

MASS MEDIA: A UNITING FORCE FOR EFFECTIVE INDIGENES AND SETTLERS RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIA

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Abstracts

The series of clashes between indigenes and settlers in Nigeria have become so alarming that it urgently calls for concern. The paper examines the role of the media in helping to unite indigenes and settlers for harmonious living. The primary roles of the media are education, information, entertainment and socialization among others. Through these functions, the media can achieve unitary living between indigenes and settlers in various communities in Nigeria that are usually prone to clashes of all sorts. The media can report clashes without sensational headlines that can aggravate further clashes. The theoretical perspectives of this paper are the Dependency and Agenda setting theories. The paper concludes that the media as agents of change can be used to change attitude and behaviour that degenerate to clashes between indigenes and settlers in Nigeria communities. The paper recommends among other things that the mass media of communication should focus their features articles and broadcast news on the fostering of unity between indigenes and settlers in Nigeria.

Keywords: Mass Media, Clashes, Indigenes, Settlers, Relationship

INTRODUCTION

The greatest problem facing the world today is terrorism and communal crises. Virtually no nation in Africa is free from terrorism and communal crises as there is hardly a week that communities will not clash. Communal crises have come to represent the only option for some individuals or groups to vent their anger or seek recognition. According to Dershowtz (2002), communal clashes are often rationalized as valid response to its “root causes” mainly repression and depression. In Nigeria, the act of communal clashes has been on the increase with the growing population of the country. This has prompted the National Assembly to be tempted on several occasions to promulgate laws against it.

In the wake of the civilian government that came to power on May 29, 1999, grievances were formerly suppressed but anger continued to erupt (Toure, 2003). It manifests in areas such as perceived injustices – real, imaginary and narrow perceptions. Since the regime of President Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 up till this present term of Buhari, clashes between and among communities have been on the increase. Notable among these crises is the Niger Delta crisis, Odi crisis, Movement for the Survival of the Sovereign States of Biafra (MASSOB), Odua People’s Congress (OPC), the Plateau Crisis, among others. All these crises have crept from the rural into the urban areas of the country. The communal clashes are characterized with the

use of sophisticated weapon such as guns, hammers, cutlasses and other explosive devices that are being perfected and put to use by the aggrieved. Some communities have degenerated to the use of chemical, biological and other more sophisticated devices than the one's mentioned above.

There has emerged the realization of the need to approach the problem of communal clashes through communication. The realization is more relevant considering the fact that modern society is fast becoming cities without walls or organizations where people are brought together to pursue activities they could otherwise not readily achieved by themselves (Giddens, Dumbier & Appelbaum, 2005). A principal means for accomplishing such co-operative actions is in the organization which has been defined as a group with the power of the pen. The media through broadcast messages and feature articles can bring co-operation among the communities. This can be done more effectively and efficiently through community media. Essentially, communities grow out of the need for human co-operation, a co-operation that can be initiated by the media (Alabi, 1997). Communities co-operation are more than just structure, rules, policies, rules, goals and standard operating procedures but in word of symbolic interaction theorists "their formal, structural characteristics are created, maintained and changed through everyday actions of their members (Mohr, 1971). Once there is a symptom of clashes between two communities, the media through their investigative mechanisms can investigate and come up with a featurized article or broadcast news report on the need for unity. In short, community newspapers, magazines and community broadcast media have what it takes to prevent or eradicate completely incessant communal crises bedeviling the country. According to Nwolise (2002), what transforms conflict into violent crisis is either lack of necessary actions or absence of monitoring by the media. Everybody dreads violence because it brings with it insecurity and other negative consequences.

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, conflict between settlers and indigenes has become so alarming. The activities of the herdsmen have become so destructive and terrific that thousands of people especially from the middle belt have lost their lives. Though, friction is part and parcel of a modern society but the destructive tendency of the herdsmen calls for concern. The herdsmen settlers have driven many indigenes from their places of abodes, some have been maimed for life while others are languishing in the hospitals. The problem has become so enormous to the extent that some indigenes have voluntarily vacated their homes for the fear of settlers. One expects the media to give prominence to the activities of settlers in order to reduce the menace of this dastardly act. Based on all this, this theoretical paper looks at how the media through their reporting can help in bringing about harmonious relationship between indigenes and settlers in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

This paper is aimed at the following:

1. To x-ray the potentials of the media in helping to eradicate herdsmen activities in Nigeria
2. To identify what the media should do to bring an end to the activities of herdsmen in Nigeria.
3. To suggest modalities on how the indigenes and settlers can live peacefully

Theoretical Framework

This paper finds relevance in Agenda Setting and Social Responsibility Theories

Agenda Setting Theory

The agenda setting theory was propounded by Cohen (1963). According to him, the press may not be successful in telling people what to think but it is successful in telling its readers what to think about. Agenda setting researchers assert that audience learns saliencies from the news media, incorporating similar set of weight into their personal agenda. The mass media have the power to determine issues that are regarded as important in the society. Okoro & Agbo (2003) are of the view that the media can ascribe relevance to an issue. Ordinary, people based and centered their discussions and views on what they read and heard from the media. Hence, Lang & Lang (1966) observed that the mass media force attention to certain issues. Based on this, the media through their reports can suggest how indigenes and settlers can live peacefully without crisis of any kind. This will go a long way in reducing settlers and indigenes incessant clashes that are nearly engulfing the nation's communities.

Social Responsibility Theory: This theory holds that the media are socially responsible in informing the masses. The major opinion of the social responsibility theory is that the media should fulfill certain obligations and expectations for the society. The theory emanated from the various criticisms which the libertarian theory of the press or free market place of idea was subjected (Akpoveta, 2012). According to Akakwandu (2014), the major substance of this theory is that the media should be responsible. The media practitioners have the responsibility to protect the interest of the Nigerian State from the terror of herdsmen. The media are saddled with the responsibility of reporting the activities of herdsmen and the modalities for ending the menace. In reporting the herdsmen activities, the media should follow the journalistic principles – truth, accuracy, balance, fairness and objectivity.

Major Causes and Effect of Indigenes and Settlers' Dichotomy

Indigenes and settlers' crisis are caused by various factors and the effects are very enormous on the communities, states and Nigeria at large. Some of the factors are:

1. **Illiteracy:** In Nigeria, major part of the population are illiterates. What some of these uneducated individuals do and think about is how to cause crisis. Some of the settlers and indigenes see community clashes as part and parcel of their relationship. Education is the bedrock of every society and Nigerian governments at all levels must concentrate on training its citizens.
2. **Religion and Injustice:** Religion has always been a volatile issue in Nigerian societies. This is due to the fact that most people see religion as a means of identifying with groups. In Nigeria, the two most dominant religious groups are Islam and Christianity. Though, Nigeria is a secular state, the issue of religion has always been a subject of controversy.
3. **Peer Group Influence:** Peer group influence is among the major causes of indigenes and settlers dichotomy in Nigeria. In any community, individuals relate with one another especially their age groups for a number of reasons. These could range from families, course mates, ethnic affiliation, religious affiliations, social affiliations among others. Most of these relationships are brought about by peer group meeting and influences on one another.
4. **Insecurity:** There is a serious problem of insecurity in every nook and cranny of Nigeria. Insecurity as a concept applies to nation state. Insecurity represents anything that can undermine the security of the nation or the peaceful co-existence of the people

(Nweze, 2008). Threat to internal security in Nigeria include religious and political intolerance, management of resources, subversion and sabotage, espionage, smuggling, alien influx, armed robbery, mutiny/coup d'état, civil unrest, revolutionary insurgency among others.

5. **Dominance:** Dominance is a state of one person wanting to dominate others. Most people always want to dominate others especially when they feel like flexing muscles. In most communities in Nigeria, the act or process of domination is what erupts crisis. We have political dominance, religious dominance, career dominance and so on. All these various forms of dominance have resulted to clashes at different times. Clashes may erupt when the other community resists dominance.
6. **Failed State:** A failed state is simply the opposite of a progressing state. Simply put, a failed state is a state which fails deliberately to provide for its citizens those basic amenities that make life meaningful such as adequate security, food, water, electricity, healthcare, good roads and so on. It is a state that fails to meet the needs and aspirations of its inhabitants.
7. **Poverty:** In Nigeria, poverty is starring most people on the face. Despite the fact that Nigeria is the eight largest oil exporting in the world, with revenue accounting for about 80% of total government earning, 40% contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 4% of employment; the country is plunged into this poverty state by the leaders who have the habit of accruing and acquiring wealth to themselves without thinking of the masses.

Media Strategies for Effective Relationship between Indigenes and Settlers in Nigeria

Media outlets largely act as providers of information and events impacting the broader society (Harman & Chomsky, 2002, Said, 1981, Soul, 2008). The masses rely on the media almost in everything concerning them. In Nigeria, the mass media carries out its conventional functions of informing, educating and entertaining the people through news items, opinion articles, feature articles and editorial writing. Though this approach is acceptable in reporting events that bring palliative measures to communal crises in Nigeria, it is difficult to rely wholeheartedly on this pattern especially on this vexed issue of indigenes and settlers' dichotomy in Nigeria. The media cannot be contended with merely reporting the news and probably editorializing for government to take action. To have a meaningful and long lasting impact on the people, the mass media must be structured differently due to the unwieldy nature of Nigeria. Nigeria has a population of about 180 million people with 36 states of the federation and with over 250 languages spoken by the people. These characteristics have made it extremely difficult for government and privately owned media outfits to provide adequate coverage for all and sundry.

Communal clashes especially the ones that involve indigenes and settler has been part and parcel of the media's routine and responsibility as the case may be. This therefore calls for a serious re-examination of the mass media to make any further appreciable impact in the war against communal clashes in the country. This calls for closely-knit, well established English and vernacular newspapers, magazines including English and vernacular broadcasting. This is paramount since most of the people who spear the communal clashes are local and uneducated.

Hence, community radio responsible for broadcasting in the people's dialects should be owned and run predominantly by the community. Ojebode (2003) asserts that there are two types of community radio: the community of interest radio and the geographical community radio. The community of interest radios are rare in nature and it is a type of community radio

owned and aimed at people with common and similar interests such as labour, education, women, socialism, classical music lovers and so on who may be living in various locations. The geographical community radios are meant for people who reside in a geographically closed community. They are for those people who live close through a nexus of social, economic, political and cultural factors. Out of these two types of community radio, the most relevant one for effective and efficient relationship between indigenes and settlers is the geographic community radio. This is due to the fact that it can be used to reach the nooks and crannies through the gathering and dissemination of adequate and relevant information.

Media Role in Bridging Indigenes and Settlers' Relationship

The media play numerous roles in helping to bridge indigenes and settlers' relationship in Nigeria. Manoff (1998) asserts that the media performs their information and education function by securing a free flow of accurate and constructive information, countering misconceptions, identifying the interests underlying the issues and helping to build consensus. Similarly, Siebert (1998) contends that the media can build confidence and mediate between the indigenes and settlers by fostering communication, generating alternative options to violent clashes, reflecting the ordinary person's desire and need for peace, communicating the process of negotiations to the constituencies involved and providing a forum for on-going dialogue and settlement.

Media dialogue should be key to countering indigenes and settlers' clashes. The media have the potential to be gateway through which to reach the largest possible number of people. Broadcast media usually engage public service announcements aimed at alerting communities and settlers on the need for a peaceful relationship. The media always strive to avoid sentiments which will help to fan conflict situations between indigenes and settlers.

Imobighe (2007) noted that there is a linkage between clashes and media. The media are able to isolate relationship that is capable of resulting to a clash. The mass media provides information among people at large so that there may be acceptance of any idea that fosters cordial relationship among them. The media disseminate messages on what could lead to clashes between indigenes and settlers. This means that the media serve as important sources of information for members of the communities. Thus, the media have the potential of ensuring peaceful relationship between them. In short, mass media campaigns against crises or clashes between indigenes and settlers have been able to reduce drastically incessant crises or clashes in their communities. Through the mass media and other modes in their network, individuals are exposed to multiple ideas, many of which conflict with one another and with the individual's own ideas and attitudes (Barber & Axinn, 2004). The success of any of the mass media messages depends on the messages reaching the target audience and being interpreted and applied appropriately. However, such campaigns are frequently competing with factors such as powerful social norms and behaviours, driven by addiction or habit (Wakefield, 2010). Mass communication via mass media identifying and reaching the right audience as well as ensuring that the message is appropriate for the conflict parties and is likely to be acted upon

Thus, he concludes that handling clashes between indigenes and settlers are always challenging to the mass media especially television, due to the impact the visual could have on the audience particularly the relations of the victims. For instance, on the spot coverage of communal clashes tend to attract extreme reactions from members of the public. Some claim that live coverage of such strife or civil disorders by television spurs participation and inflame the communal riots rather than merely an observer and thereby affect the outcome of the real event.

The mass media can help to raise awareness about strife that is in the offing. Such awareness can raise alarm by the community leaders who immediately seek for solution to avert it. The mass media of communication exerts great positive influence on the indigenes and settlers. The media appeal to indigenes and settlers in different perspectives. The media can help to shape their norms and values as the case may be. The media especially community media that are published in the language of the people have the ability to shape the thinking of the people and orient them on the essence of peace and harmonious living. Awake (2005) asserts that mass media shape culture, influence politics including indigenes and settlers' relationship. The media expose areas that could lead to frictions and suggest ways of averting such friction. McQuail (1961) believes that the areas which the mass media campaigns are most felt are the areas defining social reality and social norms, the immediate response or reaction, institutional change and change in the attitude and behaviour. In any of all these, the mass media involves processes that lead to opinion change.

Conclusion

The paper has reviewed the relevance of the media in helping to inculcate harmonious relationship between indigenes and settlers. The role of the media as a "watchdog" of the society encompasses strategizing in ensuring peace between indigenes and settlers. The prevalence of communal strife has become a serious concern to governments at all levels. This is because when these clashes degenerate to conflict situation, they hamper growth and developments of communities. The media no doubt have made contributions towards avoidance of clashes between indigenes and settlers. The paper contends that the media should reconsider their approaches and as such should become more interested in communal issues. The media through their news stories and featured articles have helped to inculcate harmonious relations between indigenes and settlers.

Recommendations

The paper recommends that the mass media as a tool for setting agenda should redouble its efforts in reporting the negative activities of the settlers in a way to deter them from any act capable of taking human lives.

Similarly, the media should be used as instrument for promoting peaceful and cordial relationship between and among communities as the language and dialects of the people in reporting are very paramount. This is due to the fact that majority of indigenes and settlers causing trouble in the society are illiterates. Community and geographical media systems are therefore very relevant.

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