

# Mass Media and Challenges of Africa's Development: An Analysis of Press Freedom and Access to Information in Africa

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## ABSTRACT

More than ever before, the need for free flow of, and access to information as a necessary condition for the development of African nations, has become more compelling in the face of myriads of development challenges the African continent is contending with. The high levels of maternal mortality, and infant morbidity illiteracy, poverty and deceases, wars, crimes, and environmental degradation, as well as corruption etc, among African leaders, are some of the issues militating against the quest for the development of the continent. It is against this background, that this paper examines critically the challenges of press freedom and access to information in Africa. It contends that unless the environment is conducive for Africa's information managers to freely pursue their legitimate duties of information gathering and dissemination without molestation from their leaders, the much talk about Africa's development will only remain at the level of rhetoric. The paper therefore calls for the immediate review, and possible repeal of all repressive existing laws that are inimical to press freedom and access to information in Africa. Finally, the paper invites African leaders to accept journalists as friends and not foes, and as partners in the development process of the African continent.

**Key words:** Press Freedom, Development, Africa, Access to Information

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of press freedom the world over is agreed to be contentious. It is an aphorism that a free press is a mark or an index of development. By implication one of the major challenges that stare on the face of those at the vanguard of African development is the issue of freedom of speech and that of the press. This obviously is one of the major considerations as it is unthinkable for one to work towards transformation and development without a degree of power to hold on to an opinion and to express it. Leaders of African nations are still with the notion that the tranquillity of the political and economic systems of the newly independent countries of Africa is a reason for press control and as well their belief is that without control African development is illusory.

This paper argues that until African leaders allow African mass media a reasonable degree of freedom to take initiative and responsibly comment on issues that have bearing with transformative changes, development and democracy, the continent will continue to swim in deep shackles of underdevelopment. The reason is because it is through free and open speech that changes take place within society.

Without the constitutional powers to objectively and constructively criticize the affairs or activities of the African leaders, the dream of African development will always end up as wide goose chase. A barking but not biting dog is estimated a less security instrument. This accounts for the high rate of poverty, infant and maternal mortality, illiteracy, diseases, wars, crimes, and environmental degradation, which result from the unrevealed and classified corrupt practices of those occupying sensitive political and economic positions in the continent. McMasters (2005) in Baran (2009 p.451) says;

No law means no law..... my view is, without deviation, without exception, without any ifs, buts, or whereas, that freedom of speech means that government shall not do anything to people, either for the views they have or the views they express or the words they speak or write.

This work has a strong belief that the press does not ensure effectiveness in a system only by amplifying on the obvious, but by unearthing through extensive investigation embezzlement and other government and socio-economic related corrupt practices which have been identified as reasons for the immeasurable failure that the continent is associated with. It is a common knowledge that leaders of African nations continue to tout and proclaim press freedom as being evident in the plurality and large number of media houses that exist in the continent. There are evidences that beneath this apparent pluralities lies a subdued media, highly restrained in its

ability to function as the people's watchdog and constantly under threat and attack with practitioners that face all sorts of humiliation and debasement just for the course of liberation and accountability.

How do we reconcile the contradiction inherent in our system as we have a compelling need for development while the press that is known as the virile instrument for transformation is gagged? How do we reconcile the paradox of the compelling need for Africa's development with a gagged press, while experiences from other climes especially in developed societies portray press as a virile instrument for transformation? There is a good dose of laws and decrees in existence in Africa which seriously derogate from press freedom. Even where no law exists, governments use extra-legal means to restrict the press from being functional and contributory to development.

Speaking on "Duties of the Fourth Estate" published in the Guardian, October 13, 1992, Chief M.K.O. Abiola reflects that: "sometimes, government breathes down the editor's neck, threatening to suffocate and often does so through detention or dismissal." He mentioned further that:

The good editor must stand like a rock in the midst of this swirling conflict of interests, powers and influence refusing to twist and bend with the wind, but refusing to break because of inflexibility. His strength is his commitment to truth and objectivity, to investigate and inform his people as well as his government.

An effective and free press is the one that has all it takes to transcend the sphere of simply chronicling events as they occur, by digging deep into the constituents of an event to expose to the public what some other people may want covered. Deriving from this background, different African governments for reasons of keeping their ugly acts of corruption in the dark, subject the press to less than nothing and this accounts for the praise-singing nature of most African press. Without doubt, this shows evidently the marks of a muzzled press as what comes out of it cannot hurt and consequently cannot in any manner be catalytic to change and apparently development. Freedom of the press, which is an essential attribute of democracy, gives rise to a credible media. The press is perceived as credible when they expose corruption in the society, expose injustice, and unearth the negative effects of government policies and actions on the people. These are cardinal functions completely absent in African journalistic setting owing to the fear of "the known and the unknown". And frankly with this in place, African press produces harmless contents that do not truly reflect the real expectations of the people and lacks that force to drive towards development.

The press does actual surveillance function when it is empowered by law to freely and responsibly give its accounts under no pressure of intimidation or molestation. Sambe (2005 p.43) agrees that surveillance is a fundamental to journalistic practice in society. He states further that it enables the media to provide useful information to members of the society which in turn enables them to make informed choices and participate effectively in societal development.

As it is a common knowledge that a free press can be effective in the crusade against corruption which is the principal factor against African development, our argument therefore is that a guaranteed press freedom is a key way to societal transformation and consequently African development.

In pursuance of this purpose, this paper will in the first place review existing literature on the role of media in continental development under the context of the importance of a free press in socio-political and economic development of Africa.

On the notions that press freedom is a concept with different definition from different people, this paper reflects on it next, with the view to making clarifications for better understanding. Following this will be a synthesis of the relevance of press freedom on national / continental development. The next step will be a cursory look on attempts by African journalists to expose corruption by ill-conceived governments of African countries and the consequences that followed this noble course. We will conclude with a contextual analysis of how incapacitated a gagged press will look in the course of development using African platform where official corruption, graft, embezzlement, child trafficking and other related crimes are endemic.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Most African nations are composed of peoples of diverse ethnicity, language, race and religion. It is the media, more than any other instrument of power and control, which have been employed, and can still be used more effectively, by both the governments and the peoples for expedient purposes. An overwhelming majority of people are oblivious of the vagaries of influence the media exert in shaping and directing their thought patterns. It is possibly for this purpose that Ansah (1998,pp.16-17), writes:

The generic concept of development,” recognizes, among others, material advancement, human dignity, and the participation of the people in the development process. A new concept of development, has emerged which builds on the weakness of the former by factoring into it the promotion of the rights and security of the people. This type of development allows for effective participation of the people in the affairs of the state. To a very large extent, the media acts as a vehicle for effective participation of the people by serving as a market place for exchange of ideas concerning matters that affect the people.

Communication scholars and researchers have provided us with an array of studies on mass media and national development and by extension continental development. Reacting on the role of mass media in national and political development, Pye (1966 p.156) writes:

The communication process thus gives form and structure to the political process by surrounding the politicians on the one hand with the constant reminder that political acts have consequences and that people can have insatiable expectations of politics, and on the other side with the warning that illusions of omnipotence are always dangerous, even among people who have a casual understanding of causality.

After a study on mass communication and national development, Nwosu (1994 p.156) concludes that newspaper alongside orthodox and traditional communication modes giving rise to a multi-media scenario, can influence audience's development oriented attitudes, actions and behaviour and by implication can help engender development. Also Nwosu (1990 p. 17) says:

Development experiences in other parts of the developed and less developed world have continued to point to the fact that communication is central to rural and national development and that its catalytic effects to the development of other sectors of a nation's economy should never be neglected or underplayed.

It is factual that communication stands as a link among all the developmental facets. Being on their own, such sectors cannot thrive effectively until they feel the impact of the powers of communication. This may be the reason behind the articulation of Odoh (2010) which holds that: “it is imperative that communication is the most essential consideration in erecting or developing an organised, united and progressive nation. Without it, there will be no national entity and no effective solution to national problems and national development.”

In line with the trend of this review, Ainslie (1986) discovered that radio is a veritable communication instrument for development in Africa. According to Ainslie, it is so because villagers depend on radio so much as a bearer of development news. After a thorough analysis on the contributions of radio in African development, Mwakawago (1986) concludes by saying: it is not enough to recognise the importance of this medium (radio) in stimulating development, while providing too little in the way of resources to utilize it fully. Also talking about the media and development, Ugboajah (1985), Boafo (1985), Morrison (1991) and Pratt (1986) are all in agreement that films and movies when appropriately packaged are good means for national development.

Idemili (1980), Mckintosh (1966) and Omu (1978) after a critical examination on the role of the media in political development in Nigeria, summarised by asserting that the mass media played major part in political transformations that earned Nigeria independence status. Sharing the same view, Mutere and Abuoga (1988), Kasoma (1987) in similar studies agreed that the press is of immeasurable importance in the development processes of Kenya and Zambia respectively. Akinfeleye (2008) while discussing the watchdog role of the press as it relates to African development observes:

Much of our theoretical understanding of the role and performance of the media in Africa has been shaped by analyses revolving around four broad themes: 1) ownership and control of the media - often by state, 2) the press's role in the continent's (essentially colonial) history, depicting the press as integral to the struggle for independence in various states, 3) the national development model where the press is viewed as instrument for national economic development and social cohesion among plural ethnic groups especially in the post-independence period, and 4) ongoing efforts toward economic liberalization and establishment of democratic institutions since 1990s where the press is perceived to be purveyors and guardians of public interest.

He argues that many of these studies have either uncritically accepted or assumed uniform roles and character of the media in Africa and/or homogeneity of the peoples and states in the entire continent, overlooking some important differences. He states further that in the new era of globalization, characterized by broadening of democratic space in many African countries, several significant developments such as licensing of private media organizations several changes have taken place that should renew interest in further and necessarily critical analyses of roles and performance of mass media in various parts of the African continent.

The list of the contributions of the press to national and continental development is endless but all in all, scholars and researchers are of the view that the media are a necessary tool for societal transformation and development. It has been so, it is still so and this fact will remain for very long time given the innovation that greet the communication arena and their positive potentials for positive change. Pye (1963 p.4) writes:

Communication is the web of human society. The structure of communication system with its more or less well defined channels is in a sense the skeleton of the social body which envelopes it. The content of communication is of course the very substance of human intercourse. The flow of communication determines the direction and the pace of dynamic social development.

For more emphasis, communication holds the best prospect for advancement and modernization in industrial societies, hence, it is said to be the proof of the world economy. It might be for this economic value of communication that led McBride (1980 p. 23) to admit that:

A constant flow of communication is vital for economic life. As well as being a great economic force with incalculable potentialities, it is a decisive factor in development. As an element of increasing importance in all national economies, communication represents a growing segment of a country's gross national product and has direct repercussions on productivity and employment.

### **The Concept Press Freedom**

It is the opinion of this paper that press freedom is an indispensable condition for African development. Without doubt, Africa media are tied to the apron strings of the various national governments. The few in the hands of groups and individuals are not truly independent as they are also controlled by politicians and other people with huge economic powers. As if that is not enough, obnoxious law, decrees and extra judicial means of press control are even more virile as African journalists are more afraid of the unknown than the known. According to Lowenstein (1967 p.45):

A completely free press is one in which newspapers; periodicals, news agencies, books, radio and television have absolute independence and critical ability, except for minimal libel and obscenity laws. A completely free press has no concentrated ownership, marginal economic units or organised self-regulation... A completely controlled press is one with no independence or critical ability. Under it newspapers, periodicals, books, news agencies, radio and television are completely controlled directly or indirectly by government, self regulatory bodies or concentrated ownership.

In our thinking and in line with the opinion of this paper, the press on a developmental mission should have critical ability and independence. With this, it can enjoy that right to be entitled to its opinion and to express it without fear or favour. "The U.S. constitution mentions only one industry by name as deserving special protection – the press." (Baran, 2009 p.451). The first amendment to the new constitution of United States stated expressly that:

Congress shall make no law... abridging the freedom of speech or of the press. As a result, government regulation of the media must be not only obstructive, but also sufficiently unjustified to meet the limits of the first amendment. Media industry self-regulation must be sufficiently effective to render official restraints unnecessary and media practitioners' conduct should be ethical in order to warrant this special protection."(Baran, 2009 p.451)

Hanson (2005 p.352) adds that:

Although it explicitly mentions the press, the purpose of the first amendment is to provide a wide range of rights, including freedom of religious practice, the right to speak, the right to assemble, the right to petition the government. The most basic

right guaranteed by the first amendment is freedom of speech without constraint by government. The right of freedom of the press thus is an extension of the rights of individuals to express themselves.

As observed earlier that freedom goes with responsibility, the reason the United States constitution accorded the press this protection derives from the enormous responsibility that the press undertakes. It was foreseen that without this freedom in a democratic setting, the press must always be restrained and subjugated by the government of the day to serve its purpose. Justice Hugo Black, on June 30, 1971, ruled on a matter where US government attempted to restrain the press thus:

In the First Amendment the founding fathers gave the press the protection it must have to fulfil its essential role in our democracy. The press was to serve the governed and not the governors. The government's power to censor the press was abolished so that the press would remain forever free to censure the government. The press was protected so that it could bare the secrets of government and inform the people. Only a free and unrestrained press can effectively expose deception in government.

From this stand point it is deemed necessary that further explanations be made on this concept of press freedom. This arises from the nature of the controversy that surrounds this concept. People from all parts of the world have diverse views on the nature of press freedom. Journalists of different backgrounds and orientation see this same issue from differing perspectives. Some are of the view that press freedom is not a question of the right to dissent but of the obligation to contribute meaningfully in the project national and continental development.

A typical definition of press freedom was given by Weaver (1977) who said it is: (a) the relative absence of governmental restraints on the media, (b) the relative absence of government and other restraints on the media., (c) the absence of restraints on the media and also the presence of diversity of ideas and opinions to a relatively large audience such as enforced right of access to newspapers and radio stations. In agreement with Weaver, Atkey (1969) reacted this way on the definition of press freedom, he says :

It is the absence of prior government censorship and following publication no prosecutions for free expression other than on widely accepted principle of the general law of jurisprudence and the guarantee of non-interference with lawful circulation.

Schramm (1967 p.9) says: in general, countries in western democratic traditions believe that such control as there is should rest with ownership, which we hope will limit their attention to such offences to libel, obscenity and sedition presenting a clear and present danger. In his own view, Emerson (1970 p.7) asserts strongly that there is a very close relationship between democracy and freedom of expression and that of the press...freedom of expression is essential to provide participation in decision making by all members of the society. Once one accepts the premise of the declaration of independence that governments "derive their just power from the consent of the governed", it follows that the governed must, in order to exercise their right of consent have full freedom of expression both in forming individuals' judgements and in forming the common judgement.

The deduction from the arguments presented by different scholars on this concept is that governments both from the developing and developed perspectives always attempt to restrict the governed from expressing their opinions freely. But it is fundamental with the observed legal backing so emanating from the first amendment that the masses should have absolute right and freedom to hold and express opinions.

Democratic governance prescribes and upholds this concept of freedom as it is believed that the press is an organ through which governments are brought to account for their stewardship through constructive criticisms and objective press comments without which the consent of the governed is completely absent and participation is limited.

It becomes evident and necessary as this paper admits that the liberty of the press is indeed essential to the nature of a free state. Every free man has an undoubted right to say what sentiment he pleases before the public. We are compelled to align our arguments with that of one time Indian Prime Minister who once said that: the freedom of the press is not just a slogan... it is an essential attribute of a democratic process.

### **Press Freedom and Africa's Development**

Without press freedom as a democratic attribute, development remains a mirage. Africa as a continent has suffered terrible setbacks from developmental perspective resulting from the clamp down of the mass media giving rise to corruption and dictatorship. Many African leaders succumb to taming the press believing on the

fifth theory of the press – development theory. According to Hanson (2005 p.402), this theory emerged to address the special needs of emerging nations, whose governments may feel they need to restrict freedom of the press in order to promote industry, national identity, and partnership with neighbouring nations. Baran (2009 p.500) writes: “the media systems of many Third World or developing Africa, Asia, Latin and South American and Eastern European nations.... exemplify the development concept. He further explains that here government and media work in partnership to ensure that media assist in the planned, beneficial development of the country. Many contemporary studies defy this development theory as it has been accused of the reason for the underdeveloped nature of African continent. This is so because if makes one a judge in his own case. Equally, it has succeeded in reducing the mass media to something less than “a yes press”. Motta: (1984 p.384) writes:

The government controls the creation, distribution and operation of the mass media as well as the flow of messages. The control takes many forms – station licensing, broadcasting regulations and censorship. This type of control seeks to depoliticise and demobilize society. Secondly, the government widely circulates official messages in order to mobilize the population towards state ends and to legitimize itself.

This is short of the statutory objectives and fundamental obligations of the press. In our view this is just like a bird with wings that cannot fly. Without a critical look at the performances of those in power, with the intention to play up the dark side of the government of the day, how would the masses expect a change? It is most often through the painful bits of the press that societal transformation and development occur. African mass media are yet to be provided with a level playing ground through liberty of expression of the press for them to function optimally. Merill (1974 p.26) asserts: “*press freedom is basically press autonomy: freedom from outside control in the professional activities of the news media.... Maximum journalistic autonomy is the imperative of journalism.*” It is reasoned that free press has been a mighty catalyst in awakening public interest in governmental affairs, exposing corruption among public officers and employees and generally informing the citizenry of public events and occurrences. While maximum freedom must be allowed the press in carrying on this important function in a democratic society its exercise must be subject to the maintenance of absolute fairness in the process.

We are quick to admit that this maximum freedom is what African journalists and media need to be able to tackle the issue of development. When the media resort to praise singing, they are merely serving the purpose of the owners or dancing to the tune of the piper. And obviously this is not the kind of journalism that brings positive change. It is good that we recall that in Africa, corruption, scandal, bribery, embezzlement and other related crimes are fast becoming ways of governance. Cases of money laundering and flagrant abuse of offices are common with African leaders. Politically motivated wars are experienced in many African countries and mostly these arise from attempt to perpetuate power through corrupt means. In this circumstance, a controlled media is powerless as it is not easy to bite the finger that fends for one.

It is a radical or investigative form of journalism that can entrench the much desired development and put smiles on the faces of African citizens and government. It is good to recall that it was an expository report on the Water Gate Scandal in 1972 that led to the resignation of President Richard Nixon of United States of America. Nwabueze (2009 p.93) says:

Investigative journalism has also made tremendous impact on the democratic Nigerian society which ensured the exit of the military. Notable among the footprints of this form of journalism in Nigeria is the report by the News Magazine in 1999 which exposed certificate forgery case of the former speaker of House Representative, Sanusi Buhari, leading to his exit from the office and eventually from the National Assembly.

Nwabueze observes further that this form of journalism “makes the media to be more credible: the media are perceived as credible when they expose corruption in a society, expose injustice, unearth the negative effects of government politics and actions on the people.”

In the real sense of it, what Africa needs is journalism that is absolutely autonomous and responsible with journalists that are courageous enough to stand firm and dare the consequences of victimization. This can only be obtainable where the atmosphere is friendly for such operation. Guaranteed freedom of expression and that of the press are the conditions needed to create that conducive environment for the watchdog role of the press in Africa, which will eventually give way for that most needed change for development. Nwosu, (1990) admits:

In fact, we shall make bold to say here that communication is the most vital factor in building or developing an organised, united and Progressive nations; that without it there

will be no national entity and no effective solution to national problems and national development.

It is pertinent we flow with this line of thought as we know that our system needs information, not just information, but the hard truth” that can move our nations and Africa forward. Realising that journalists perform better when empowered from the perspectives of law and economy, it becomes evident that the provision that can place them better from the angle of taking initiative and autonomy precludes the enviable change the nations of Africa are demanding. It is reasonable to assert that African press is made stronger to spur the latent efficiency in the form of expose for development. Obviously legions of negative things happen very often which the masses of Africa are kept away from. Nwankwo (1993 p.59) notes:

Often journalists in Nigeria come across significant information that they believe ought to be brought to the attention of the public, but for the fear of repercussion – which could be death, injury, arrest, forced closure of his media house or displeasure to his proprietor or family – the stories never get to the public. Whatever the reason are for self-censorship, the victims are usually the readers who often are unappreciative of the denial they have suffered or are suffering.

This notwithstanding, some courageous ones who damn the consequences and went ahead to publish according to the dictates of their conscience and profession, usually pay painful and unbearable penalties. Sommerlad (1966 p.139) observes: “*The prisons are crowded with courageous journalists who are not prepared to accept dictation as to what they may or may not print.*”

### **The Mauled Press of Africa**

As observed earlier in this paper, news men in Africa come across many interesting pieces of information in the course of their duties; ideas that are capable of entrenching change by bringing sanity in the system but such ideas are kept away from the African populace just for lack of press freedom. Worse still, the last hope of the common man- the judiciary, compromises very often, making the plight of the journalists in Africa to be more complex, uncertain and unpredictable.

Resulting from common and consistent abuse of the fundamental human right of expression and that of the press in Africa, most journalists of African origin play within “the rule.” The implication of this is that the public is starved of genuine environmental account of events. Sometimes the account given is slanted in favour of some interests, usually the political class, to the detriment of the masses. Those who may be courageous enough to dissent from “popular” trend are usually subjected to different painful experiences.

All over Africa there are traces of murder and assassination of press men, seizure, closure, and suspension of publications and revocation of operating licenses of broadcast houses. Other measures include; woeful arrest and detention of journalists, torture, imprisonment, retrenchment, dismissal, and other forms of threat and intimidation. Apart from all these physical and mental means of subjugation, self censorship is even the most effective means of control, hence reports are judged from the views of leaders and politicians. These and more are reasons we have the less obvious as news in Africa. Instances of the cases of the above said victimization abound across Africa. A few instances here would suffice.

At the 2014 International Day to End Impunity of Crime against Journalists with the theme, “Promoting the Safety of Journalists in Nigeria,” the president of Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), and Federation of African Journalists (FAJ), Mallam Mohammed Garba said that 108 journalists were killed in Nigeria in 2013, excluding those imprisoned, exiled, accidental deaths, health ailments, missing or abducted.

According to BBC news of September 19, 2014, the under listed attack on African press were recorded. In Somalia in 2013, 18 journalists were killed. Out of this number, seven journalists were killed in attacks blamed on Al-Shabaab, whose deadly methods are notorious. On 27 October, a TV journalist died from gunshot injuries received in a motorcycle attack. In March, a young woman radio producer met her untimely death on a street in Mogadishu. So many others were killed in similar mysterious way making up the number above.

On September 16, 2014, Facély Camara, a reporter for Liberté FM, a private radio station in Guinea; Molou Chérif, a technician at the N'Zérékoré province rural radio station, and his colleague, Sidiki Sidibé, were in the N'Zérékoré district accompanying a five-member team of experts informing people about the Ebola virus and how to prevent its spread. The bodies of all eight victims, three journalists and five medical experts, were found on 18 September in the village of Womé.

On February 22, 2014 - Unknown assailants shot and killed a Ghanaian journalist, Samuel Kwabena Ennin, at a popular spot in the country's second capital Kumasi. Mr Ennin, the chairman of the Ashanti region of Ghana Journalists Association (GJA), also served as an editor of 'Ashh FM' in Kumasi.

In Egypt, Mike Deane, Abdel Gaward of Al Akhbar Newspaper, Mosab El-Shami Rassd of a news Website (RNN) and Asmaa Waguih a photojournalist with Reuters were all recently killed in active service. Consequent upon the above background of extreme victimization and lack of freedom, African press is estimated to be incapable of offering what it takes to drive the system to development.

### Theoretical Framework

This research work is anchored on two theories - the Social Responsibility Theory and Agenda Setting Theories of Mass Communication.

#### The Social Responsibility Theory

It is said that freedom goes with responsibility and for this reason; it is sacrosanct that the details may be incomplete if an attempt is made on discussion of press freedom without a reflection on social responsibility.

The Hutchins Commission of 1947 is deemed to have formed an essential milestone on the issues of press freedom and social responsibility. This commission was the first to be initiated by government to look into the failure of the media to meet the needs of the society and the possibility for reform, (McQuail, 2005 p.171).

The theory of social responsibility involved a view of media ownership as a form of public trust of stewardship, rather than an unlimited private franchise. Hocking (1947 p.169) writes:

Inseparable from the right of the press to be free has been the right of the people to have a free press. But the public interest has advanced beyond the point; it is now the right of the people to have adequate press. And of the two rights, he added: it is the right of the public that now takes precedence. This is one fundamental base for the demand for responsibility.

The social responsibility theory of the press holds that it is based on the concern that while the press may be free from interference by government, it can still be controlled by corporate interests.

So while the press in a free society is not regulated by the government, it is controlled by a limited number of corporations and individuals. Social responsibility theory says that the high level of concentrated powers in the hands of the media requires that they be socially responsible in covering all sides of controversial issues and providing voters with all the information they need to make considered choice, (Hansen 2005 p.400).

Social responsibility theory advocates non-authoritarian controls. Siebert et al (1956 p.95) writes: "Social responsibility theory holds that the government must not merely allow freedom; it must actively promote it.... When necessary, therefore, the government should act to protect the freedom of its citizens. The act of government mentioned include: legislation to forbid flagrant abuses and it may also enter the field of communication to supplement existing media". They state further that social responsibility is located under the concept of positive liberty – freedom for not freedom from.

In total alliance with the above arguments, the Hutchins Commission of enquiry coined the notion of social responsibility and named the key journalistic standards that the press should seek to maintain. They are provision of full, truthful, comprehensive, and intelligent account of the event in a context which gives them meaning. A forum for exchange of comments and criticisms, a common barrier of the public expression and that it should always give a representative picture of the constituents of the society. The presentation and clarification of the goals and values of the society is included.

The issues raised above are evident enough to demonstrate that the quest for press freedom in our society is closely tied to the press being socially responsible. This concept of social responsibility is built on the principles of the press being governed by self control, not by government intervention through legal means or other illegitimate approaches.

In Africa and other developing economies, the press is said to be free but at the same time in terribly discomforting chains and this is reasoned to be why the press has failed reasonably as instruments of change and development from the African perspective. A perfunctory press must be able to take initiative and constructively criticise the affairs of the people and government. It is through this that it does that watchdog role. This is the singular power the press has to bit and invariably through this individuals and governments are subtly compelled

to sit up. Mancini (1996) in McQuail, ( 2005 p.175) has reflected on the disjunction between the widely diffused and proclaimed adherence to this liberal theory of journalism and the actual practical in many countries. The gap between the theory and practice is found on two main points: one relates to the investigative, critical and advocacy role of the journalist which gets little notice in any code. Another relates to the supposed independence and neutrality of journalism, when in practice most journalism operates in rather close symbiosis with government, political parties, powerful economic interests and other authorities.

### **Agenda Setting Theory**

Agenda setting theory holds that issues that are portrayed as important in the news media become important to the public – that is, that the media set agenda for public debate (Hanson 2005 p. 383). The core idea of agenda setting is that the news media indicate to the public what the main issues of the day are and this is reflected in what the public perceives as the main issues. Trenaman and McQuail (1961 p. 178) point out that: “the evidence strongly suggests that people think about what they are told but at no level do they think what they are told”.

This was what Dearing and Rogers (1996) refer to as “an on-going competition among issue protagonists to gain the attention of the media professionals, the public and policy elites.” Lazarsfeld et al (1944) called it the power “to structure issues”. In their further reactions to the issue of agenda setting, Dearing and Rogers (1996 p.192) assert: “the position of an issue on the media agenda importantly determines the issue’s salience in the public agenda.

Needless to say, given the above reflections, that there is a bearing between the issue of African development and active participation of the media. The agenda setting function of the media can be realised easier with a level playing ground where the media are free to take up their responsibilities. It is this contentious freedom that breeds the desired platform for an effective press. “One common condition for agenda setting is that different mass media tend to share the same set of news priorities. This condition is challenged by the availability of many new online news services, plus the greater chance for a “news user” to seek news according to personal agenda” (McQuail, 2007 p. 514).

It is acknowledged that the power of the mass media resides more on amount of space or time devoted to a story and its placement in the broadcast or on the page. On this, McCombs and Shaw (1972 p.176) write:

In choosing and displaying news, editors, newsroom stall, and broadcasters play an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issue, but how much importance to attach to that issue from the amount of information in a news story and its position.... The mass media may well determine the important issues – that is the media may set the “agenda” of the campaign.

### **Conclusion**

Press freedom is synonymous with development both at national and continental levels. The question of liberality of the media in Africa is an issue because of the nature of decay surrounding African politics and leadership. It is obvious that without an observer, objective and constructive enough to give discomforting accounts of government activities to the people, when necessary, with the intention to push for changes, African socio-political and economic development will continue to be illusory. No institution in any society is best suited to perform this role than the press. Freedom of expression and access to information play a crucial role in good governance, transparency, and accountability--and these in turn are pillars of sustainable development. As Africans strive for agreement on a broad set of sustainable development goals (SDGs), there is a growing chorus of experts and organizations calling for the inclusion of good governance and fundamental freedoms, such as the rights to expression and association. Danso and Macdonald (2001) asserted that the print media’s failure to check the veracity of government statements on immigration in South Africa was partly responsible for some of the worst examples of xenophobic behaviour in that country. Tettey (2008) observes:

A major concern in the social construction of the press communication system is the elite capture of the press. The elites may deploy press organisations as tools for ventilating parochial political interests rather than as a public arena for robust democratic expression. Elite manipulation of press organisations in Nigeria and Madagascar fit the above description. In Madagascar, wealthy people established media organisations and utilised them to articulate their political propaganda.

If the news media in Africa are to build greater levels of accountability and reduce corruption, then we must focus on its relationship with governments. The relationship between a national government and its media is – at times – inevitably antagonistic, but most governments are committed in principle to provide the political will and establish the regulatory and enabling environment which allows media the freedom and ‘space’ to speak and act freely. It is when such political will and protected space are absent that the media cannot – or fails – to hold governments to account. Governments need to be persuaded to be committed to the media as a ‘public good’ and to support it through public service legislation and open, independent regulation promoting high journalistic and media standards.

Censorship and extra-judicial killing are notably among the government strategies of muzzling the press in Africa. For this singular reason, experienced journalist play safe by being uncritical. This is why African press has not been able to produce the desire result, in essence, they serve as sycophantic to the various national governments. “With the establishment of state media and press censorship, the Nigerian press became weak, partisan and ethnocentric. Successive governments employed the press as an instrument of propaganda,” (Abati, 1998). The Nigerian socio-political environment influences press freedom with adverse implications for education, information, entertainment and surveillance. A theoretical recognition of the press as the “fourth estate” connotes the capacity of the press to monitor the tiers of government (the legislature, the executive and the judiciary). However, the state monitors the press in Nigeria in a manner that negates the principle of the fourth estate (Akinwale, 2010).

It was observed that African journalists are just preys amidst predators resulting from no clear cut legal provisions that expressly protect them from the dangers inherent in their jobs. We are firm to assert that African media have capable hands that are needed for a revolutionary reformation that will launch the continent on the path of development. That fundamental right of expression and that of the press protected by law and guaranteed by the entire environmental factors as is evident in developed systems is prescribed as a panacea to this much needed African development. Mac Bride (1980) quoted in Communication for Social Change (2006) writes:

Our conclusions are founded on the firm conviction that communication is a basic individual right, as well as a collective one required by all communities and nations. Freedom of information and, more specifically the right to seek, receive and impart information – is a fundamental human right: indeed, a prerequisite for many others.

The concept of press freedom prescribes autonomy in all aspects. The enjoyment of this right by African media is seen as a big step towards the dream of development hence they can criticize constructively and provide platform for that change that will give birth to envisaged development. With evidences of open corruption, bad leadership and governments without the people’s mandate, a completely controlled press is as good as nothing. The issue at stake here is the reasoned need to involve the African press deeply in the course of development. Following the trend of this paper and the premised argument, it is of utmost importance to ensure a balance between the parties that are of considerable value to the dream of development in Africa. It is a huge but necessary challenge on the part the governments of Africa to encourage the press through guaranteed freedom, in return the press cannot compromise responsibility. This balance is possibly what Tettey (2008) meant as he argues:

Striking a balance between competing concerns (public right to know and the necessity of political stability or national security) is a major challenge to press organisations in Nigeria. Similarly, recent situations in Kenya have uncovered the enormity of the dilemma facing press organisations in their attempt to produce balanced reporting. Press organisations in Kenya complied with the Ministry of Information’s directive to delay news broadcasts in view of post-election violence and the importance of national security. As a result, these press organisations presented to the public an incomplete picture of socio-political realities in the country. Neglect of press freedom can also aggravate national disaster, as demonstrated by experience in South Africa.

In line with views of many scholars of communication that the mass media have a monumental influence on socio-political and economic development of nations, we admit that there are evidences that even the governments of African nations believe the press can assist immensely in their development efforts. This paper therefore advocates for a revolutionary press for Africa, a free press that can be critical and responsible, the one that can always meet the needs of the people for development, the one free from the control of governments of Africa. We align this work with this line of thought because Ainslie (1966 p.19) contributing on the implications of the press in the development process said:

A truly African revolutionary press does not exist merely for the purpose of enriching its proprietors or entertaining its readers. It is an integral part of our society with which its purpose is in consonance. Just as in the capitalist countries the press resents and carries out the purpose of capitalism, so in revolutionary Africa our revolutionary African press must present and carry forward our revolutionary purpose.

As we admit the communication inefficiencies that characterise the African media, it is good as well to note that African news media are not alone in being at a critical moment. Worldwide, the news media is facing dramatic upheavals because of technological and market changes. Global freedom of expression can be seen to be expanding in many regions. Trends such as economic growth, expanding education and the emancipation of previously marginalised groups are helping to fuel a growth in the free distribution of information. Yet it is also under threat and its freedom in retreat in many areas. Potential political gains from new technology are neither self-evident nor inevitable. Africa has many examples of retreat and threats, and a historical failure to capture the benefits of free media being seen elsewhere in the world. It is broadly agreed that the spread of democracy, advancement of human rights, and the introduction of neoliberal reforms followed the end of the Cold War, although several countries are yet to fully enforce the civil right to press freedom. Few countries have a good record in terms of press freedom and members of the press in many countries of Africa including Nigeria are still struggling for full enjoyment of this right. (World Bank 2006).

### **Recommendations**

In the light the direction of this paper's arguments and in accordance with facts from available literature, the researchers are of the conviction that Africa's development is realisable but not without unreserved involvement of professional and perfunctory press that is ready to guard its social responsibilities jealously. This paper recommends the following:

- That governments of the nations of Africa have no option than to see the need to partner with African press in the move to entrench a developed Africa. By implication, a legally and economically empowered press is a functional press; this transcends to a press that enjoys autonomy and with this in place, undue interference with the duties of the press is curtailed.
- That the African press must be socially and operationally responsible. It can only live up to its expectations by upholding, to the highest esteem, the press laws and professional ethics. This calls for shunning selfish interests and all forms of incentives capable of affecting the objectivity of African press accounts.
- The people of Africa are required to be more media literate to enable them match their media expectations with the available accounts. Media literacy has also to equip them with the knowledge required for media choice which is rooted on integrity of the available media and news variety, as against accepting whatever is available.
- Apart from legal and ethical controls of press in Africa, extra-judicial activities of the leaders are even more dreaded. For a realistic development in Africa, political office holders must learn to play by the rules, otherwise, journalists would always recycle the views of the influential which most often lacks truth and objectivity, and invariably cannot be development oriented.

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