Development Journalism and Africa: Tackling Violence against Women

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Key Terms: violence, women, development, communication, journalism and Africa.

Abstract
Violence against women is a perennial issue that have been debated and discussed among media professional, diplomats, civil right activist across the globe. The Vienna declaration and programme of action adopted at the World Conference of Human Rights in 1993 recognizes the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life. The main trust of this paper x-rayed the nature of violence against women in Africa as well as emphasizing the need for development communication as an ideal media based tool to tackle issues of violence against women in Africa. The author further suggests various pathways whereby a development journalist could contribute in tackling issues of violence against women in Africa.

Introduction
The World Development Report (2003) has revealed that violence against women was a serious cause of death and a greater cause of ill-health among women across the globe. In Africa, violence against women is a perennial issue that affects the rights of women in every facet of life. It carries with it both short and long term consequences that affect both the physical and psychological well being of women.

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Abama and Kwaja (2009) have estimated that one in every five women face some form of violence during her lifetime, some cases leading to serious injury and death. This is why it has been recognized in the Millennium Declaration of September 2000, in which the General Assembly of the United Nations resolved “to combat all forms of violence against women and to implement the convention in the elimination all forms of discrimination against women” (United Nations, 2005:12).

This paper was organized in a number of rubrics; it x-rayed the incidence of violence against women and children in the African society, using Nigeria as an example. It also examined the need for development communication in the African society and how development journalism can be used as an integrated approach in the media to alleviate discrimination against women in Africa.

**Theoretical Framework**

Among the dominant theoretical perspectives that could be harnessed in the analysis of this work, the following perspectives or models, which are of immediate relevance to this areas are; The Agenda Setting media theory and the Development Media theory.

The Agenda – Setting theory stipulates that “the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at a given time in a given society” (Folarin 1997: 68). In raising such vital issues to the platform of discourse and draw attention to it, the media succeeds in their efforts among other ways, via the quantity / frequency of reporting, the prominence given to the reports, indicated through headline displays; pictures, layouts in newspapers, film, graphics prime time allocation on radio and television. The importance of women welfare, needs and rights should be emphasized in news reports and programs in other to facilitate equality among different genders in the society. In essence, there is a need for media experts
and communication professionals to use their functional role of agenda setting for the prime place of the rights of women so as to alleviate decimation and violence against women as well as increase the awareness and knowledge of the rights of women in the society.

Development media theory, which serve as part of the theoretical framework of the study is largely normative. Its key tenet stipulates that the mass media especially in developing countries (like Nigeria), to be considered relevant and responsible, they must identify with our national interest and contribute to the socio-economic development of the Nation in which they exist (McQuail, 1987; Folarin, 1997). It calls on the media and the government to work together to ensure that the media assist in planned, beneficial development of the country. It holds that by the press assisting and supporting the government, the media is indirectly developing the society. The major tenets of the theory are as follows:

- Media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with national established policy.
- Freedom of the media should be open to economic priorities and development needs in the society.
- Media should give priority in news and information to link with other developing countries, which are close geographically, culturally or politically (McQuail, 2002).

As it relates to violence against women in developing countries, the mass media should be committed to the promotion of development programmes targeted at women rights and meeting the societal welfare of women in Africa.
Violence against women in Africa

Across the globe, there have been campaigns discouraging violence against women. The Vienna declaration and programme of action adopted at the World Conference of Human Rights in 1993 recognizes the importance of working towards the elimination of violence against women in public and private life. It emphasizes the elimination of all form of harassment, exploitation and trafficking in women, gender bias in the administration of justice, and eradication of any conflict which may arise between the right of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional and customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism.

In retrospect, The United Nations, in 1967, proclaimed through the General Assembly resolution 2263 (XXII), in fifteen articles, issues that address possible elimination of discrimination against women. Several issues were considered in making the fifteen declarations. Some of these include:

- **Article 1**: discrimination against women, denying or limiting as it does their equality of rights with men, is fundamentally unjust and constitute an offence against human dignity.

- **Article 2**: states that all appropriate measures shall be taken to abolish existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women.

- **Article 3**: states that all appropriate measures shall be taken to educate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards eradicating of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women.
Article 11: specifies that the principle of equality of rights of men and women demands implementation in all States in accordance with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Governments, non-governmental organizations and individuals are urged, therefore, to do all in their power to promote the implementation of the principles contained in this Declaration.

Violence against women has been a contextual issue in most African countries in the 21st century. It has been observed that despite the campaign spearheaded by various non-governmental and international organizations against violence and discrimination of their gender, many of them still suffer from the scourge (Akpoveta, 2008; Yarhere & Soola, 2008). Historically, women have been facing a lot of violence and discrimination from society, church, work place and the environment in which they find themselves. In Nigeria, women are neglected in policy formulation and in other activities or task, where women could be productive as their men counterpart. For instance, the national policy on agriculture was formulated without considering the interest of rural women, who constitute a larger percentage of the work force in agriculture (Fab-Ukozor, 2004).

There are a number of causes for violence against women in Africa and other developing countries. Oladitan and Anyanwu (2008) have observed that one of the causes of violence against women in Africa was due to culture and tradition which borders on the people’s belief system and practice. They explained that culture has two facets. On one hand, it is a condition and the other hand, it is a process. As a condition, culture defines the tradition of the people; as a process, it x rays the dynamics of change and evolution in the collective consciousness of the group. Culture as a condition, require women to be submissive to their husbands even when they are maltreated or disregarded; it requires women to engage in widowhood rites even
when such rites are retrogressive and negative to psychological well being of the women; it also require young women to engage in circumcision, even when such act could result to women losing their womb. Akpoveta (2008) noted that in Nigerian culture, the discrimination against women begins from the announcement of her birth which is usually followed with the sad exclamation “Ah a girl again!”. She is then dressed in pink cloth to identify her. Her toys are baby dolls to prepare her for motherhood and not womanhood. Many husbands on their part secretly or overtly express to have a male child as the first-born. Inadvertently the expectant woman would also wish for a male child as her first born in response to attitudes and behaviors that reinforce women's subordination.

Scientific data on the prevalence of son preference is difficult to obtain. According to WHO (2006) countries in Africa where son preference is most apparent are Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia, Cameroon, Liberia, Senegal and Madagascar. Oppressive patriarchy and male dominance in all African societies mean that in all countries, there is some form of son preference and discrimination against girls.

Another cause of violence against women in Africa is due to the negative exposure about women in televisions and Films in Africa. Oladitan and Anyanwu (2008) have noted that the home video world is full of realistic and unrealistic crimes which some viewers replicate in real life. For e.g. video films create enmity between spouses to be and yet –to-be mother in law, which results to negative behaviors and interactions between spouses and their mother in law due to the exposure of these films. Yarhere & Soola (2008) notes that Nigerian home video are replete with all sort of atrocities attributed to aged women and mother –in-laws in family setting. Safeguarding one’s marriage is another cause for violence against women in Africa. Many women in Africa do not support the idea of divorce in marriages, which make them to subscribe to any form of
Discrimination meted on them by their husband and relatives (Yarhere & Soola, 2008). Many women remain faithful to their husbands even when they know that their husband engage in infidelity activities and refuses to take financial and moral responsibility of the family.

Types of Violence against Women
For proper understanding it will be appropriate to briefly look at the different types of violence against women.

1. Domestic violence: this is a violence experienced by women from people that they are close to. This type of violence could be referred to as “Intimate Partner Violence” (IPV). The impact of domestic violence is usually committed by the husbands and boyfriends of these women. Akpoveta (2008) has observed that the sphere of total violence against women can be understood by the fact that 40-70% of murders of women are committed by their husbands or boyfriends.

2. Psychological violence: another form of violence against women can be done psychologically. For instance, threat to use force against the women in the form of intimidation, shouting, abuses or using forceful language for the purpose of making them afraid; harassing women or not allowing them their right to choose or denying them freedom of association; presenting women in bad light either by writing evil things about them or taking their picture when naked.

3. Physical violence: this is the common form of violence done against women in Africa and most developing countries. It involves fighting, beating and even injuring women. It also involves forcing women to abort pregnancies either against their will or without the advice of medical doctors;
maltreatment of nannies or house helps or maids. It also involves rape i.e. forcing women to have sexual intercourse against their will.

4. Labour violence: many women in Africa and developing countries suffer from labour violence. For instance, in some countries, there are some offices or positions women are not allowed to occupy in the work place. During the Second World War, women underwent extrajudicial punishments in labour camps of Nazi Germany.

5. War violence: due to the effect of war in a country or among countries, there is an increase of violence against women. For e.g., during the Vietnam War, women were raped and abused by Vietnam soldiers in other to create entertainment for them selves.

Development Journalism
To address gender-related issues negatively affecting developing countries, there is a need for development communication to abet sustainable development in a country. Development communication is conceptualized as the systematic, effective, and efficient use of communication structures for development purpose. Moemeka (1991) has reasoned that development communication was the use of principles and practice of exchange of ideas to fulfill the development objectives. In addition, Recardio (1999) expounds that communication for development is about aiding different types of actors interested in understanding the needs and assessing opportunities jointly; it is about providing them with methods and media to reach common meaning and about enabling them to negotiate with other actors with contrasting preparation and interest. In other words, development communication is the use of communication to provide transformational solutions to the issues affecting development.
Okorie (2009) posits that development journalism is a form of development communication that involves a conscious effort to mobilize the society for the purpose of ameliorating the nation’s socio-political and economic health. Furthermore, Soola (2003) provides a clearer nature of development journalism, when he posited that development journalism should be seen as a new form of investigation reporting to which journalists’ role on a development news beat, was to examine, evaluate and report the relevance of a development projects to the national and local need.

To Golding, (1977:303; Nwosu, 1986:40; Soola 2003:167) development journalism is capable of fulfilling the following:

I. Stresses the generally educative function of news, either about specific pieces of information or by arousal of general awareness of events and their implications in the rural area.

II. Produces stories which displayed particular social needs or problems it was hoped that government would be provoked into action.

III. Give prominence to local self helps projects, which could encourage emulation of success activities in other communities.

IV. Tackling specific problems such as corruption, often with prudent obliqueness

In other words, development journalism possesses the capacity to widen the scope of journalistic enterprise in terms of individual initiatives and self actualization possibilities.
The Development Journalist and Violence against women: The way forward

The mass media exerts great influence among individuals in the society. Most people in well civilized societies, would want to first glance through the newspapers or listen to the morning news broadcast before doing any daily routine (Umechukwu, 1997). The mass media shapes culture, influences politics, plays an important role in business and affects the daily lives of millions. In addition, the mass media shapes people’s thinking and orient them to fight for their right (Okorie, 2009).

The issue of discrimination and violence against women is one of the perennial issues of African governments today. Using development communication as a tool of professional media practice, in tackling this issue has become imperative. For the populace to change the harmful effects of certain traditional customary practices and cultural prejudices of women, they need information that could persuade and motivate them to meet to the needs and welfare of women in the African society.

In order to tackle violence against women in Africa, development journalists are expected to take cognizance of the following in the conducts of their responsibilities, there are:

I. Journalist should embrace the philosophy of development journalism in handling issues about women right based in the constitution and the cultural norm in the society. This is necessary in order to balance competing interest i.e. the cultural norm of the society and the women interest in reporting issues about discrimination and violence against women.

II. Journalist should perceive the women as a contributor in all community development actions and activities in their news reports and publication. Such presentation of women in
A media report could help destroy cultural prejudices of women in the African society

III. Development journalists should make use community radio and newspaper in reaching out to people in the rural areas about meeting to the needs and welfare of women in the society. These channels should endeavor to communicate these messages in the indigenous languages of the people who reside in these environments.

IV. Journalist should provide a platform whereby women are allowed to share their experiences, feeling and aspirations as well as proffer solutions in other to tackle violence against women in the society. These platforms should be in form of Talk shows, interviews and special reports on newspaper and magazines

V. Media professionals and the government should promote more public interest on issues of women’s’ right in the African society. This will help guarantee consistency in the flow of information that could educate and teach people on the manner to treat women in the African society.

VI. Journalists should work hand in hand with NGOs, Government agencies and International Organizations, in other to mobilize their resources in reporting issues, programs and policies that affect women and tackle issues of violence against women.

VII. Journalists should apply their agenda setting function to educate public opinion and to direct national aspirations towards eradicating of prejudice and the abolition of customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women

VIII. Journalists should spearhead the campaign in their news reports and programs to abolish existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women
IX. Journalists should continue to engage in constant and continuous analysis of issues relaying to gender performance in every sphere of life

X. Journalists should partner with the government to view issues relating to violence against women such as rape, sexual harassment, female genital mutilation, forced pregnancy, male child preference, early marriages etc, with the seriousness it deserves and come up with programmes and policies on such issues

Conclusion
Violence against women is a crime against women and their future. Violence against women is endemic and can be reduced but not eradicated. The reduction of violence would only be possible with societal change. Despite inroads of women in government and increased education for girls, brutality in the home and community is still tacitly accepted. Development communication is a media based instrument that can be used to alleviate the violence against women to a minimal effort if journalists could partner with government agencies, international organizations as well as non-governmental agencies to spearhead a campaign to abolish existing laws, customs, regulations and practices which are discriminatory against women, and to establish adequate legal protection for equal rights of men and women.

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