

Who speaks for the poor? Poverty, Human Rights, Social Justice and Access to Media in Nigeria

Charles Maduabuchi Ekeh^{1*} Victor Ugochukwu Ikem² Adebawale Jeremy Adetayo³

1. Department of Mass Communication, Adeleke University, Ede, Nigeria
2. Department of Mass Communication, Babcock University, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria
3. Department of Library and Information Science, Adeleke University, Ede, Nigeria

* E-mail of the corresponding author: mekehcharles@gmail.com

Abstract

Nigeria faces a major poverty crisis with more than half of the population living in extreme poverty. This conceptual paper delves into the critical issues surrounding the rights of the poor in Nigeria especially in regard their access to media, freedom of expression, and the broader implications for social justice and poverty alleviation. The central question explored in this study is whether the right to freedom of expression and the right to be heard by the poor are recognized and upheld within the Nigerian media landscape as a fundamental human right. Furthermore, this paper examines the extent to which the media has contributed to addressing poverty prevalence in Nigeria and the impactful ways in which this contribution has manifested. Relying on the analytical and critical methodology of study, the paper argues that access to information is a fundamental human right, and the poor, who face multifaceted inequalities, must have their rights protected. Doing so, the paper contends will enhance their capacity to escape poverty, since information and knowledge play pivotal roles in poverty reduction. Emphasis is laid on the importance of granting the poor adequate access to information through available and relevant media, to enable them make informed decisions and choices that can lead to their emancipation from poverty.

Keywords: Human Rights, Media Access, Poverty Reduction, Social Justice, Freedom of Expression

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1. Introduction

The nexus between poverty and human rights has received several scholarly reviews in the past decades. Studies such as Gaisbauer, Schweiger, Sedmak (2016), Gauri and Gloppen (2012), and Gready and Vandenhole (2014) have established that poverty prevalence should be an important consideration in addressing human rights objectives. Poverty as a concept and as an experience has been a major concern of many studies especially as it relates to the question of fundamental human rights and the right to have access to basic social services to live in dignity and to be free from most debasing conditions of human existence. Fukuda-Parr (2007) argues that poverty is an important human rights concern as human rights are claims that people have to guarantee their basic social needs and that the poorer a people are, the higher the chances that they will be vulnerable to suffer abuse in many other areas including inequality and discrimination. People living in poverty are widely acknowledged to lack access to basic needs including the essential requirements which are important to guarantee healthy living and preserve human dignity. These basic requirements include access to quality housing, safe drinking water, access to healthcare services, education, and basic sanitation (Collins Ayoo, 2021). These fundamental factors of human existence, which are supposed to be considered basic rights of every human being, are not readily available to the poor. The most significant of these is the lack of access to information and the media.

Poverty is a global development problem. Several attempts have been made to address its many dimensions including efforts to reduce immediate and remote causes. The United Nations' (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) which outlines all global development agenda identifies the need to end extreme poverty as goal number one, which calls for urgent steps to end extreme poverty by the year 2030. This signals the degree of importance attached to global poverty as a worldwide problem. With sufficient evidence, it is right to bring forward that despite numerous attempts to reduce its impact, global poverty is still on the rise. The global multi-dimensional poverty data released in July 2023 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the University of Oxford stated that the global Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI) shows 1.1 billion out of 6.1 billion people; around 18% of the world population, live in acute multidimensional poverty across 110 countries, with sub-Saharan Africa accounting for about 534 million of the world's poor.

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) states in its preamble that recognition of the inherent human

dignity and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice, and peace in the world. To explain the implications of poverty on basic human rights, Speth (1998) noted that the right to be free from poverty must be counted among the most fundamental human rights. The author observed that poverty is brutal and its impact extends beyond lack of income.

Nigeria is a country with high poverty prevalence. With over 70 percent of its population living below \$1.9 per day (Bloomberg, 2022), Nigeria is estimated to be the poverty capital of the world according to the Brookings Institution's report, overtaking India and China with worldwide poverty average. The vast amount of Nigeria's population is directly affected by the widespread consequences of poverty.

The key question which this study unravels is whether the right to freedom of expression and the right to be heard by the poor are recognized in the Nigerian media. It also sought to understand whether the media has given adequate expression to the voice of the poor and investigated whether the media in Nigeria has contributed to addressing poverty prevalence through prioritizing information and knowledge for the poor and in what ways have these roles of media been impactful in the quest to end extreme poverty.

It is acknowledged that access to information is a fundamental human right to which everyone is entitled. As such, should not the poor who suffer all kinds of inequalities also have their right to information or right to be heard protected? This study therefore, explores how protecting the right of the poor to access relevant information can contribute to improving their well-being and capacity to escape poverty.

2. Statement of the problem

Nigeria is a country characterized by stark economic disparities and a significant prevalence of poverty. In this regard, there exists a pressing and multifaceted issue concerning the recognition and protection of rights of poor persons who suffer consequences of economic mismanagement, particularly in the context of access to media, freedom of expression, and the pursuit of social justice. The poor in Nigeria, often marginalized and disenfranchised, face various inequalities that limit their exercise of fundamental rights, notably the right to access information. At the core of this problem lays the recognition that access to information is an essential human right commitment to which every individual is entitled, which also forms the cornerstone for informed decision-making, empowerment, and social change. In a world where knowledge and information are increasingly recognized as drivers of poverty reduction, it is imperative to confront the fundamental issue of providing the poor with equitable access to information. This study's focus underscores the profound importance of ensuring that the poor can make informed choices, decisions, and actions, thereby increasing their chances of escaping poverty and participating more fully in the economic and social fabric of Nigerian society.

3. Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Human Rights and Information Access: Global and Nigerian Perspectives

Human rights, as inherent entitlements of all individuals, stand at the core of global values. The international community, acknowledging their significance, has codified them through various treaties and declarations. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), ratified by the United Nations in 1948, stands as cornerstone document in this regard. It encompasses a wide array of rights, including the right to life, liberty, security, and freedom of thought, conscience, and expression (United Nations, 1948). These international agreements underscore the universal character of human rights and their applicability across diverse cultural and political landscapes.

In the context of media and information, the right to freedom of expression, as provided for in Article 19 of the UDHR, is of particular relevance. This right extends beyond the mere expression of opinions; it encompasses the right to seek, receive, and disseminate information and ideas through any medium, transcending geographical boundaries (United Nations, 1948). Freedom of expression is the bedrock of democratic societies, providing individuals with the means to engage in social and political discourses. Nigeria, as a signatory to international human rights agreements, recognizes the paramount importance of freedom of expression. Its constitution explicitly guarantees this right in Section 39, stressing the liberty to hold opinions, and to receive and disseminate ideas and information without unwarranted interference (Jurist, 2023). But despite this constitutional guarantee, the practical realization of these rights faces myriad challenges.

In Nigeria, the safeguarding of freedom of expression frequently clashes with legal restrictions, censorship, and threats to journalists and media organizations. Several legislative acts, such as the Cybercrimes Act and the National Broadcasting Commission Act, have come under scrutiny for their potential to stifle free expression and curtail media freedoms (Ihechu & Okugo, 2013; Olubiye & Oriakhogba, 2021; Viko, 2021). Furthermore, the

country has witnessed instances of harassment, violence, and even killings of journalists, raising concerns about the safety of those exercising their right to free expression (Punch, 2023).

3.2 Access to Information

Access to information stands as a pivotal component of human rights, empowering individuals with the knowledge essential for informed decision-making and participation in public life (Riegner, 2017). International agreements, such as the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), recognize the vital role of access to information in achieving global development objectives. Goal 16.10 of the SDGs explicitly calls for ensuring public access to information and the protection of fundamental freedoms (UNESCO, 2023). In Nigeria, access to information remains a formidable challenge, particularly for marginalized and impoverished communities. While the Nigerian Constitution guarantees the right to access information under Section 39, this right does not always materialize, particularly for those residing in poverty-stricken regions. Information poverty, characterized by limited access to educational and health information perpetuates cycles of deprivation among vulnerable populations (Abdulkareem et al., 2022). The digital divide further exacerbates information inequality in Nigeria, manifesting through disparities in internet access, digital literacy, and information and communication technology infrastructure. This divide disproportionately affects the impoverished, as they often lack the resources and skills to access and utilize digital information effectively (Akanbi & Akanbi, 2012; Vassilakopoulou & Hustad, 2023).

3.3 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria

Nigeria, the most populous country in Africa, grapples with stark economic disparities and a significant poverty problem, despite its abundant natural resources. The multifaceted nature of poverty in Nigeria necessitates a comprehensive analysis. In 2022, data from the National Bureau of Statistics revealed that 63% of Nigerians, which is approximately 133 million people, were multi-dimensionally poor, highlighting the dire living conditions affecting a substantial portion of the population (National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). One key dimension of inequality in Nigeria is income disparity. The nation's wealth is concentrated in the hands of a privileged few, while a significant proportion of the population struggles to meet their basic needs. This wealth concentration further worsens poverty, as the distribution of resources and opportunities disproportionately favour the privileged. The top percentile of income earners accumulates a significant share of the nation's wealth, leaving many Nigerians in lower income brackets grappling with economic hardship (Adeleke & Alabede, 2022; Taiga & Ibrahim, 2021).

Gender inequality presents another critical challenge, with women experiencing discrimination in various aspects of life. This discrimination is particularly evident in limited access to education and economic opportunities (Adeosun & Owolabi, 2021). Despite progress in the push for women's rights and gender equality, deeply rooted societal norms persist, perpetuating gender disparities. These disparities act as significant barriers to women's economic empowerment and independence, contributing to the overall poverty landscape in Nigeria.

Regional disparities add another layer to the problem of poverty (Teriba, 2014). An inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities within the country creates substantial disparities between northern and southern regions. Northern regions, in particular, face higher levels of poverty and limited access to essential services (Abdulrazak et al., 2016). This regional imbalance is driven by factors such as historical disparities in development, infrastructural deficits, and conflicts, which have hindered economic growth and social progress in certain areas of the country. These intertwined forms of inequality create a situation where the poor often lack access to quality education, healthcare, and economic opportunities. The absence of quality education perpetuates limited upward mobility, while inadequate healthcare leads to poor health outcomes and high mortality rates, further trapping individuals and communities in poverty (World Bank, 2014; Zajacova & Lawrence, 2018). The intersections of income, gender, and regional inequalities underscore the need to urgently address poverty and promote social justice in Nigeria.

4 Conceptual Framework

4.1 Human Rights

Human rights are the inherent entitlements belonging to all individuals by their humanity. These rights are universal, indivisible, interconnected, and interdependent, encompassing a wide spectrum of civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights. At the heart of human rights lies the principle that every person is entitled to dignity, respect, and equality (Addink, 2019; Marks, 2014). Governments, institutions, and societies have a duty to protect and uphold these rights.

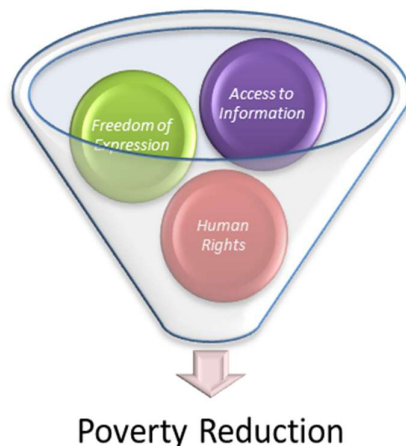
4.2 Freedom of Expression

A cornerstone of human rights, freedom of expression is the right to express opinions and ideas without

interference. It also includes the right to seek, receive, and disseminate information and ideas through any means, transcending geographical boundaries (United Nations, 1948). This right is of paramount importance in democratic societies, fostering open discourse, the free flow of information, and public involvement in decision-making processes.

4.3 Access to Information

Access to information is a fundamental human right that empowers individuals by providing them with the knowledge required to make informed choices. It encompasses the right to access, receive, and share information, which is vital for economic, social, and political participation (Riegner, 2017). Access to information plays a crucial role in poverty reduction, equipping individuals with the tools necessary to break free from poverty and become active participants in society.



5. Theoretical Framework

5.1 Rights-Based Approach

At the core of our theoretical framework lies a rights-based approach which is the theoretical foundation for exploring the intricate connection between media, human rights, and poverty reduction in Nigeria. This approach underscores the fundamental importance of human rights, including freedom of expression and access to information, in the context of poverty alleviation. It asserts that all individuals, regardless of their socio-economic status, must have full access to these rights (Bessell, 2017). Moreover, it insists on empowering individuals, particularly those living in poverty, to assert and exercise these rights. On a global scale, human rights have been codified in documents like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent international treaties. These instruments establish a common standard for safeguarding and promoting these rights, emphasizing the principle that human rights are not a privilege but an entitlement inherent to every person by virtue of their humanity.

5.2 Participatory Communication

The framework incorporates the theory of participatory communication, as articulated by Paulo Freire and other scholars. This theory underscores the essential role of communication in democratic processes and social change. It highlights the principles of dialogue, empowerment, and collaboration within communication processes (Hardianto, 2013; Mefalopulos, 2003), which are crucial for addressing the needs and amplifying the voices of marginalized communities. In the context of poverty alleviation, these participatory communication principles can guide media strategies that actively involve the poor in shaping their narratives and advocating for their rights. Participatory approaches have gained prominence in development initiatives and have been proven to empower communities and individuals living in poverty. In this context, the media serves as a platform for these voices to be heard and integrated into the discourse on poverty reduction, thereby fostering more inclusive and effective strategies.

5.3 Amartya Sen's Capabilities Approach

The capabilities approach of Amartya Sen offers a vital perspective on poverty reduction. Sen argues that development should focus on expanding the capabilities of individuals, enabling them to lead lives they value (Jacobson, 2016). Media, by providing access to information, education, and opportunities for social participation, plays a critical role in enhancing the capabilities of the poor. It empowers them to overcome poverty by equipping

them with the knowledge and resources needed to make meaningful choices and lead lives of dignity. Amartya Sen's approach has significantly influenced international development strategies and poverty alleviation efforts, underscoring the importance of factors such as education and access to information in expanding people's capabilities (Saito, 2003; Singh & Chudasama, 2020). In this framework, the media acts as an enabler, breaking down information barriers and facilitating access to essential resources and opportunities, thereby empowering the impoverished to break free from the cycle of poverty.

6 Existing Research on Media and Poverty in Nigeria

Research on the interaction between media and poverty in Nigeria has played a critical role in shedding light on how information is disseminated, social justice is pursued, and poverty is alleviated in the country. Several studies have explored the media's involvement in tackling poverty and inequality, revealing both its strengths and limitations. For instance, Adams (2023) focusing on media approaches to poverty alleviation programs in Chikun, Kaduna State, highlighted poverty as a pressing concern within the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG). Through investigating the media's role in promoting knowledge and national development programs, Adams acknowledged potential disruptions due to communication gaps. Consequently, the study recommended budgetary allocations for rural media and communication strategies to ensure inclusivity in poverty alleviation efforts. In Aligwe's (2015) study of mass media and poverty alleviation, the Nigerian experience, it was acknowledged that while the significance of media in this context is readily apparent, defining its specific role can be challenging. According to the study, the Nigerian press has not consistently and efficiently covered poverty-related topics. Furthermore, the study showed that not only are rural areas underrepresented in news coverage, but the content of rural news frequently lacks a developmental focus. As a result, the report contended that national and regional mass media have struggled to meet the information needs of Nigeria's radically distinct urban and rural populations, highlighting the need for a more rural-oriented approach to information transmission.

Similarly, Nwachukwu (2023) scrutinized the politics of new media and poverty reduction in Nigeria (2000 - 2022), shedding light on progress and regional disparities, emphasizing government initiatives and the role of new media in tracking and enhancing the impact of anti-poverty programs. The paper underscored the significance of government-media collaboration in the fight against poverty. Haruna and Surajo (2021) also explored the role of mass media in combating rural poverty in Kano, Nigeria. Their study highlighted the detrimental impact of factors like land degradation and unfavourable agricultural policies on farming communities. It underscored the pivotal role of mass media, including print and electronic media, in improving the lives of the rural poor, and revealed a significant link between unemployment and rural poverty.

Furthermore, Ikem and Akintayo (2022) explored communication and poverty alleviation, emphasizing the prevalence of poverty in Nigeria, as characterized by various challenges, including communication-related impediments. Their study underscored the role of communication in promoting knowledge, social inclusion, and national development programs, calling for innovative communication strategies to eradicate extreme poverty by 2030. Hewapathirana (2017) researched the role of the media, notably television, in alleviating rural poverty in Sri Lanka, and acknowledged that the media plays an important role in speaking about poverty and development challenges. Television, in particular, is notable for its steady progression as a mass medium in terms of its broad reach, viewer time spent, and persistent popularity. The study's findings were consistent with the broader notion that media, including television, has a dual mission to inform and inspire, and that it should be used to highlight the voices and concerns of marginalized people.

Ndinojuo (2023) delves into how poverty is portrayed in Nigerian newspapers, revealing underreporting but a significant focus on solutions, with a dominant frame of 'empowerment' emphasizing various empowerment programs. Recommendations include increased media coverage of poverty stories and enhanced transparency in government poverty alleviation initiatives. Omitola (2022) explored framing poverty in Nigerian online media reports, focusing on online media reports related to Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Nigeria. The study highlighted the impact of these diseases on impoverished communities and the media's role in raising awareness. However, it cautions that these reports often neglect the need to address poverty as a root cause of NTDs.

Collectively, these studies provide a comprehensive understanding of the media's role in addressing poverty in Nigeria. They emphasize the importance of collaboration between media and government, the significance of effective communication strategies, and the potential for new media to mobilize support and raise awareness in the fight against poverty. Other studies have also identified that the media are a crucial partner in the battle against poverty as they serve both as a mirror, reflecting the harsh realities faced by impoverished communities, and as a megaphone, amplifying their voices. Its potential to create public awareness, generate empathy, and drive positive action is substantial (Aderounmu, Azuh, Onanuga, et al., 2021). The media is depicted as a powerful tool for awareness, advocacy, and accountability in the fight against poverty. By providing platforms for highlighting poverty-related issues, the media facilitates a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by impoverished

populations.

7 Challenges in the Nigerian Media Landscape

The Nigerian media landscape, brimming with diversity and potential for positive impact, faces an array of pressing challenges that span media freedom, economic viability, and ethical standards. These multifaceted issues pose substantial obstacles to the media's vital role in addressing critical societal concerns like poverty and social injustice. Foremost among these challenges is the issue of media freedom. Media practitioners frequently confront threats, harassment, and violence that obstruct their ability to report on sensitive issues (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021). This climate of intimidation can cast a chilling shadow over investigative journalism, stifling the media's indispensable role as society's watchdog. Economic sustainability stands as a pressing concern within the Nigerian media landscape (Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, 2021). Many media organizations grapple with the struggle to generate sustainable revenue in a highly competitive and rapidly evolving media environment. The digital revolution, while presenting opportunities, has also disrupted traditional revenue models, impacting the financial stability of media outlets.

The landscape is further complicated by ethical standards (Okonji, 2020). Sensationalism and the proliferation of fake news undermine the quality and credibility of media content. This not only erodes public trust but also hampers the media's capacity to advocate for social justice and provide accurate information on poverty-related issues. In addition to these challenges, impoverished communities face additional barriers to accessing media:

- *Digital Divide:* The digital divide remains a formidable challenge, with many impoverished individuals lacking access to the internet and digital devices. This gap restricts their ability to engage with online media and information resources (Ani et al., 2007).
- *High Illiteracy Rates:* High levels of illiteracy within impoverished communities impede access to print media and written digital content. Many individuals in these communities may struggle to read or comprehend written information (Aderogba, 2018).
- *Linguistic Diversity:* Nigeria's linguistic diversity can be a significant barrier. Access to media in one's local language is essential for understanding and utilizing the information provided. The lack of content in local languages can limit the media's reach (Nwagbara, 2013).
- *Economic Constraints:* Economic limitations are a significant hindrance to media access for the poor. The costs associated with owning a television, purchasing newspapers, or accessing the internet can be prohibitive for those with limited financial resources.
- *Geographical Isolation:* Remote and marginalized communities often lack access to the media outlets due to their geographical isolation. This isolation limits their exposure to information that could enhance their lives and address the root causes of poverty (World Bank, 2018).

There is also the challenge of media regulatory framework. The Nigerian media landscape operates within a regulatory framework overseen by entities such as the National Broadcasting Commission (NBC) and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC). These organizations are tasked with ensuring compliance with broadcasting and journalistic standards. However, concerns have been raised about the impartiality and effectiveness of these regulatory bodies (Kolawole & Umejei, 2023). Striking a balance between media freedom and accountability remains a significant challenge, as regulatory measures must align with democratic principles and protect human rights, including freedom of expression and access to information.

8 Analyzing media campaigns and programs targeting poverty

Poverty is the most severe development issue confronting many African countries today. In the case of Nigeria, which is comparable to many other African countries, the government has embarked on several programs targeted at addressing the issue of extreme poverty over the years. Aderogba (2012) investigated the role of the media in efficiently distributing information about the government's poverty alleviation measures, focusing on Iwo town in Osun State, Nigeria. According to the study's findings, a sizable majority of the surveyed population (77.8%) was aware of the Federal Government's poverty-relief programmes, with radio (16.3%) emerging as the single most influential media channel. A tiny plurality of respondents (23.9%) chose a combination of non-traditional, electronic, and print media. Furthermore, over 22.9% of respondents preferred a combination of electronic and print media, while print media was the least preferred, with only 0.6% expressing a preference for it.

The high level of poverty in Nigeria is paradoxical in the sense that it contradicts the country's immense wealth. Enormously endowed with human, agricultural, petroleum, gas and, large untapped solid mineral resources, it remains worrisome that the country over many years has embarked on different poverty alleviation efforts without

much success. On many occasions, these poverty programs are implemented without the awareness of actual targets. The result is an ever-increasing incidence of poverty in spite of various resources and efforts exerted on poverty-related programmes and schemes, thus suggesting that such programmes and schemes were ineffective and ineffectual. The media rarely dedicate awareness campaigns and programmes targeted at enlightening poor members of society on how to take advantage of poverty reduction programmes to their best benefit.

In a related study, Sanusi (2017) delved into the role of the media in promoting social integration and development, recognizing its significant influence in enhancing public awareness of government initiatives and fostering national progress. The study specifically focused on the newspaper coverage of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) campaign in Nigeria, aiming to gauge the importance accorded to the issue of sustainable development in the country. Four prominent national newspapers, namely *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Nigerian Tribune*, and *The Nation*, served as the subjects of analysis. Findings revealed that, while Nigerian newspapers promoted the SDGs campaign positively, the publications generally took the form of news-story presentations. He proposed that newspapers publish exclusive editorials and detailed feature articles on SDGs programs, allowing for in-depth analysis and enlightenment. This strategy could successfully prepare the public to take positive steps toward accomplishing these critical goals.

9. The Impact of Media on Poverty Reduction

There is no doubt that the media's role in accelerating the development of any nation is critical since it provides information, education, entertainment, integration, and social contact, all of which have implications for national development. This is taking inference from Nwaolike (2018) who observed that the media has a responsibility to provide insights into societal events and to aid in the advancement of a nation. Within this framework, the author attempted to demonstrate that the media is a catalyst for change by introducing new values and behaviors into society. Within the context of poverty alleviation and development, Seidu, Alhassan, et al., (2011) established that radio plays an important role in raising awareness and information about many community development concerns such as cultural preservation, rural development, education, hygiene, sanitation, agriculture, and local governance. They noted that radio stations effectively served as a platform for dialogue between duty bearers and rights holders, bridging this critical gap; they also confirmed that radio has contributed to the development of small and medium enterprises by creating market opportunities for SME operators, ultimately leading to increased sales and incomes, which have a direct impact on poverty reduction.

According to Owolabi and O'Neill (2014), the terrible status of poverty in emerging countries of the world, particularly Africa, underscores the need to investigate the relationship between the media and poverty reduction. They emphasized the complex relationship between media, government, and poverty reduction, underscoring the critical role media may play in either perpetuating or reducing poverty, while also showing certain structural problems. Their study highlighted Nigeria's extreme poverty situation, which affects a sizable section of the population, including vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and children. This partly aligns with the opinion of Suleiman and Ojomo (2019) who studied the political and economic dynamics that underlie Nigeria's media landscape, intending to discern whether these factors impact media content and, by extension, the poverty levels within the country. Their study argued that if the Nigerian media can play a constructive role in advancing democracy and reinforcing democratic institutions, much like their historical contributions, they also have the potential to drive economic development and poverty reduction through their news reporting.

10. Case Studies

Individuals living in poverty, according to Brems (2010), are disproportionately more likely to incur human rights violations, although they face severe hurdles in exercising their rights. According to Brems, the court in developing countries, like Nigeria, has a critical role in combating human rights violations that disproportionately harm the poor. The study highlighted the significant issue that Nigerian legislators and the judiciary have in making justice accessible, particularly to the poor. Nigeria should learn from other developing countries, particularly India, where Public Interest Litigation (PIL) has shown considerable promise in increasing access to justice for poor people. In India, public interest litigation (PIL) is distinguished by the easing of procedural limits in cases of human rights breaches, facilitating the process of seeking justice and submitting evidence. A similar situation can be reproduced in Nigeria, in terms of the function of the media in pushing for poor people's rights.

Ani (2021), opined that we are living in an era marked by a mounting threat to peace, a worrying rise in poverty, and a terrible expansion of suffering caused by human acts, principally driven by the ubiquitous issues of corruption, oppression, and violence. According to his conclusions, this circumstance has elevated human rights to a global concern. The study does acknowledge, however, that Nigeria's position, in which the country ranks among the world's top in terms of poverty and human rights breaches, poses substantial concerns that should worry all of its residents. It went further to advance a sobering and urgent plea to confront Nigeria's multidimensional

concerns of human rights violations, social injustice, and poverty, since they are interconnected and have far-reaching repercussions for the nation's general well-being, stability, and progress. Furthermore, the study's theological approach argued that these issues have a moral and ethical dimension as well. It implies that tackling challenges of human rights and social fairness takes more than just legal and political concerns rather it necessitates a deeper reflection on society's moral fabric.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) are adaptable, allowing them to solve a wide range of issues, including those connected to health, education, food security, and livelihoods. They can empower people and advance human rights. In this light, Okogun and Abang (2013) investigated the impact of ICTs on poverty reduction with a focus on the Nigerian setting. The Human Development Index (HDI) and the Gini Coefficient were used as standardized metrics of poverty in the study to analyze the influence of ICTs on poverty alleviation. According to statistics, Nigeria's HDI was 0.416, with roughly 70% of the population living below the poverty line, putting the country 156th out of 187 economies. Furthermore, the Gini Coefficient for Nigeria in 2010 was 0.4470, indicating a growing disparity between the rich and the poor. Finally, the study makes policy recommendations for the successful use of ICTs in reducing poverty and closing the economic gap in Nigeria between the wealthy and the underprivileged. Nigeria's Human Development Index (HDI) and Gini Coefficient statistics highlight the urgency of the situation. With a low HDI and a significant proportion of the population living in poverty, Nigeria faces major challenges in achieving economic and social well-being for all of its residents. The situation is exacerbated further by rising economic inequality, as measured by the Gini Coefficient. This has direct consequences for human rights and inequality, aligning with their findings.

11. Protecting the Poor's Right to Access Information: The Vital Link to Social Justice

11.1 Access to Information and Social Justice

Access to information is intricately linked to the concept of social justice. It acts as the linchpin of informed citizenship and a powerful tool for addressing inequalities and discrimination within society. The poor, who often bear the brunt of multifaceted inequalities, are particularly vulnerable to the repercussions of restricted access to information. Denying them this fundamental right not only perpetuates their vulnerability but also exacerbates the systemic inequalities contributing to their impoverishment (Igwe, 2019). In the pursuit of social justice, equitable access to information is a critical strategy for addressing the root causes of poverty (Ciuffetelli Parker & Conversano, 2021; Vassilakopoulou & Hustad, 2023). It enables marginalized communities to have a voice, advocate for their rights, and participate in decision-making processes directly affecting their lives. It promotes transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, all vital elements in the fight against poverty and social injustice. Empowering the poor with the tools and information they need to escape the cycle of poverty and inequality is not only a moral imperative but also a practical approach to creating more equitable and just societies. When every individual, regardless of their economic status, can exercise their right to access information, the foundations for social justice and poverty reduction are fortified, paving the way for a more inclusive and prosperous future for all (Bununu, 2020; Ciuffetelli Parker & Conversano, 2021).

12. Protecting the Poor's Access to Media and Information: Policy Recommendations

12.1 Media Literacy Programs

Implementing media literacy programs targeted at marginalized communities is essential. Such programs can empower individuals to critically evaluate media content, discern misinformation, understand their rights, and effectively engage with various media channels (Sarwatay et al., 2021). These initiatives can be integrated into formal education curricula and community-based initiatives, ensuring that the poor are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to navigate the media landscape.

12.2 Subsidized Media Access

Governments and non-governmental organizations should explore the possibility of subsidizing access to media channels such as newspapers, radio, and television for low-income populations (Murschetz, 2022). This approach can help bridge the economic gap that often prevents the poor from accessing crucial information. Subsidies can take various forms, including reduced subscription fees, free distribution, or community access centers.

12.3 Local and Community Media Support

Promoting the development and sustainability of local and community media outlets that cater to marginalized communities is crucial. These outlets are often more accessible to the poor, communicate in local languages, and address issues directly relevant to their lives. Supporting the growth of such media can enhance the representation of marginalized voices and issues (Elejalde et al., 2019; International Institute for Democracy and Electoral

Assistance, 2012).

12.4 Internet Connectivity Initiatives

Bridging the digital divide by expanding access to the internet is essential (Vassilakopoulou & Hustad, 2023). Initiatives can include community Wi-Fi projects, shared access centers, and affordable data plans. Ensuring that even the poorest can access digital information is critical in the digital age, where much of the world's information is now available online.

12.5 Legal and Policy Frameworks

Governments should enact and rigorously enforce laws and policies that protect media freedom, eliminate barriers to access, and ensure the right to information for all citizens, including the poor. This encompasses safeguarding the independence and effectiveness of media regulatory bodies. A strong legal framework supports an environment where media outlets can operate without fear of censorship or reprisals, ensuring a diverse and vibrant media landscape (CORDIS, 2010; OHCHR, 2022).

13. The Potential for Empowerment and Poverty Reduction via Information Access

13.1 Economic Empowerment

Improved access to information can empower the poor to make more informed economic decisions. This includes accessing financial services, starting businesses, and participating in income-generating activities. Informed economic choices can lead to increased income and financial stability, contributing to poverty reduction.

13.2 Health and Education

Access to information is crucial for improving health and education outcomes among the poor (Jain & Saraf, 2013; McCloud et al., 2016). For instance, access to information on healthcare practices, nutrition, and sanitation can lead to better health outcomes. Similarly, educational content can enhance learning opportunities for both children and adults, increasing their chances of escaping the cycle of poverty.

13.3 Civic Engagement and Advocacy

Access to information empowers the poor to participate more actively in their communities and advocate for their rights (Nath, 2001). It enables them to engage with local and national governments, express their needs, and hold authorities accountable. This civic engagement contributes to social justice and poverty reduction by amplifying the voices of marginalized populations and ensuring their concerns are addressed.

14. Summation on media's role in Human Rights and Poverty Alleviation Nigeria

With evidence of poverty and inequality prevalent in Nigeria, the media has an undeniable obligation to advance human rights, social justice, and poverty alleviation. As a potent instrument for communication and information dissemination, the media has a unique capacity to address these challenges, not only by just raising awareness but also by facilitating public discourse and advocating policies and actions that foster social justice. One of the fundamental ways in which the media can contribute to these goals is by increasing the level of attention paid to raising awareness about poverty-related issues (United Nations Division for Social Policy and Development, 2017). Through in-depth reporting and storytelling, it can shine a light on the daily struggles faced by the poor, providing a voice to those often marginalized in society. By sharing their stories, media humanizes the issue of poverty, making it relatable and tangible to the wider public. Investigative journalism also has the power to uncover and expose corruption that contributes to fight against poverty, thereby holding those in power accountable (OECD, 2018). Beyond raising awareness, media outlets function as platforms for informed public discourse on poverty-related policies and initiatives. Debates, talk shows, and opinion pieces create spaces for experts, policymakers, and civil society to engage in discussions on a broad spectrum of poverty alleviation strategies. These dialogues delve into critical topics such as income redistribution, social safety nets, and economic empowerment, ensuring that these issues are comprehensively explored. Informed public discourse, fueled by the media, can lead to more equitable and well-rounded policy decisions.

Media advocacy, another crucial facet, plays a pivotal role in advancing human rights, social justice, and poverty alleviation (Wallack, 1994). Journalists and media organizations can champion the cause of the impoverished by actively advocating policies changes that address inequality and promote economic empowerment. They can use their platforms to emphasize the importance of enhanced access to education and healthcare as critical pillars in the fight against poverty. Media advocacy not only influences public opinion but also exerts pressure on policymakers to take concrete actions. By highlighting the dire consequences of inaction, the media can mobilize public sentiment and encourage political leaders to prioritize poverty alleviation.

Furthermore, media outlets can initiate campaigns, documentaries, and community engagement programs that

focus on poverty reduction (Wood & Barnes, 2007). They can spotlight successful poverty alleviation initiatives and innovative solutions, showcasing stories of resilience and progress to inspire change. The media's comprehensive engagement in these efforts can contribute significantly to the national discourse on poverty and inequality, reinforcing the importance of collective action in addressing these pressing issues.

15. Conclusion

In this conceptual paper, we have navigated the intricate interplay between media, human rights, freedom of expression, and poverty reduction in Nigeria. Let's encapsulate our key findings and their profound implications:

1. *Media's Pivotal Role:* The media emerges as a cornerstone in the fight against poverty. It not only raises awareness but also champions policy reforms and delivers essential information, effectively empowering the impoverished.
2. *Hurdles to Access:* Despite Nigeria's diverse media landscape, the most underprivileged segments face formidable obstacles in accessing information. The hurdles range from the digital divide and illiteracy to linguistic disparities, financial constraints, and geographical isolation.
3. *Empowerment for Poverty Alleviation:* Enhanced access to information holds the potential to bolster the economic standing of the poor, bolster their education and health, and foster active civic participation. It is a dynamic instrument for addressing the root causes of poverty.

Safeguarding the rights of the impoverished concerning media access is not just an ethical imperative but an indispensable facet of attaining social justice and poverty reduction. Every individual, irrespective of their economic status, possesses an inherent right to information. The denial of this right perpetuates vulnerability and disempowerment. In a world where knowledge and information wield immense transformative power, ensuring that the voices of the indigent are acknowledged and their rights enshrined within the media landscape becomes paramount.

16. Call to Action: Policy Reforms and Future Exploration

To elevate the role of media in the battle against poverty and the promotion of social justice in Nigeria, the following actions are strongly advocated:

1. *Policy Overhauls:* Policymakers must take proactive steps to enact and enforce legislation that secures media freedom, eliminates barriers, and guarantees universal access to information, including for the poor. This entails safeguarding the independence of media regulatory bodies and fostering equitable information access.
2. *Media Literacy Initiatives:* Implementation of media literacy programs, especially geared towards marginalized communities, is essential. These programs empower individuals to critically evaluate media content, comprehend their rights, and meaningfully engage with various media channels.
3. *Support for Local and Community Media:* The development and sustainability of local and community media outlets must be encouraged, as they serve as accessible platforms for the poor. These outlets often operate in local languages and address issues directly relevant to the lives of the impoverished.
4. *Digital Inclusivity:* Bridging the digital divide is a priority. This involves expanding internet access through community Wi-Fi, shared access centers, and affordable data plans to ensure that even the poorest can partake in the digital information age.
5. *Continued Research:* Ongoing research is indispensable to fathom the evolving role of the media in poverty reduction, preservation of human rights, and social justice, particularly in the context of rapidly evolving media landscapes and technological advancements. In-depth investigations can unveil the most effective strategies for empowering the poor through unfettered information access.

In closing, this conceptual paper underscores the relevance of the preservation of the rights of access to the media of the poor as a pathway to poverty alleviation and social justice in Nigeria, recognizing the media as a powerful ally in securing the rights of the impoverished to information, and translating knowledge into equitable opportunities for all with the main objective being to achieve the UNSDG Goal 1 which is to end extreme poverty by 2030. It is a call to action, a call for change, and a call for a more just and inclusive society.

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