of the office. Elective office holders are interested more in how much money or state wealth they can amass for themselves at the expense of the people. The real concept of governance which is service and improvement of the standard of living of the governed is completely alien to them. The pillar of good governance is probity, transparency and accountability. Sadly, these three are largely absent in the nation's life. This explains why an average Nigerian is so skeptical of public functionaries. The situation is so pathetic at the third tier of government. It is common knowledge that governance at the local government level in many states of the federation has been non-existent. There are reports of council chairmen and councilors who only show up at the office at the end of the month when revenue allocations are being shared. As soon as everybody takes his share, they disappear for the rest of the month. The thinking among these elected public officials is that nobody would ask questions. To check this ugly trend, Ibrahim Tahir, ex-internal affairs minister in the defunct Second Republic posits: "we must get our concept of governance right. We must allow our democracy to endure and develop its systems. We must establish safeguards against the factor that make it possible for corruption such as we have it today to flourish. We must also fashion out a proper system of sanction against culprits. 2007:16). All these are necessary if not, we would be chasing shadows" (Tahir

**Mass Media and Public Enlightenment**

The media are the instruments of information dissemination in any modern society. Without the mass media, the input-output functions of any system would have been difficult if not impossible to achieve. It facilitates the implementation of policies, decisions and programmes of the government to the people.
Akinfeleye et al (1995), as -eked by Nwekeaku (2007), describe the mass media as tools for the creation of linkages between the society and the type of socio-political ideology whether democracy, autocracy or meritocracy.

Corroborating these facts, Buckalew and Wulfemayer (2005), listed the role of the mass media, among others, to include:

- To inform
  - To educate
  - To help bring about social change, and
  - To help establish public policies

There is a relation between the creation of public awareness and the mass media. On the one hand, through coverage and presentation of news, information, facts, figures, editorials, and other analytical pieces about an issue, the media have considerable influence over the creation of public awareness of that issue. On the other hand, the media serve as channels for the expression of public opinion which is a manifestation of public awareness. Public awareness and its overt manifestation (public opinion) require information for their creation and proper functioning. Information dissemination is a necessary precondition for the existence of public awareness. Without knowledge of an issue, there cannot be awareness about that issue.

Given the appropriate mix of factors, newspapers, magazines, posters, radio, television, film and other communication paraphernalia offer the channels for disseminating development-oriented information, including information relating to good governance. Although communication channels (mass and traditional media alike) per se are not the panaceas for the problems posed by bad governance, the efforts to generate a shift in attitude towards such problems are information-related or information-dependent in one way or another. Therefore, the provision of information and education through the media of communication is essential to efforts to create awareness of issues relating to good governance and its relation to political and socio-economic development.

Social scientists and communication scholars have observed that the communication media can be used to effectively inform broad masses of people about a problem of public interest; they can inspire ideas and public awareness. Such scholars as Mansurov (1988), have identified several factors which determine the creation through the media of public awareness and the stimulation of public interest in certain issues. These include: i) how the issue is presented in the media, especially the use of clear and accurate information and facts; (ii) periodic repetition and frequent reference; (iii) the amount of time and space devoted to the issue in the media; and (iv) presentation of adequate analytical pieces on the issue and information and its effect on the society.

On both a long and short term basis, the mass media can make substantial contributions to the process of creating public awareness, whether the aim of such efforts is to:

- Bring about an increase in the information or knowledge level of the public or target group about a specific issue;
- Generate a change in their opinions or attitudes; or
- Motivate them to action; that is to change their behaviour and habits.

Regardless of the purpose, the creation of public awareness and the generation of public action involve and require a purposive-use of the mass media.

The Challenges of Mass Media

One of the major challenges facing the media in the efforts to promote good governance in the country is corruption which has eaten very deep into the psyche of Nigerians, especially those in positions of public responsibility. It is the bane of Nigeria's socio-economic development.

The country's biggest minus is its corruption reputation. Nigeria as rated in Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index (CPI), was the world's most corrupt country in 2000, second most corrupt country in 2001, 2002 and 2003, third most corrupt country in 2004, and sixth most corrupt country in 2005. Corruption is the greatest albatross and the most virulent cog militating against good governance and national development in Nigeria. It has remained an all-pervading evil, afflicting all tiers of government (Sanni, 2007:39).

Osoba (2000:372), defines corruption as, a form of anti-social behaviour by an individual and social group which confers unjust or fraudulent benefits on its perpetrators, is inconsistent with the established legal norm and prevailing moral ethos of the land and is likely to subvert or diminish the capacity of the legitimate authorities to provide fully for the material and spiritual wellbeing of all members of society in a just and equitable manner. To Oghale (2005:14), corruption is a generic term used to designate all activities through
which unfair advantages are gained.

In view of the many adverse effects corruption has on our economy, it is the responsibility of the media to constantly expose corrupt practices and collaborate with the anti-graft agencies to fight corruption so as to achieve a zero tolerance level in our society. For the media to fight corruption, journalists must first of all clean up their house and shun corruption by not taking gifts from people they report on so that their reports would not be distorted. It is time for journalists to rise up and fight for their right to adequate pay and fair treatment by their employers in order for them to be effectively positioned to publish news without bias.

The media are also under obligation to re-orientate Nigerians to change their attitude towards material wealth and put into practice those indigenous cultural values that promote honesty, integrity and respect for good name. One of the causes of corruption is the dominant material social character and orientation of our society. In any given society, the dominant value orientation plays a crucial role in the attitudes, behaviours and values of its individual members. At the moment, the Nigerian society is dominated by the desire to get rich as quickly as possible.

Commenting on the shift in our value orientation, Anele (2007:18), observed time-honoured values such as honesty, integrity, and respect for good name no longer have the kind of strong influence on people's behaviour as before. Parents want their children to be materially successful in a hurry, and society honours big men and thick madams, irrespective of the morality or immorality of the sources of their wealth. The change in societal values has a number of consequences. According to Anele, it encourages greed, avarice and rapaciousness in individuals. It promotes disrespect for truly hardworking people who earn an honest living without being rich, which in turn, degrades the dignity of labour.

Senate President, David Mark, alluded to this fact while blaming Nigerians for the corrupt tendencies of some public office holders. Speaking when he inaugurated the Senate Committee on Ethics, Privileges, Code of Conduct and Public Petitions on Tuesday, September 11, 2007, Senator Mark accused Nigerians of coercing public officials into corrupt practices by their incessant demands. "Immediately a man is appointed or elected into office, a lot of pressure is brought on him by the people who do not only want him to bring development to their area, but want him to put money in their pockets", he noted, stressing that there was need for a change of attitude (The Pointer, September 13,2007:24).

Former military vice president, Admiral Augustus Aikhomu agrees with Senator David Mark when he said the citizens themselves have a role to play. They should not expect too much from public office holders. It is the desire to meet up to the expectation of the families and the society that makes some office holders to tamper with state resources. We should stop glorifying wealth. We can set standards for those who govern us by measuring them not by how much they have amassed but how well they have run our lives (Aikhomu, 2007:16).

To consolidate on the practice of democratic governance, the media should also sensitize Nigerians to rise to the challenge of leading the rest of Africa in strengthening the position and role of the civil society. The civil society constitutes an important instrument through which democracy could be deepened to enable it endure. With a responsive, virile and dynamic civil society, the practice of democracy becomes easier to monitor and evaluate. The people themselves, to whom power belongs, continuously subject its practice to scrutinity to enable them check excesses and abuse. Elected leaders become more alive to their responsibilities in such a circumstance. Institutions also become stronger and better able to defend the philosophy and principles upon which the system of government is anchored. In the final analysis, the voters matter more and the votes could even become more important.

Another major challenge for the media is for it to partner with government to reduce illiteracy and poverty. Poverty slows down growth and retards progress. It is personified in those we see in our cities and villages who show evidence of hunger, disease-malnutrition but who appear lost in our statistics yet, must be part of our touted 140 million population. Regarding the threats of illiteracy and poverty to society, former Director General of UNESCO, Mr. M'Bow in a 14th International Literacy Day speech published in Montreal Gazette (1979), observed that, illiteracy is closely tied to poverty. Throughout the world, the illiterates are the poor, or make up poor societies but illiteracy is not only an effect of misery, it is also one of the causes.

Lending credence to M'Bow's submission, Nigeria's former Power and Steel Minister, now Governor of Cross River State, Senator Liyel Imoke said illiteracy and poverty are two major factors inhibiting growth and development in Sub-Saharan Africa. Imoke, who spoke while addressing participants at the opening ceremony of the 2005 Global Education for All (EFA) emphasized that of the 1.3 billion people in the world who live below one US dollar per day, over 70 million are Nigerians. According to him, as the figure rises, it is saddening to note that barely a year to the end of the decade of poverty eradication, there is very little to show for all the efforts made by nation states particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa (Vanguard, April 29, 2005:6).

Conclusion
From the foregoing, it is crystal clear that the media can play a vital role in the efforts to promote good governance in the country. For the media to perform this role creditably, it must be allowed access to public records and documents. The National Assembly therefore owes it a duty to ensure that the Freedom of Information Bill is passed into law in order to provide the foundation for an open system of governance that will benefit all sectors of the society, including government. The Freedom of Information Act would among other things create an enabling environment for obtaining information and monitoring the activities of various departments of Government, ensure that government institutions, work better and more efficiently, promote transparency and accountability in governance as government policies and activities will become more open and available to the public, and improve the quality of decisions and policies of government as it will be possible for citizens and stakeholders to participate in the decision-making process.

References


The Pointer, September 13, 2007.
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