

# THE RELEVANCE OF PRESS/MEDIA FOR ECONOMIC REHABILITATION AND SELF - RELIANCE

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## **Abstract**

Human existence largely depends upon communication availability while its absence brings about absolute chaos and jeopardy. Hence, effective communication, greater understanding. Both government, organisation(s) as well as the citizens function well and effectively when adequate means of information dissemination exists. Thus, for the proper flow of information, in any polity, the role of the press or media cannot be over-emphasized. This justifies the writing of a paper of this nature. This paper equally becomes essential so as to reveal the relevance of press/media in economic rehabilitation and self-reliance.

## **Introduction**

The part which the press or<sup>1</sup> the media plays in the transmission of information and culture is generally beyond question. It is the press which makes news or events and activities available to the possible widest audience. It (the Press) feeds the people with information about what was, what is, and what will be. And by this singular function, creates awareness about those events that consequently bring about changes of attitude and orientation. A renowned political commotion researcher— Maxwell ones opined that, media generally can be used to influence people's opinions and that, information dissemination forms the principal role of the press. Whereas for there to be full and adequate economic rehabilitation and reliance, there is the need for full awareness, consciousness and proper orientation on the part of the populace who are the target audience in this case. As a matter of fact, government cannot successfully introduce, efficiently implement and effectively carry out any policy(ies) that borders on people's lives without making adequate use of the media or the press. Thus, the relevance of the press in moulding peoples' opinion cannot be over emphasized. Hence, it is so enormous.

## **What Communication is as a Concept**

Before delving into what may be considered to be the importance or roles of the press in economic rehabilitation and reliance, it is indeed imperative for us to know what ncommunication is as a concept. According to Olasehinde (1994: 2) in B. B. Bolaji (ed) she defined communication "as the transferring of thought or a message to another party so that it can be understood and acted upon". She also defines it as "the process by which verbal and non - verbal symbols are exchanged between two or more persons".

Communication has equally been defined as an act of conveying an information, idea or knowledge from the sender who encodes such a message to the receiver who decodes the message sent using a desirable or appropriate channel with the receiver responding to such message in form of feedback (Odeyemi, 2001:2). Communication is undoubtedly very crucial and fundamental to all human existence; man has always been information conscious, wanting to be informed of all that goes on around him. Whereas the extent to which the press or mass media can be used as means of economic rehabilitation and reliance cannot be overemphasized. This becomes imperative in that, in all facets of human endeavours, communication effectiveness cannot be overlooked. In fact, if there is anything that is gaining widespread or utmost attention globally today, it is information/communication means.

In fact, going by the rate at which communication or information technology is gaining both national and international recognition, it won't amount to a dry catalogue of fact nor a mere recital of deed history to say that, communication generally has reduced the whole world to a very small global village.

That the, press or mass media can be used as a powerful weapon or tool for revamping, reviving, resuscitating, rehabilitating and sustaining nation's economic for the purpose of total reliance is undisputable. We cannot justifiably talk about economic rehabilitation and sustenance of any nation without referring to the kind of polity that is obtainable there, thus, in this paper, efforts shall also be made to unfold

blue print on the political roles of the press/mass media, its ethical code of conduct/ethics of the profession, ownership influences, press freedom. It is only when we have fully understood these that we will be able to know whether the press/mass media can be used as an economic tool for rehabilitation and reliance. For, if the press or the media is not politically freed, that is not able to operate freely as dictated or provided for, it should or as provided for by its professional ethics, then, it logically follows that the idea of dreaming that, this valuable fifth estate of the realm can be used for economic rehabilitation and reliance is a mirage and tantamount to a white elephant project effort in futility.

### **Brief Historical Evolution and Development of the Press in Nigeria**

To be precise, the origin of the press in Nigeria is dated back to the twentieth century. This is because there were possibly newspapers and of course newspaper men ever before there were other professions such as Law, Medicine, Engineering, Accounting, etc (Agbese, 1992:1).

In fact, it could be said that the history of the press in Nigeria is the history of an institution that has been in existence for a period of over hundred and fifty years. It has come of age as an institution to which all persons can turn for information, education, guidance and entertainment and a veritable watchdog of the society and the government. Undoubtedly, researches have shown that there were Nigerian newspapers before there was even an entity that could be called or addressed as Nigeria. In fact, researches have also revealed that the P<sup>1</sup> Nigerian Newspaper came into existence on 3<sup>rd</sup> of December 1859 which was established by Reverend Henry Townsend, an Anglican Bishop. This paper was called or titled *hve Irohin fun ara 'cgba' ati Yoruba* and the paper later became a bilingual newspaper (Yoruba and in English), and it disappeared from the stead in 1967.

Next to emerge after the existence of Iwe Irohin was the Anglo-African newspaper which was founded by Robert Campbell, an American Immigration activist of Jamaican origin. It came to existence in the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1863. This paper took a cue from the confrontational outlook of Iwe Irohin and served as a link between Britain and Africa in terms of Western and African values. This paper too. .received a very low patronage because of its neglect of the local populace and eventually disappeared from circulation in December 1863. Omu, in Ademola J.Y. (1999: 3) tracing the development of newspapers in Nigeria between 1880 and the end of the second world war states thus;

From 1880 when the African newspaper press was born to the outbreak of the Second World War which ushered in new journalistic influences, over 50 newspapers of varied frequency and duration were published. The leading newspapers of the period were: The Lagos Times 1880, Lagos Observer 1882, Eagle and Lagos Critic 1883, Lagos Weekly Record 1891, Lagos Standard 1894, Nigerian Chronicle 1908, Nigerian Pioneer 1914,

African Messenger, 1921. Eko Akelc 1922, Elete Ofe 1923, I we Irohin Osose 1925, Akode Eko 1928.

Idowu in Ademola Y. (1999: 5) also identifies oilier newspapers that developed between 1931 and 1960.

The African Sunday Digest 1931, The Service 1933, The Nigerian Evening Standard 1934, The Comet 1933, The West African Pilot 1937, Gasikiya to Fi Kwabo 1939, Eastern Nigerian Guardian 1940, "Nigerian Spokesman 3943, Middle Belt Herald 1958....",

One thing that is very common to all these newspapers is that, most of them disappeared from circulation because of lack of capital to sustain them and most of them too were privately owned.

### **Press in the Period of Nationalist Movement (1920 - 1960)**

The press during this period was very militant and nationalistic in its approach. According to

Lemert (1981: 8) quoting one of the Editorial comments of the *Times* then:

We are not clamouring for immediate independence, but it should always be borne in mind that the present order of things will not be forever. A time will come when colonies in the West Coast will be left to regulate their internal and external affairs.

During the period in question, most of the available media or press then were majorly used for nationalistic struggles. Thus, they were used as people's mouth piece. Late Awolowo too had this to say of the media especially the press of this period particularly of the *West African Pilot* 1937.

The *Pilot* .... whatever the literary defects or linguistic imperfection, was a fire - eating and aggressive nationalist paper of the highest order .... it was naturally very popular, the very thing that the youth of the country had been expecting (cited in Odeyemi. 1994:22).

The Veteran Journalists of this period did excellent pioneering journalistic works in creating political awareness and awakening of the people's consciousness.

#### The Press in the Post - Independence Period

In this period as opposed to what obtained in the forgoing era, shortly after the attainment of Nigerian political freedom, there was a drastic dramatic shift in the press orientation from the nationalistic struggle to that of reinforcing tribal and sectional loyalties in preference to the good of national unity and integration. The period in question witnessed tremendous government participation in the media industry. Newspapers that were hitherto owned and controlled by private individuals were now being taken over by either the federal or the state governments. In 1960 we have the *Morning Post*, 1961; *Sunday Post*, (1964); *Daily Sketch*, (1966); *New Nigerian* (January 1966) by the Northern Regional government at Kaduna etc.

#### **Types of Press/Media**

The press is the major force in forming public opinion, affecting national and international efforts towards development or global understanding. Press stories have turned ordinary men to national and international heroes and have removed world leaders from power. This is as a result of being a powerful and effective tool or weapon in forming and shaping people's opinions.

When we are talking about press types, we are simply saying who determines the press responsibilities in the society. Thus, the type of polity obtainable, in any society and who owns this veritable estate of the realm determines the types of the press that is to be found in such society.

It should be noted that the political philosophy and ownership factors collectively act as major constraints to media practitioners generally and particularly the press.

According to Gandlin in Odeyemi (1994: 27) there are certain qualities or characteristics which are expected of the press. These are: intelligence, friendliness, courage, punctuality, mental alertness, shrewdness, honesty, accuracy of style (writing), imaginative in thinking, endurance etc. For the press to play or do all these, it would depend strictly on who controls it.

There are basically three types of press. They are: government owned, private or ideological type and independent press organ.

#### **Ethics of the Profession**

Hornby (1974) defines Ethics as a system of moral principles, rules of conduct. Ethics is a set of rules or regulation guiding, preserving and regulating the way and manner in which people should conform themselves to a particular doctrine or ideology laid down. Also Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 3<sup>rd</sup> Edition defines ethic as the general idea or belief that influence people's behaviours and attitude. It is moral rules or principles of good behaviour for deciding what is right or wrong. Professional ethics began in the 1920s but presently, such codes exist almost all over the world. The profession

demands of its practitioners the widest range of intelligence, knowledge and experience as well as national and trained power of observation and reasoning. The oldest code of journalistic ethics was first adopted in 1926. The organisation which embodies the professionals is the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ).

Among such codes of conduct are: that the public is entitled to the truth and that only correct information can form basis for sound journalism; that the moral duty of any journalist is to have respect for the truth and publish only the truth; must serve as a constructive critic of the government all the time; refusal of any reward or allowances for publishing or suppressing news or comments; and avoidance of plagiarism among others.

### **Press Freedom**

Every freeman has an undiluted right to lay what sentiments he pleases before the public. To forbid this, is to destroy the freedom of the press.

Article of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' rights provides that: every individual shall have the right to receive information; and every individual shall have the right to express and disseminate his opinion within the law.

Apart from Section 39 of the 1999 Constitution, Section 22 of the Constitution also deals with mass media. This section is titled obligations of the mass media. It thus states:

The press, radio, television and other agencies of the 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 (Ademola, J.Y., 1999:13).

A paper of this nature may be incomplete without mentioning the fact that all the aforesaid or written press or media's roles are only practicable where press freedom is or could be guaranteed. Thus, if the press is not actually allowed or given free hand to operate or perform its constitutional and professional functions, all that have been said about the veritable estate of the realm would be a mirage. Thus, "everything is safe where the press is free". What this presupposes is that, in any society where there is no press sanction or refrain, or censor, it logically follows that, people's rights could not be trampled upon since this impartial (in an ideal situation) and veritable estate of realm is there to raise alarm.

The press/media should be freed from being controlled either by the government or its proprietor but rather allowed or given free hand to operate according to its ethical code of conducts or professional ethics. This is necessary so as to avert the tendency for distorting or slanting news stories and other editorial comments by its practitioners. It is only when this is done that people too could have confidence in the press or the media. So that even if government is using it for a just course as in the case of trying to sensitize the citizens on productive, educative and economically inclined programmes such as this economic rehabilitation and self reliance, it would not be detested or despised by the masses.

### **How the Press Can Be Used as a Tool for Economic Rehabilitation and Self- Reliance**

Information is the core of all education and of all personal growth and development. Both human existence, growth and, or development, be it political, economic or social could only be made possible through adequate and proper information dissemination. To this end therefore, press as one of the major or being the most powerful media organ has got some theoretical functions which are expected of it to perform if sanctions, impositions, incarceration and restraints are removed. In other words, if allowed to freely practice.

Among such roles is to ensure continuous flow of information. Serves as the people's voice or mouthpiece against oppression, sensitize the society to abate crime of variegated types through its publicity.

Apart from this, interpretation and explanation, agenda setting and developing, it also

encourages and explains the plans of the government that are of public interest and discourages or condemns those that are detrimental and counterproductive in all its ramifications or entirety. Even as in this case, for there to be economic rehabilitation and reliance in any society and Nigeria being no exception, these roles are very crucial and fundamental and must be adequately played by the press.

In order to also play this role effectively, the press ensures that the interest of the masses are well - protected. Not only that, all forms of social, economic and political injustices are vehemently campaigned against wherefore a programme or policy like economic rehabilitation of the masses would not only be welcomed by the press, but also be given utmost attention and of course widest publication or coverage for people to be well - acquainted with the programme. It gives clues about the policy to the audience. No wonder therefore, it was in the light of this vital role which this veritable estate of this realm plays that necessitated why Hmeri (1984) remarks thus: "The basic responsibility of the press is to serve the governed and the governor"<sup>1</sup> and he went further, to say that the press should also perform these functions in an ideally democratic society: serves as the watchdog; serves as the gatekeeper; socially responsible to the masses; objective evaluation of issues; informs and keeps, one up-to-date; broadens and deepens perspective; entertains and creates laughter.

## **Conclusion**

Press in its functions improves the quality of life in the society by exposing and denouncing all forms of socio-economic and political injustices, it also serves as the guardian of nation's progress and a catalyst of the political and constitutional progress of the nation. Thus, the press apart from playing the fundamental role of educating, informing and entertaining the people, it also makes constructive contributions to thoughts and discussions on matters of public policies as the one in question — economic rehabilitation and reliance. It is the press that can really give adequate and sufficient interpretation of what it is to be economically rehabilitated and be made self-reliant. This role the press has successfully played in the past. For instance, on programmes such as MAMSER — Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Recovery, NDE — National Directorate of Employment, Poverty Alleviation or Eradication Programme and the recent operation back to the land et cetera/et cetera are some of those programmes where the media/press has played vital roles in seeing to their actualization.

Also, in order to create conducive atmosphere for economic rehabilitation and self-reliance in any polity, the press ensures that democracy works or that the democratic governance is entrenched, it preaches against violence, tribalism or sentimentality and religious intolerance and moulds public opinions as well as shaping both foreign and domestic policies. In fact, this must have been the reason for Mchihari Edward et al in Odeyemi (1994:17) stating that:

The press keeps records, great literatures and all accomplishments, it is the medium that more than all others, daily dictates the fortunes and failures of men and women.

It is the crusader for all social justices and moralities, civil liberties and human progress.

From the expositions in this paper, it could be rightly claimed that the press is a veritable weapon in economic rehabilitation and self-reliance. That is, taking into consideration the inevitably vital roles which the press or the media generally play in all spheres of human endeavours especially in the area of economic rehabilitation and self-reliance, it could be deduced and vehemently agreed upon that it is indeed very crucial and highly fundamental as a tool or weapon. It is equally believed that the mass media or the press should be democratized while commercialization of news has practically undermined and redefined news are just anything that anyone could pay for would be counterproductive and highly detrimental to the entire populace.

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