

Mass Media and Democratic Consolidation in Africa: Problems, Challenges and Prospects

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Abstract

One of the elements of democracy and the rule of law is the freedom of expression. To democratize is to ensure free unhindered two-way communication between the government and the governed. The essence is to ensure the responsiveness of the government to the yearnings of the people and for the people to put their views across to government without fear or hindrance and in an atmosphere devoid of interference. Against this background, this paper examines the role of the mass media in the process of democratic consolidation in Africa, including Nigeria. The objective is to identify the factors acting as constraints to the effectiveness of the mass media in ensuring democratic consolidation. It observes that the sustainability of democracy in Africa depends on several factors, some of which are located within the media itself while others are based on the prevailing political, socio-economic, legal, infrastructural, cultural and religious environment in the different countries. The most crucial factor for the sustenance of democracy in Africa would consist of the enthronement of a popular-sovereignty that touches the daily lives of the populace, gives meaning to the notion of citizenship and goes beyond the constitutionally defined form of rule. The role of the media is facilitative, supportive and integrative. To achieve greater media effectiveness in promoting democratic ideals and governance in Africa, there is need for private sector partnership and involvement of civil society organizations in media ownership in order to achieve a balance

Keywords: Democracy in Africa, Mass Media and Democracy.

1. Introduction

The past thirty years witnessed have witnessed the alienation of the African masses by tyrants. Most Africans have lived under political systems where the genuine and popular was circumvented and where democracy was confined to a few ambiguous statements in constitution that were fashioned, often capriciously by civilian dictators or military regimes (Nyamnjoh, 1999). This was achieved by conceptual noises furnished by pseudo-intellectual apologists, the impoverishment and disillusionment of the masses by structural adjustment, the sacralization of power and the neutralization of shared pain and misery (Soyinka, 1994:7). The euphoria of the South African struggle for liberation encouraged the African masses in the 1990s to believe the time has come to be liberated from dictatorial autocrats who while promoting obscure notions of national development and stability deterred all forms of opposition. But even in South Africa, democracy is seriously threatened by misguided loyalties and a culture of silence, not least among the academics. These misguided loyalties Ramphela (1993:31) warns, is putting South Africa's newly won democracy at risk. Opposition parties wherever they exist are only genuinely concerned with replacing the gluttons at the table rather than redistribute the national cake (Nyamnjoh, 1999). This is because African leaders continue to perceive the state as the sole source of personal enrichment and reward. The leaders are apt to use political power for private ends, guided by a sort of mercenary ethos or kleptocratic instincts (Eyoh, 1995). As a result, they are reluctant to commit themselves to popular democracy, and hence with few exceptions they are least likely to concede power, more or less graciously as a result of defeat in democratic elections or adopt genuine democratic instruments (Ellis, 1994:119). Democratic participation in Africa is yet to mean respect for the ballot or a meaningful extension of the ballot to areas where ordinary people do not normally participate (Hamelink, 1995:19). Against this background, Goulbourne (1987:46), has observed that political equality in many African states has been confined to the right to vote, as autocrats have chosen to ignore the right of most of the people to be elected or to enjoy civil liberties. Ordinary people and alternative social and political organizations continue to face enormous difficulties exercising their

rights, to hold and express opinions contrary to those of the state or regimes and leaders, to assemble freely and organize within the framework of the law, to publish contrary opinions about public affairs to suggest alternative political strategies. According to Hyden (1983:19), the state remains an interfering irritant, a source of corruptly obtained advantage or a massive irrelevance for many people. The consequence of these developments have been a profound disillusionment and a growing problem of popular de-participation in the political process of most African countries (Olukoshi, 1998:28). Since multipartism seems to differ little from nonpartism and military regimes as a vehicle for establishing a truly democratic culture in Africa. In the face of repeated frustrations at elections, opposition parties have either become dupes of the ruling party, to lure them with the carrot of state patronage or have simply splintered into factions and or faded into irrelevance (Olukoshi, 1998:31).

2. The Concept of Democracy

Democracy is popularly conceptualized as government of the people, by the people and for the people. As a concept, democracy has problems of homogeneity in that it is often used in an ambiguous and inconsistent way, such that it means different things to different people; in different contexts (Ojo, 2003:15). The concept can better be examined from two points of view; that is, as ideology and as politics (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:1). Democracy as an ideology is the philosophy of governance which sets a high premium on the basic freedom or fundamental human rights of the citizens, the rule of law, the right to property, the free flow of information and the right of choice between alternative political positions. On the other hand, democracy as politics is concerned with the institutions and processes of governance that may elicit, tend to foster consensus whilst simultaneously promoting and sustaining respect for the ideology of democracy (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:1). However, democracy as conceived in the West may present an ideology of democracy that has problems for developing countries in Africa and other developing countries (Ikoku, 1992:117). As Nwabueze (1993) observed, “western democracy places people into artificial antagonistic boxes, turn friends into enemies and aims at arousing unnecessary competition”. He maintains that democratization is not only a concept, nor is it synonymous with multipartism but a concept concerned with conditions of things, conditions such as a virile society, a democratic society, a free society, a just society, equal treatment for all citizens by the state, an ordered, stable society, a society infused with the spirit of liberty, democracy, justice and equality. Democratization requires that a society, the economy, politics, the constitution of the state, the electoral system and the practice of government be democratized. Against this background, Kabira et al (1993) have argued that no society qualifies as democratic, representative and progressive until there is free and voluntary participation of all its citizens in all spheres of life. According to them, no society participating fully and meaningfully in politics are removed (Stedman, 1993:3).

2.1 Democratic Institutions and Processes

Certain institutions are fundamental for democratic processes and the sustenance of the process. These were identified by Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992:19) to include; pressure groups, political parties, the civil bureaucracy and the court system. Even though these institutions are vital for proper democratic practices, it is noteworthy that most of them were created by government, enjoy government subventions and government has virtually eaten their way into the operations and activities of these institutions. For democracy to survive, these are some fundamental processes such as: a visionary and effective executive, a committed and responsible legislative, a fearless and firm judiciary, a forthright and courageous press, an active and tolerant multipart system, and a free and fair electoral system sustained by an independent and incorruptible electoral commission (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:51).

2.2 Essential Basic Rights in a Democracy

According to Obasanjo and Mabogunje, there are certain basic rights that are essential for popular and participatory democracy. These include / economic, political, social and human rights.

a. **Economic rights;** The right to work, the right to choose one’s trade and profession and the right to participate in controlling and managing economic activities of the nation.

- b. **Political rights:** These include the right to participate in the decision making process in the country, the right to have full residence opportunities, the right to form associations and the right to equality before the law.
- c. **Social Rights:** These entails the right to free education at all levels, the right to health insurance and care, the right to safety and welfare of all citizens, and the right to equal treatment before the law.
- d. **Human rights:** These includes the right to life, to human dignity, to fair hearing, to private and family life, the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion, the right to freedom of expression and of the press, the right to peaceful assembly and association, the right to freedom from discrimination.

3. Democracy in Africa

Democracy as a concept is not new to Africa (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:11). In some African communities, the traditional system of government was relatively democratic. As Obasanjo and Mabogunje rightly observed, the political structure and processes of most pre-colonial communities within the enclave of what is present day Nigeria were relatively democratic. In Botswana, the Kothia system of native administration is reasonably democratic and participatory. In Igbo traditional society in south eastern Nigeria, there was an element of democracy in the way the people governed themselves. Onwumechili (2000) reported that the Igbos governed themselves without giving power to chiefs or kinship. Drawing a parallel between scientific western culture of democracy and the legacies of "Igbo EnweEze" which recognized "no kings or chiefs with divine knowledge". He rationalizes the "Igbo EnweEze" legacy by noting that science has no kings, just like the Igbos. In traditional Igbo communities, the people organized themselves into many independent village governments which meet periodically as the need arose to discuss and take decisions on both internal and external affairs of the village. The council might be limited to certain age grades but the assemblies were for all and sundry. Every man could and did have his say on all matters under discussion. Nobody had any special privileges because of ancestry (Onwumechili 2000). Today, the varieties of democratic governance found on the continent reflect the diverse cultural and historical antecedents and varieties of traditional governance system among the constituent nationalities (Isoba 2008:20). These varieties may not strictly conform to the realities and nature of modern democratic governance and universal standard which prescribes participation and inclusion by rotation through elections among political groups that compete to occupy positions of power in the governance process. Most of the 53 democracies on the African countries are at the infantile stage compared to western liberal democratic standard. As Isola (2008:20) observed, most of these African countries are yet to grapple with the realities and nature of modern liberal democratic governance. They are still grappling to fathom a balance between traditional political culture and the modern system of governance, hence the emergence of "Sit tight" dictators and protracted single party rules in some African countries, such as Kenya, Zaire, Ivory Coast, Zimbabwe, Uganda and Zambia. Others such as Nigeria, Ghana, Mali, Burkina Faso, etc have witnessed military rule before embarking on the path to democracy. The northern African countries have tempted to combine western style democracy with classical Islamic governance culture which does not permit complete participation of individual citizens as expounded by western democracy (Isola, 2008:24). Rather, an element of theocracy which justifies divine ascendancy of leaders into governance is much more deep rooted. In Egypt, Libya, Algeria and Sudan, four north African countries, the same leadership has been in power for almost three decades; even though elections take place occasionally to assert and legitimize the continuity of the extant leadership. There is a glimmer of hope for democracy in Africa in Southern Africa where Botswana stands out as an example of economic development, functioning governance and multiparty liberal democracy (Stedman 1993:1). The reverse is the case in Zimbabwe, Guinea Bissau and Somalia where anarchy and violence continue to reign terror on the citizens.

4. Mass Media and Democracy

The role of the media in a democracy therefore is to assist in building an environment conducive to democracy, by promoting free choice of leadership, respect for the rule of laws, by both the rulers and the ruled, social justice and equity as well as respect for human rights (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992:133). Another important role of the mass media in a democracy is to assist in the entrenchment of a political culture that allows for free and orderly succession, especially of civilian to civilian administration.

5. Objectives of the Mass Media in a Democracy

The objectives of the mass media in a democracy as suggested by Oseni (1992:133) include the following:

- i. To convey information to the people with a view to letting them know how their mandate is being discharged.
- ii. To provide a forum through which the governed could react to government policies and activities.
- iii. To provide such analysis as would enable the people secure an adequate understanding of events and background to events.
- iv. To assist in the articulation and pursuit of the national interest.
- v. To help strengthen the economic, social and political fabric of the nation.
- vi. To provide informal criticism and viable alternatives.
- vii. To monitor the performance of government with a view to preventing deviation from agreed objectives.
- viii. To provide the medium for transmitting knowledge and education to the populace.
- ix. To function as an agent of modernization.
- x. To assist in setting an agenda for priorities in national development.

Idahosa (2008:207) however warns that the role of the media in a democracy could be dysfunctional if the operators of the media are not altruistic, nationalistic, selfless, broadminded, detribalized, proactive, incorruptible and trained to be able to objectively and constructively present news and other issues to the public.

6. Theoretical Framework

The author uses the normative theories of the press as a theoretical framework for analysis. The basic assumption of the normative theories is that the press always takes the form and colouration of the structures within which it operates (Siebert et al cited in Folarin 1998:24). The four theories were the authoritarian, libertarian, social responsibility and Soviet-Communist theories. Other emergent normative theories of the press as propounded by Dennis McQuail (1987) are the Development. Media Theory and the Democratic Participant Theory. According to the Authoritarian Media Theory, the media existed to serve the government in power and are forbidden to criticize the government or its functionaries. Folarin (1998:24), citing McQuail 1987:111). The instruments of the authoritarian control of the media include repressive legislation decrees, heavy taxation, state control of staffing and production inputs, censorship, supervision of operating licenses, publication or transmission (Folarin 1998:25).

6.1. The Soviet Communist Media Theory

Like the Authoritarian theory, states that the media existed purely to service the socialist system and maintain the sovereignty of the communist party (Daramola, 2001:66).

6.2 The Democratic Participant Media Theory

Calls for greater attention to the needs, interests and aspirations of the receiver in a political society. In place of top-down, it calls for horizontal communication and a concern for feedback in socio-political communication. It recommends the associational and service modes as opposed to the command mode (Folarin, 1998:30). Under this system, the role of the media is not to serve the public but to inform it in line with what the government would want the populace to know.

6.3 The Libertarian theory

Promoted the liberalization of the media because of the belief that democratization of information followed by the individual's ability to distinguish between the right and wrong was the least way forward in the development of society. Under this theory, the people are presumed able to discern between truth and falsehood and having been exposed to a press operating as a free marketplace of ideas and information will themselves help determine public policy.

6.4 Social Responsibility Media Theory

According to the social responsibility media theory, the chief duty of the media in society is to raise conflict to a plane of discussion. In other words, the media can be used by anyone who has ideas to express, but they are forbidden to invade private rights or disrupt vital social structures or interests (Folarin 1998:27).

6.5 Development Media Theory

Places emphasis on the “right to communicate” and the need to use communication to achieve social change and better life, which is the pivot of development (Daramola, 2001:68). All these theories of the press are, not mutually exclusive because different societies combine them in different configurations as they suit that particular society (Daramola 2001:67).

7. The Mass Media and Democratic Consolidation in Africa

Democratic consolidation is the capacity of the polity to nurture and sustain democratic values over a long spell with little or no threat of abortion of the democratic experiment in all ramifications (Sartori 1992 cited in Ojo, 2003 :5). In this respect, the mass media has played a significant role in the struggle for democracy in several African countries including Nigeria (Ufuophu-Biri, 2008). In countries that have gone through autocratic and dictatorial rule (military regimes) the mass media have helped entrench democracy and cooperation between the new leaders and the citizenry through ideological persuasions that helped to legitimize the government and win the loyalty of the people (Ojo, 2003). But the efficacy of the mass media in Africa in promoting democracy has been limited from the onset by several factors. Firstly, Africa had a long colonial history without the benefit of a solid mass communication foundation that is capable of serving as the bedrock for the formation of truly independent, democratic and viable nation states. (Imoh, 1991:81). Secondly, there was no favourable national political philosophy and ideology that is anchored on egalitarianism and democratic ideals (Ojo, 2003). Thirdly, there was no reliable communication infrastructure needed for effective communication between the government and the vast majority of the people scattered over large geographical areas (Sabowale, 1989). In most African countries, there are no systematic national communication policies aimed at achieving collective national goals as expressed in the Coat of Arms. As a result, mass media messages reflected the disputations, selfish competition and conflicts among rival political elite on the one hand and between them and the mass media practitioners on the other (Ezenwa, 1989:81). Under these circumstances, the mass media often find themselves in the crossroad between globalization and the preservation of national interest and dominant culture (Isola 2008:24). Human rights studies by the Amman Centre (ACHRS) in 2006 shows that the mass media in African countries, especially northern African Islamic countries are characterized by a large dose of state intervention. The studies show that the level of freedom for media practitioners operating in Arab countries such as Egypt, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Algeria is low. In these countries, media personnel face physical harassments, threats and assault by state agents. In Somalia, a failed state where a protracted armed conflict and political crisis have rendered the state comatose, it has the worst record for providing the worst scenario for professional activities of the.. media. More journalists were killed in Somalia than in other Arab countries except for Iraq. (ACHRS Report 2001 cited in Isola (2008:26). The report revealed that Mauritania provides the best and most conducive operating environment for the African Arab media because the media are allowed enough freedom to encourage them to contribute to democratic governance. In some weak and failed states, such as Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Rwanda, the mass media reflected the environment within which they operate. The risk of operating as a journalist or media owner is high in such states, and this discourages media professionals and investors in the media, except when one aligns with the dominant political groups who may facilitate media operation in exchange for media support and patronage to sustain the ruling groups ideologies, interests or hold on to power (Isola 2008:24). An example is the 1994 Rwanda genocide where radio and some print media were used in coordinating the effort to prosecute mass murder of the Tutsi ethnic group by the Hutu dominated government forces and civilians. In Zimbabwe, another failed state, where the media refused to collaborate with the state or dominant groups to perpetuate atrocities during crisis, the media has become a victim of official repression by the state. The constant harassment of journalists and media establishments has resulted in the inability of the media to perform their role as watchdog of society (Isola, 2008:24).

8. The Mass Media and the Struggle for Democracy in Nigeria

The first recorded effort to formally use the mass media to influence society in the enclave that later metamorphosed into Nigeria was by Rev. Henry Townsend in 1859 when he began the publication of the “IweIrohin” a bilingual newspaper published in English and Yoruba languages. The objective of the newspaper was to influence the traditional governments he found in Egbaland in their idea of good governance and to educate the people as a means

of converting them into Christianity (Obasanjo, Mabogunje 1992: 144). Later, Richard Blaize an anti-colonial crusading Sierra Leonian who came into the country and promoted the use of newspapers to mobilize the population against colonial rule. Their mode of journalism was generally adversarial against the crown and this marked the beginning of the adversarial and nationalist press in Nigeria (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992:145). Albert Macaulay started the first indigenous (Nigerian) newspaper “Daily News” which he used as a weapon in the nationalist struggle. Later in 1937, Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe founded the West African Pilot which enjoyed mass circulation. Zik used the medium to promote serious broad-based anticolonial mobilization in the country. However, the convenient marriage between the press and politics broke down when Zik established the West African Pilot in 1951 with the regionalization of Nigeria, and consequent sectionalization of the press in Nigeria. Chief ObafemiAwolowo founded the Tribune in Ibadan in 1949 to promote his welfarist doctrines and champion the cause of the EgbeOmoOduduwa”. Zik’s *West African Pilot* shed its nationalists logo and fully embraced the promotion of “Eastern Nigerian” interests. The Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo” a vernacular newspaper was set in Zaria in 1930s to serve the needs of Hausa speaking groups in northern Nigeria. But in 1966, the New Nigeria was established in Kaduna by the government interests (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992:146). This divisive and sectional tendencies of the press have remained with press till today. Thus making ownership a crucial factor in determining the nationalist orientation of newspapers. The civil war between 1967-1970 briefly reunited the Nigerian press in a nationalist mobilization of a sort, but introduced some other disturbing dimensions, notably, the perception and use of the media as a propaganda instrument (Obasanjo Mobogunjo 1992:146). Successive governments in Nigeria have used the media for propaganda to support their policies and programmes, no matter what and this has resulted in the perennial conflict in media government relations because the mass media exist to exercise their watchdog function over government. The coming of private newspapers with no clear political leanings, starting with the *Punch* in the early 70s, helped somewhat to moderate the destabilizing impact of the adversarial role of those newspapers either affiliated to political parties or owned by government. The major problem with the Nigerian media after independence was that thereç has been no centralized driving force and no particular centralized view, owing chiefly to the diverse ethnic religious and linguistic groupings (Mailafiya, 1989:133). The leaders after independence used the media not to promote national interest and democratic ideals but to promote group, ethnic and institutional loyalties at the expense of the state (Yibo and Okoosi-Simbine 2003:180).

9. Problems and Challenges Facing the Mass Media in Promoting Democratic Consolidation in Africa

After independence in the 1960s, there was no favourable political philosophy and ideology among the new leaders to promote egalitarian and democratic ideals among the populace (Sadeeq 2003:248). Consequently, the marriage between politics and the media was broken by ethnic loyalties. For instance, Dr. Zik established the West African Pilot to fight for the rights of Eastern Nigeria, While ObafemiAwolowo established the Tribune at Ibadan to project the interest of the Yorubas (Obasanjo, 1992).- The unstable political and economic climate that prevailed in the 1970s and 1980s coupled with idiosyncratic media policies and laws by autocratic leaders have led to a divisive disloyal, psychopathic praise singing, conscienceless and downright corrupt mass media in Africa. As a result, the politicians are able to use the media to remain in power rather than use it for mobilizing the people for national development (Ojo, 2003). Sadeeq (2003 :248) and Edeani (1989:109) have identified factors in the African environment which constraint the effectiveness of the mass media in democratic consolidation. These include the low level of infrastructural development and essential facilities, pattern of media ownership and control, unstable socio-economic and political conditions, low level of literacy and political education, ethnicity, parochialism, unfavourable legal environment and lack of private sector involvement. Other factors include religious pluralism and military interventions as the case was in Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria, Burkina Faso, etc (Isola 2008).

9.1 Pattern of Media Ownership and Control in Africa

The prevalence of government owned media is acting as a constraint to effective performance of the media as watchdog (Isola 2008:23). The mass media in most African countries are mostly government owned. The owners perform some gatekeeping functions that are conditioned by political, parochial and economic interests. As a result, the media serve the interests of elites or the government in power at the expense of the majority. Consequently, the impact of the socialization and democratization function of the mass media are limited. This has served as a self-limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to positively champion the cause of democratic consolidation in Africa (Imoh, 1991:182). The low level of private sector partnership and participation in the media business has led to an imbalance as most media-hoti-ses -especially radio-and—television are government-owned. The implication is that journalist must toe the line of government

or be sacked by their employers. This way, the mass media is unable to monitor the activities of government (Ojo, 2003:5).

9.2 Poor Socioeconomic Situation

Poverty and democracy have an inverse relationship. In Africa, poverty is an all-consuming and multidimensional concept with multifarious causes and multidimensional effects that negatively affect the process of participatory democracy and decision making (Obasanjo, 1992:10). There are three broad types of poverty which may affect the sustenance of democracy. These are: Poverty of material wellbeing conceived as the lack of the basic necessity for the sustenance of life. Poverty of ideas among the leaders and the led resulting in lack of good judgment in supporting democratic processes in the society and Poverty of courage, typified by a situation where there is a timid citizenry very apprehensive and cautious in standing up against lapses on the part of those in power or telling the government what it has done wrong. In Africa, material poverty and the perpetual struggle for survival is overbearing and sets apathy into the practices of democracy. According to Obasanjo, when there is abject poverty, the masses are usually easily brainwashed and their rights of choice terribly manipulated. As a result, material poverty may lead to the poverty of ideas, and poverty of courage vitiates poverty of ideas especially among those the fringe of material poverty such as the members of the judiciary, the protector of human rights (Obasanjo, 1992:110). The harsh economic situation in Africa has made journalists to be vulnerable and dependent on government patronage and support. Evidently, government political parties and those in the higher socio-economic strata are the largest advertisers and this makes newspapers and electronic organizations to fall over each other. And this hinders the freedom of the mass media to criticize the government as criticism of government will send a newspaper, radio, or television station out of business (Ojo, 2003). The extent of economic improvement of the contingent could minimize the dependence of the media on government patronage and this would go a long way in expanding the ability of the media to curtail the excesses of the government and the ruling class (Isola, 2008:22).

9.3. Poor Infrastructure and Facilities

Most countries in Africa, South of the Sahara still carry the burden of irregular power supply to their urban and village communities and this has seriously impeded the usefulness of the electronic media, especially television. Consequently, most of the citizens are not aware of what is happening in their communities, including the government policies and programmes that are being implemented. Poor transport conditions and seasonal accessibility to some remote, arid or riverine areas make access to rural areas difficult for newspaper circulation, especially community newspapers which are fastly becoming elitist and merchantilistic (Sobowale 1989). Low level of technological development, and shortage of well trained mass communicators, have affected the quality of programming, production and transmission. The result is that most programmes lacked serious informational, educational and developmental content and their message signals did not travel far and wide enough for clear reception by the diverse audience. Many disenchanted literate urban and semi-rural dwellers have acquired dysfunctional communication gadgets such as video tapes, cable television, (DSTV, TV Africa) television games and other cheap popular entertainment gadgets that could divert the people from paying attention to more serious local messages that affect their lives and their communities (Sobowale, 1988).

9.4. Ethnic and Parochial Loyalties

Democracy relies on divergence of interests and opinions to survive in pluralistic societies. In Africa, however, the pattern of horizontal and vertical segmentation among the multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual societies has given rise to familism, parochialism and chauvinism in the body polity (Imoh 2008). This segmentation has served as a self limitation on the growth of the state and made it difficult for the mass media to effectively champion the cause of democracy. In Nigeria, for instance, the Tribune represents the Yoruba interest, the *New Nigerian*, the northern interests while the *West African Pilot* was used by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe to promote the sociopolitical interests of Eastern Nigeria (The Ibos). (Obasanjo and Mabogunje 1992). The conflicting interests between ethnicity, politics and religion on the one hand and politics on the other hand has made the media and journalists victims of the endemic chauvinism, parochialism and sectionalism that now characterizes the media in Africa, most especially Nigeria.

9.5. Unconducive Legal Environment

The African environment has not been conducive for the mass media to promote democratic ideals among the people, because the laws and constitutions of the land have not allowed unhindered access to information by journalists, so as to promote accountability and transparency by government and public servants. Unfortunately many countries in Africa including Nigeria and a majority of the Arab states have failed to entrench press freedom in their constitution. For instance, Nigeria is yet to pass the Freedom of Information Bill. The legal mechanisms that could aid access to information in government institutions are not in place. (Isola, 2008:27). Several media establishments and journalists have been maltreated by the governments in power in several African countries for publishing the truth that puts the government in bad light. In Nigeria, for instance, the Zamfara state government fired the managing director of the state owned newspaper, Mallam Bashir SandaGasau for criticizing President Musa Yar'Adua (Vanguard August 18thp.18). Similarly the National Broadcasting Commission suspended Channels Television license leading to the closure of channels television office in Lagos and Abuja and the arrest and detention of 5 members of staff of the organization. This was as a result of a broadcast report purportedly originating from the News Agency of Nigeria that President Musa Yar'Adua may resign on health grounds (Vanguard September 18th2008, P.1). In Egypt, the level of freedom for media practitioners is low. Journalists are constantly facing constant physical harassment, threat and assault by state agents. The same scenario exists in Algeria, Sudan, India, Morocco and Libya because there is no freedom of information law which could enhance media access to public information (Isola, 2008:26). Nigeria just recently passed the Freedom of Information Bill, thereby enhancing media access to public information and promoting accountability and transparency by government and public servants. However, the commitment of African government to liberalize media access to public information has been limited by the lack of growth of community media in Africa (Isola, 2008:28). Apart from few countries in Southern Africa, (Botswana, South Africa, Malawi, Namibia) and some countries in West Africa (Ghana, Senegal, MalY'etc) the licensing process for community radio has been inhibited. Partly due to the rising wave of religious fanaticism, ethnic militias, international team/group, that can destabilize the state using radio.

9.6. Military Interventions in Politics

In the event of a coup, the mass media are the first victims. In Nigeria, Ghana, Uganda, Burkina Faso and Guinea Bisau, the military has disrupted democratically elected regimes and taken over the reigns of government. According to Obasanjo and Mabogunje (1992:183), several years of military rule have militarized the civilians just as the soldiers have become part of the varying indisciplined masses of citizens with warped values about democracy and national development. The military tend to relegate accountability to the background in their discharge of national assignments, and this has brought them into conflict with the media, the watchdog of society.

9.7. Religious Pluralism

Africa is a mulireligious continent and religion has been a source of stress to democracy in many African countries including Nigeria. Even though religion and democracy are neither antithetical nor mutually exclusive there are practices that are rampant in Nigeria and some Arab states such as religious fanaticism, aggressive proselytization and social insensitivity, intolerance, exclusivity, bigotry, competing claims of superiority of one religion over others have created a "we" and "they" syndrome that tend to undermine the growth of true democratic culture and the sustenance of democratic values and norms. In some cases, the mass media has taken sides in handling reports and comments about religion and this has further aggravated the crises (Obasanjo and Mabogunje, 1992:174).

9.8. Inadequate Training of Journalists

The mass media on their own cannot design and produce messages or programmes on democracy, only journalists do. There is a yawning gap in the capacity of media personnel to design and produce political education programmes on democracy, its basic tenets and principles so that the masses can be empowered to checkmate the politicians and monitor the process and outcome of democratic consolidation in African states. The schools of journalism need to integrate democratic concepts into their curricula to sensitize and empower journalists in training.

10. Prospects for the Future

The most crucial factors for the sustenance of democratic governance in Africa would consist of the enthronement of a popular sovereignty that touches the daily lives of the populace, gives meaning to the notion of citizenship, and goes beyond the constitutionally defined form of rule (Olukoshi 1998:38), for democracy can only survive in the continent if and when it becomes a lived experience that is worth defending. Political affairs and social life should be organized and conducted in such a way that allows for effective access to decision making for all and sundry and for an equitable distribution of the fruits of democracy among the various social groups and strata in society. As Berman (1998:339) rightly observed, most of Africa has failed to develop a culture of commonwealth and public interest that transcends ethnicity and is grounded in universalistic norms and the essential relations of social trust in the disinterested competence and probity of millions of unknown and unseen others. Against this background, Wiredu (1997:308-311) has suggested that Africans revisit the idea of “consensual democracy” as a possible solution to stalling majoritarian democracy. Consensual democracy as practiced in the traditional Ashanti system was by the consent and subject to the control of the people as expressed through their representatives. Thus while majoritarian democracy might be based on consent without consensus, the Ashanti system and the “IgboEnweEze Legacy” (Onwucheli, 2000) in South Eastern Nigeria, ensured that consent was negotiated on the principle of consensus. Popular democracy requires responsible leaders and enlightened followers who recognize the correlation between democratic practices and socioeconomic development that focuses on the social welfare of the people, reinforces political and cultural pluralism, emphasizes democratic accountability, guarantees the protection of human and peoples’ rights and ensures representation for competing interests in the political process (Olukoshi, 1998:34-3 5).

11. Summary

The role of the media in the consolidation of Democracy in any particular country is facilitative, supportive and determined by the nature of the society itself. To be effective, the media need an enabling environment. Since most media establishments are government owned and controlled by politicians with political biases and leanings, the involvement and participation of the private sector and civil society organizations would go a long way in achieving a balance. In carrying out their functions, the media must not be merely a mirror of society, passively reporting events. They must act as the watchdog of society and the instigators of positive change. But to effectively perform these roles, the media should be independent and given a free hand to perform within the ethics of their profession even when they are owned by private individuals, the government and non-governmental. The media must also operate in a responsible manner, by exercising a strong sense of fair play and a deep respect for truth in the handling of news and opinions. Above all, the media must operate an effective system of self-monitoring and self-supervision.

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- ✓ Ag. Head of Department, Mass Communication with effect from February 2012 – February 2013.
- ✓ Associate Dean, Faculty of the Social Sciences with effect from March 2013.
- ✓ Member, Organizing Committee and Chairman Publicity Sub-Committee for the 1st and 2nd International Conferences organized by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka. November 2006 and June 2009.
- ✓ Teaches Postgraduate Diploma and Masters Degree courses in Communication Management.
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 - **2010**
 - ✓ International Conference on Homeland Security and Development. Organized by Faculty of Social Sciences, Delta State University Abraka. No. 2010.

 - **2009**
 - ✓ International Conference of the African Council on Communication Education Held in University of Legon, Ghana. August, 2009.
 - ✓ International Conference on Research and Development in Africa. University of Benin, Nov. 2009.
 - ✓ International Conference on Millennium Development Goals. Faculty of Social Sciences, Delta State University, Abraka.
 - **Paper Presented:**
 - ✓ Development Communication and Dependency Relationships in Africa’s Rural Development.
 - ✓ Bilingual Communication in a Multinational Society: Problems of English Language Learning in Nigeria.

 - **Year 2007**
 - **International Conference on Communication and Development**
 - University of Ibadan (Nov. 2007)
 - **Paper Presented**
 - Knowledge, Awareness, Attitudes, Behaviours, Practices and Problems of Urban Out of School in Relation to Sex, Condom Use, STDs and HIV Prevention in Nigeria. (*Award for best paper presentation*)
 - **NATIONAL CONFERENCES ATTENDED**
 - **Year 2008:**

- **National (AGM) Conference of the ACCE) Nigeria Chapter, Held at Delta State University, Abraka.**
- **Paper Presented**
- A critical examination of the role of the mass media in the management of the Warri, interethnic conflict in 2009.
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- ✓ Co-Editor – Book of Readings on the Proceedings of the 2009 International Conference. Millennium Development Goals: Issues on Gender, Women, Poverty and Development.
- ✓ Contribution of a Chapter on the GST Book on Conflict Studies (Faculty of the Social Sciences, 2008). “The Role of Regional and Multinational Organizations in Peace Prevention and Resolution in Africa.
- ✓ Assistant Editor: Journal of Communication and Media Research (2009).
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