

Mass Media, Governance and Poverty Reduction Strategy in Nigeria: A Role Evaluation

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Abstract

Poverty, like an elephant, is more easily recognised than defined. This is the prevailing condition in many developing nations of Latin America, Asia and Africa. About 75 per cent of Nigerian population, comprising of women, youths and children in both urban and rural areas live without the basic needs of life. Poverty in Nigeria has been attributed to bad governance resulting from prolonged military dictatorship and its inconsistent economic policies. This paper therefore conceptualises the issues of media, governance and poverty and establishes their inter-relationships. It employs content analysis method to obtain data from four selected print media in Lagos State using the Convenient Sampling Method. The result of the study revealed that the press has not performed creditably well in the coverage of poverty and related issues. It also showed that rural communities were not only neglected in news reports but the community news was found to be lacking in development contents. The study reasoned that national or regional media have been found to be unable to cater for the development information needs of Nigeria's sharply divergent urban-rural populace and therefore community media should be encouraged instead.

Keywords: Poverty, Governance and Mass Media

Introduction

The issue of poverty has, in the last two decades, become an intractable problem among the governments of developing nations of Latin America, Asia and Africa that constitute about two third of world population (World Bank,2006). The mass media, both local and international have sensitised the international community to this plight. It is against this backdrop that the United Nations in September 2000 constituted a global compact group to address the issue of biting poverty ravaging the world. The outcome of the committee's efforts is the emergence of 15 years millennium development goals (MDGs) which is binding on all the governments of developing nations. Although it appears the whole continent of Africa is vulnerable but this paper focuses on Nigeria.

Background to the Study

The issue of poverty presents a case of paradox in Nigeria. Although the country is abundantly rich in land, human and natural resources, yet more than 75percent of her 160 million people including women, youths and children residing in the rural communities still live below poverty line (Oshewolo, 2010). Nigeria is the world's largest community of black race, the most populous nation in Africa and the 7th in the world. An oil rich state, with her 2.5million barrel per day, Nigeria ranks as Africa's largest oil producing nation and the 6th position in the world. Apart from oil, Nigeria also has a large deposit of gas which is adjudged to be greater than oil. Since her oil discovery in the early 1970s till 2005, Nigeria has earned over N3.2trillion from oil exploration (World Bank, 2008). This figure rose between 2009 and 2010 when she realised US\$196billion within four years (National Bureau of Statistics, 2010). Besides oil and gas, Nigeria has 37 other solid mineral deposits (yet to be explored) in commercial quantity (FOS, 2009).

Despite her enormous natural endowment and massive wealth, Nigeria is still surprisingly, included among the 50 countries of the World where poverty level is still unreasonably high (CBN Brief, 2002). According to the statistics released by the World Bank and the IMF, Nigeria ranked 152nd among countries with the lowest Human Development Index (HDI), 54th among 77 other developing nations where poverty level remains high and upward swinging(UNDP, 1998, p.26; Sanni, 2003, p.10). The National Bureau of Statistics (2012) also observes that the number of people living with poverty in Nigeria has risen from 54.7% in 2004 to 60.9% in 2010 translating to 112 million poverty-infested Nigerians despite the 7.6% growth claim by the government. The Punch newspaper of Wednesday, July16, 2008 reported that 24million Nigerian youths are jobless while 1.6million out of 16million employed youths were under-employed (National Manpower Board, 2008; National Bureau of Statistics, 2008).

Besides, the Economist in its survey (2006, p.7) also offered a fresh perspective to Nigeria's poverty profile. It states, "more than 4 out of 10 Nigerians live on less than N1, 320 per capital per month". This is approximately US\$8.2 per month or 27cent per day which, according to UNDP barely provides for a quarter of nutritional requirements of a healthy living. The report further added that "life expectancy is pegged at 50.1years while infant mortality rate is 112 per 1000 births; adult literacy 59.5% and access to clean water is 50%" respectively.

In Nigeria as in other developing nations, there is a geographic dimension to poverty issue as can be seen by its level of pervasiveness in the rural settings than in the urban centres. According to Aigbokhan, (2000); FOS, (2004), about 63.8% of Nigeria's population translating to about 80million people including women, youths and children are resident in the villages and are poor." Oshewolo (2010) also observed that in 2004, the urban population with access to water was 67% whereas it was 31% in the rural communities. The development situations in the rural areas are even made worse as basic infrastructural facilities are non-

available or are in state of disrepair. There are no good roads, no standard school, no adequately equipped hospital; everything depicts absence of government. This situation has induced mass rural-urban migration which leads to mass un-employment with its attendant social ills such as armed robbery, hired assassination, drug abuse, raping, prostitution, teenage abortion, ritual murder; advance-fee-fraud and the most recent development, kidnapping and terrorism. All these have contributed largely to making Nigeria unsafe for both the rich and the poor.

Conceptual Clarification

Poverty: Poverty, like an elephant, is more easily recognised than defined (Aboyade, 1975). Notwithstanding its multidimensional nature that lent it to various controversial definitions, poverty has been defined by the World Bank, (2004) as that level of income below which a certain percentage of the population is to live. The UNDP (2009) provided an all-embracing definition of poverty as “denial of choices and opportunity, a violation of human dignity, lack of basic capacity to participate effectively in the society, not having enough to feed, to cloth a family, not having access to school and health facilities, lack of land to farm or employment to earn a living, not having access to credit facility, insecurity, discrimination and exclusion of individuals, households and communities; susceptibility to violence, living on marginal or fragile environments without access to clean water or good sanitation”.

Governance: Most people have asked the question on why Nigeria has remained poor in the midst of plenty. Contemporary development thinkers have reasoned and attributed Nigeria’s poverty to bad governance. Fukuda-par and Ponzio (2002) define governance as the process by which power and authority are exercised in a society; government and the citizenry articulate their interests and preference; reconcile their differences and exercise their legal right and obligations. The World Bank (1992) also defined governance as the means by which power is exercised in the management of a country’s human and natural resources to engender sustainable development. UNRISD (2000) and Cardoso (2001) however, agreed that governance that will engender sustainable development must be associated with well thought-out development policy and management, adequately organised market economy with effective liberal democracy. Absence of these basic factors due to prolonged years of military governance characterised by political instability, epidemic thievery of public fund and ill-conceived economic policy have combined to multiply poverty and reverse the early post-independent economic and political gains (Igbatayo & Igbinedion, 2008).

Corruption which is viewed by scholars as the abuse of public office is a global phenomenon with evidences of its ability to hinder or slow down the pace of development of any nation. Although, the degree of corruption varies from nation to nation, it is indirectly proportional to the level of development and openness of the machinery of government. In Nigeria, corruption has eaten deep into the national polity and governance. The transparency International (TI) in its 1996 Corruption Perception Index (CPI) rated Nigeria as the most corrupt nation out of 54 countries surveyed worldwide. This record was repeated in 1997 when Nigeria was rated 52nd out of 52 nations surveyed. Although, each succeeding government claimed to be fighting corruption, but the more efforts directed at it the more pervasive it becomes.

Over the years, large sum of public fund meant for infrastructural development and poverty reduction programs have ended up in private accounts of some public officers. Recently, a former state Governor in Nigeria was found guilty and jailed by a London Court for money laundering of about £380million. The same former Governor within a period of five months was convicted by a High Court in Texas, United States for owning properties

worth \$53million. This is just a case out of many other public officers who diverted public fund meant for national development into their private account locally and internationally.

That governance is an instrument of administrative order, authority and control presupposes that, to effectively and profitably exercise the power and authority to benefit the populace, there must be means of information sharing between the government and the governed. This is where the mass media becomes relevant.

Mass Media: Mass media have come to occupy the position of eminence in the world today as it constitutes the nexus that controls the over-all socio-economic and political development of every society. Without the media which, according to Okunna (2000, p.32), maintain constant flow of vital information for economic growth, national development is bound to be stagnated or at best be retarded. Owolabi (2008, p.287) also corroborated this position, adding that progressive policies and decisions are made on the basis of the quality of available information at one's disposal. To policy makers, information and knowledge about the desires of the people are the basic ingredient they need to respond to the opportunities and challenges in their economic and political domain. For example, the mass media, particularly radio can be used to propagate government programs on poverty alleviation at the grassroots level. It can also be used to educate the people on their civic responsibilities to the state; that while the government makes effort to develop the rural communities, the people also have the compelling obligation of paying taxes and any other levies and participate actively in the political process. The press, through comprehensive and continuous report sensitizes the public to the misconduct of their leaders as well as stimulate agitation for reforms that will create positive attitude change on the part of public officers.

It follows from the above that there is a Trinitarian relationships between the media, governance and poverty reduction. If the mass media is free as a part of the trinity and perform its expected roles, it is only normal that the level of poverty will reduce and those factors breeding poverty and slowing down Nigeria's march towards sustainable development will be tamed. Against this backdrop, this paper aims to investigate to what extent the media reports on poverty issues demonstrate the social responsibility of the press within the context of liberal democracy.

Theoretical Perspectives

The intellectual construct that gives credibility to this study is the normative press theories of communication as enunciated by Sierbert, et al (1963) and McQuail (1987). However, since the main objectives of this study is to encourage social responsibility among the media organisations and promote development issues through development communication, emphasis will be on social responsibility and development media theories.

The principle of social responsibility stipulates that mass media should accept and fulfil certain obligations to the society and these must be discharged on the basis of truth, accuracy, objectivity and fairness. Besides, the media are expected to be pluralistic and reflect the diversity of their society, giving access to various points of view and to rights of reply (McQuail (2000, p.15). Going by the above stated principles, the media, both publicly and privately owned are expected to serve the interest of the public by contributing to its socio-political and economic needs. This is also the basis of Folarin (2002) assertion that mass media are major participants in the development process and it is also tallies with the assumptions of development media theory that states among others that: "media must carry out positive development tasks according to nationally established policy, media should give priority attention to economic issues in every part of the nation without discrimination" (McQuail, 1987). The above presupposes that the media as agent of change must facilitate socio-economic development of the nation as well as bridge the information gap between the government and the citizenries. It is therefore reasonable to mention that the essence of

development media theory is to encourage journalists in the developing nations to embark on sustained advocacy against poverty and other factors responsible for economic backwardness and enslavement. To do this, the media must be able to engage the government constructively by criticizing every bad policy and program that are contrary to development.

The fundamentals of both theories vis-à-vis this study is that the freedom of the press preached and highly cherished in social responsibility theory carries with it a great responsibility of accepting and carrying out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy.

Purpose of Study

(a) The main purpose of the study is to examine the nature and pattern of the coverage of government policies, programs and administrative style and see how they have translated to better life for the citizenry.

(b) It will also find out the extent to which Nigerian newspapers have been socially responsible in their collective concern for poverty eradication and good governance.

Research Questions

- I. What was the volume of coverage given to rural development issues?
- II. What was the degree of prominence given to the issues reported about poverty and sustainable development?
- III. Were the issues highlighted about the government capable of enhancing development?

Methodology of Study

The study examines press report of government's poverty alleviation program between 1999 and 2011, a period of 12 years. The period was specifically chosen because it was the period when the nation just returned to participatory democracy after 16 years of military incursion into the Nigerian polity. It also marked the period when all Nigerians acknowledged the base level of the nation's poverty and the urgent need for economic transformation and the reduction of poverty index. This is also the period when the Federal government initiated its poverty alleviation program as well as its "famous" seven point agenda as an ideology to steer Nigeria's economic ship towards achieving the millennium development goal (MDG) and vision 2020.

The study populations were two national newspapers (*The Guardian and Punch*), one State-owned newspaper (*Eko Today*) and One Community paper (*Oriwu Sun*). Both *The Guardian and Punch* were purposively selected from a list of other newspapers because of their national outlook, wider coverage and private ownership. They circulate in all the 36 states and the Federal capital territory. *Eko Today* is a government owned newspaper established in 1999 by the government of Lagos State. It is published weekly and circulates within the 20 Local government areas of Lagos State. Lagos is a mega city, the most populous state, a heterogeneous community and the commercial nerve centre of Nigeria. *Oriwu Sun* established in 1985 is a community based newspaper based in Ikorodu, the headquarters of Ikorodu Local government area of Lagos state.

Method of Data Gathering

To obtain data for the study, two editions per week of both *The Guardian and Punch* were purposively selected for study. This translates to 16 editions per month (2x4weeksx2newspapers=16copies). For 12 years, (May 29, 1999- May 29, 2011) a total of 2,304 editions of *The Guardian and Punch* were selected for study. For *Eko Today* and *Oriwu Sun* that are published weekly, 4 editions per month of each were selected, translating to 8

editions per month. For 12years, a total of 1,152 editions of *Eko Today* and *Oriwu Sun* were selected for study.

The study was limited to the manifest contents of the selected papers and the contents were categorised into five for the purpose of clarity. They include politics, business/economics, social issues, rural community and others. Every news story that relates to Nigerian politics and government was grouped under politics, business/economics story includes private and public sectors reports on banks, finance, employment, power, labour, poverty, inflation and macro-economic issues; news on culture, religion and social activities was treated as social issues; news relating to villages and rural areas were classified under community news while other news that do not fall within any of the above categories was classified as others. In all, a total 3,456 copies of the four selected papers were randomly selected for study. Copies of the papers were obtained from their respective Corporate Headquarters in Lagos.

Findings and Discussions

A sample of 1,460 items comprising news stories, editorial and feature articles were recorded in the four newspapers selected during the period of study. Each newspaper displayed slight differences in the pattern of reporting as can be seen in the direction and the level of emphasis placed on some news items. This could be explained against the background of the diversity of individual ownership and editorial focus of each paper. Without doubt, the issue of poverty in relation to poverty reduction did not receive considerable attention in all the papers selected for study and most probably, in all Nigerian press in general.

TABLE 1: Stories Reported By the Four (4) Newspapers

STORY CATEGORY	THE GUARDIAN	PUNCH	EKO TODAY	ORIWU SUN	TOTAL %
POLITICAL NEWS	146	160	125	112	543 37.1%
ECONOMIC/BUSINESS	106	98	74	66	344 23.5%
SOCIAL	69	73	62	60	264 18.0%
COMMUNITY	32	38	36	58	164 11.2%
OTHERS	16	16	14	13	59 4.0%
TOTAL	369	385	311	309	1,374 94%

TABLE 2: Direction of News Reporting in Selected Newspapers

RESPONSE	THE GUARDIAN	PUNCH	EKO TODAY	ORIWU SUN	TOTAL
Positive	68	94	220	106	488 34.4%
Neutral	105	90	52	103	350 23.9%
Negative	196	201	39	100	536 36.7%
TOTAL	369	385	311	309	1,374 94.1%

As table 1 reveals, within the period under study, political issues received the highest prominence in the selected papers with 37.1%. As political activities were just gathering momentum in Nigeria after 15years of military rule, it is not surprising that news about political parties, legislative matters, constitutional issues, electoral petition and other related issues constitute the major news contents of all the newspapers.

'Economic/business' news ranked second with 23.5%. Business and economic news remain one of the specialised areas of press reporting as it accounts for the daily commercial transaction of everyone in the society. It is through economic news that development index by which the over-all quality of life of an average Nigerian is measured (Oboh, 2004, p.46). Here, issues like the distress and recapitalisation of some banks and allied institutions, privatisation of some failed public enterprises, poverty and unemployment, housing, transportation, fuel subsidy and salary increment featured in the newspapers selected for study. Incidentally, the period of study was also the period of economic meltdown experienced in most developed nations and which has severe spill-over effect on the local economy as demonstrated by heightened inflationary trend, low purchasing power; unemployment rate and diminishing living standard of most developing nations including Nigerians. During the period, six out of Nigeria's 82 licensed banks became distressed resulting in job loss and many depositors also lost their deposits. The power and energy sectors got a boost as the Federal government, through the Nigerian Integrated Power Project (NIPP), channelled about \$5.4billion towards accelerated expansion of the power infrastructure but ironically, it was also during this period the sector performed at its worst. These various economic issues were reported in varying degrees by the selected papers.

Social issue is the next. A total of 264 reports translating to 18% were recorded. Issues on sports, education, health and water services, religion, culture, social problems etc came under this theme. The government of Nigeria is bound by the constitution to be socially responsible to the citizens regardless of their tribal or political affiliations. It is most disheartening that the government has failed in this area despite the huge sum often budgeted for it annually. It is noteworthy that within the period of study, the public Universities were shut down seven times as a result of trade dispute between the government and university staff union on matters that borders on poor condition of service, lack of research and teaching facilities and general appalling state of public universities. The story of health sector is not any better. The Guardian editorial October 2, 2010 likened Nigeria's hospital to a consulting clinic owing to lack of basic drugs and expected equipment befitting a good hospital. This is why most government officials and their families often fly to Europe and America for medical attention. It is no longer news that water services have become personal burden in Nigeria because government has abandoned its responsibility of providing water for the people. This perhaps explains why only about 50% of the population of Nigeria have access to clean water.

The next theme is 'rural community'. Out of 1,374 items collected for study only 164 (11.2%) are on rural community. The issues reported include campaign visits of government officials, commissioning of community or NGO-sponsored projects, outbreak of epidemic and communal crises.

The last theme is 'the others'. These include other stories that did not fall into any of the themes discussed above.

Table 11

The pattern of reporting as reflected in table 2 was balanced between positive and negative i.e. 34.4% 'positive' and 36.7% 'negative' while neutral was 23.9%. Individually, *Eko Today* recorded the highest figure in positive (220) followed by *Oriwu Sun* (106). This can be explained within the context of their ownership status. While *Eko Today* is owned and managed by the Lagos state government, *Oriwu Sun* is owned by a businessman who shares the same political ideology with the state government. Most of the times, these two newspapers enjoy generous patronage from the state government in form of advert placement. About 80% of adverts slot in these two papers are government sponsored.

Punch newspapers reported more in the 'negative' direction with about 201 as against 94 'positive' items. The Guardian also toes the line of Punch with 196 in the 'negative' direction as against 68 'positive'. The two newspapers gave a lot of attention to political reporting and in most cases such reports were given critical slants or simply remain neutral. The behaviours of these two papers could be explained within the context of their editorial focus that has always pitched them against the government while defending the rights of the people. Although, both Punch and The Guardian balanced their reports between positive and negative, their reports appeared more of 'straight news' lacking in investigation, interpretation and analysis. It is observed that they did not take the government to task on issues of good governance, corruption and poverty alleviation. The present Governor of CBN was reported to have said that the quarterly allowances of legislators was increased from N111.24billion to N232.74billion in year 2011 budget, translating to 25% of the national budget. The media industry ought to do comprehensive investigative reporting by providing comparative facts and figures of what legislators earn in other developed and developing nations and present the fact sheet before the civil society. The media should be able to publish federal allocation to states and local governments and compare with their debt profiles. The media, in conjunction with the civil society should have raised questions on prudence, accountability and priority settings of the Governors and council chairmen as well as the illegal and criminal self-adjustment of quarterly allowances by the national assembly.

According to Soola, (2002:4), to contribute to national development, the media need to change its traditional style of reporting using 5W+H and delve into the realm of developmental reporting which entails exhaustive investigative and interpretative reporting, research, news analysis and advocacy. It is not enough for the press to report low poverty index claim by the government, it has to ask questions especially when the claims of economic growth has never translated to better life for the populace. Development journalist will not just report fraud and the ring leader in the crime but it must be smart enough to dig deeper and discover the collaborators who, usually, at the arrest and trial of their leaders disappeared and mixed with the crowd of "saints". Now that the freedom of information act has been signed into law, the media have neither excuse for not keeping the government on its toes nor does it have reason for not waking up the civil society from their passive state.

The issue of internal security is another thing that took much of newspapers attention. Punch headline on the issue was captioned "Terrorism: *Boko Haram* takes over North-East". The Guardian captioned its report as "*Security operatives discovers bomb factory in Kogi*". Punch newspaper presented its report as if there was a violent overthrow of a legitimate government in the North-Eastern part of the country. It is true there was a violent attack in only three states out of six in the region by a group of Islamic fundamentalists but it amounted to extending the truth into the boundary of sensationalism. While this study does not justify hiding the truth from the public yet, it advocates circumspection when reporting national issues especially those that can send negative signal to the outside world about Nigeria thus discouraging would-be investors from coming to the country. It is important to mention that every nation has her peculiar problem capable of obstructing socio-economic and political development. It is the mass media as status conferrer that determine what name the international community gives to it.

Going by our findings, there was no adequate coverage of issues relating to the rural areas especially as it affects governance and poverty. This is a confirmation of the press negligence of the rural area which accommodate about 75% of Nigeria's population the vast majority which includes women, youths and children most of who are poverty-stricken. According to Akinleye & Ojebode (2004:21), two factors were possibly responsible for this lop-sidedness. One, the attention of the average journalist is centred on the urban centres where he or she is trained, work and domiciled. Secondly, most of the media houses are

located in the urban centres far from the rural areas. Paying scanty attention to the rural community in media coverage is an indication that the events and the people in those areas are irrelevant and not newsworthy. An attempt to be in the news Galtung (1984) observed, is responsible for incessant violence in most part of the world. Nigeria is presently experiencing serious communal crises in the North and South- South geo-political zones where the rural dwellers have been neglected for a long time.

Besides, most of the community news that were reported lacked development contents and were mostly on tragic occurrences such as religious crises and inter-tribal disputes. Giving Nigeria's unenviable development profile in general and poverty rating in particular, it could be assumed that no other issue should attract more attention than poverty and hunger. The media owe Nigerians explanations on the reasons for heightened poverty as a nation endowed with abundant human and natural resources. This study revealed that out of 344 (23.5%) business/economic news analysed, only three (3) are 'editorials' and eleven (11) are 'features' respectively while others were 'straight news'. Findings also revealed that out of 344 stories analysed, only 48 were on 'poverty and hunger' and were reported as inside page straight news. None of the reports made either the 'editorial', 'feature' or front page respectively. This goes to prove that the issue of poverty and hunger did not receive adequate coverage and prominence in the newspapers.

Nigeria as a signatory to the United Nations' MDGs' mandate has since 2002 put in place Small and Medium Scale Enterprises (SMEs) development policy to serve as catalyst for the nation's industrialisation, employment generation, poverty reduction and the general economic re-engineering. Despite the efforts of the government as well as other International agencies that have provided funding assistance, one wonders why the media failed to give priority attention to the issues of SMEs in relation to poverty eradication. The Small and Medium Scale Enterprises Equity Investment Scheme (SMEEIS) constituted by consortium of banks in Nigeria was reported by Guardian newspaper May 3, 2006 that it has pooled together N41.4billion to support SMEs development. Punch newspaper May 17, 2002 also reported this "Banks Support for SMEs Hit N7billion"; "Bank disburses N221million to SMEs Operators" (Punch November 11, 2003). Evidently, the tone of this reports showed that they were products of either media briefing or public relations press releases. A smart and professional reporter with focus on SMEs and economic development should have gone beyond mere reporting to the realm of investigative journalism. Reporter should be able to tell the readers who the beneficiaries of the funds were. He should also be able to expose if the claims were true and if the beneficiaries are genuine entrepreneurs or phony, he should let the public know whether the funds were truly invested or diverted into something else, how has the businesses responded to fund injections for example, through expanded production capacity, employment generation, purchase of modern equipment among others. To achieve these transcends regular straight news. This must be consistently followed by insightful feature stories, robust analysis and balanced editorials at intervals.

According to McQuail (1987), two main principles of development media theory are pertinent here: "the freedom enjoy by the media should be opened to economic priorities and development needs of the society" and that "media must accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy". For the media to operate within these principles and contribute to national development, McNelly (1966: 345) outlined four conditions that must be fulfilled. These include availability for use by all, media reports must be relevant to socio-economic and political transformation of the state; must capture the interest of the mass audience and the content must be able to persuade the audience to accept modern ideas or ways of doing things. The four newspapers under study evidently did not meet these conditions. While the Punch and Guardian appeared elitists in their editorial content and focus thus paid less attention to the issue of poverty affecting about 70% of

Nigeria's population, *Eko Today* and *Oriwu Sun* on the other hand paid greater attention to reporting government programs and other matters affecting the ruling class. This corroborates Ogan (1982) position about development journalism which he sees as "journalism of government-say-so" lacking in development content.

Notwithstanding, there are explanations for the evidently low media coverage of poverty and hunger as illustrated in this study. One is the study's finding which revealed low number of business advertisement insertions in the four publications during the year of study. The study shows that only nine advertorials on SMEs were published by the four media under study. It is an incontestable fact that without advertising patronage, the media industry cannot survive. According to Stromberg (2004), mass media organizations derive between 60 and 80 percent of their income from advertisement placement while the remaining 20 percent are generated from the sales of copies and other ancillary sources. While corroborating this claim, Tesler (1966) put it more bluntly stating that, newspapers without advertisement hardly survive, adding that the economy of a successful media management is predicated upon its ability to get advertising patronage from its reading or listening public. It follows from this that media outfits will normally want to give extensive coverage to their advertisers than those who do not advertise. This much we observed from the frequency of report about government and politics in our research findings. In Nigeria, media houses (print and electronics) are either owned by the government or members of the ruling parties at the Federal or state level. The few independent ones that do not fall into the above categories usually have one form of business or the other with the government. It is therefore not surprising why the editorial direction changes times and again depending on the government in power.

Perhaps another reason for low coverage of government program such as poverty eradication is what Owolabi (2013) refers to as "inaccessibility to information". This may also be the reason why Ochonogor (2007, p. 275) declared that "most government initiated programs in Nigeria are usually conceptualised and executed in secrecy". It is a common practice for government officials to keep the media at safe distance knowing that if they are too close, men of the press may want to ask certain questions that borders on probity and accountability. This is why government programs are usually enmeshed in corruption and are usually designed to fail right from conception.

Summary and Conclusion

Lastly, two conclusions can be drawn from our discussion. The first is that the four newspapers fell below expectation when their reports on poverty are weighed on the scale of development. Another point is that there is lopsidedness in the news reporting pattern in favour of the urban centre. The rural communities in Nigeria have been neglected for so long by each succeeding governments hence, the social monster they have constituted today. As mentioned earlier, about 75% of Nigerian populations live in the rural community. Denying this large segment of people access to news is not only contrary to the principle of development journalism but also against the tenet of social responsibility theory which stipulates that the media should be pluralistic, giving voice to the voiceless while reflecting the diversity of the society.

As we consider a new world order and the possibility of sustaining poverty reduction program among developing nations, we need to put in perspective the rural-urban information imbalance. If the developing nations are quick to dismiss the present world information flow as imbalance and totally unacceptable, there is a greater need for as much agitation to maintain balance at the national level. There is urgent need for true community media in Nigeria. National or regional media have been found to be unable to cater for the development needs of Nigeria's sharply divergent urban-rural populace. A community media

should be sited in, owned and managed by the community. Although there is a reasonable level of improvement in community broadcast but there is still much to be done in print media by dedicating a sizeable number of pages to development news about the rural communities.

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