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**GOOD GOVERNANCE AND MEDIA OWNERSHIP IN NIGERIA: DILEMMATIC PRACTICES, STOIC CHALLENGES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Discourses on democracy in Africa often revolve around the relevance of Western democracy to African nations given the region's peculiar socio-economic and cultural conditions (Ezeani, 2013). In many African countries, evidence abounds of the absence of democratic dividends, an indicator of the apparent failure of liberal democracy in the region. The media as the fourth estate of the realm is often seen, albeit idealistically, as being positioned to rise above democratic failures and, in its watchdog roles, to work towards the enthronement of good governance. Unfortunately, in Nigeria, the environment within which the media operates vis-à-vis the ownership structures has continuously posed stoic challenges to its expected roles. The result is continuous dilemmatic practices, whereby the media's position as bastion of democracy is consistently negotiated. This article, with exemplars from the Nigerian media scene over the years, x-rays the stoic challenges which media ownership poses to Nigerian society as the nation works towards development through good governance. It argues that ownership patterns, pressures and politics continue to challenge the consistent and committed role of the media in deepening our march towards good democratic governance. The article, however, concludes that rather than heaping the blame on the media, one could more safely return a verdict of collective responsibility – viewing the failings of the media within the larger context of the failings of the social system in which the media are embedded. Such thinking invariably points to the fact that various stakeholders other than the media have a role to play in enthroning good governance in the Nigerian polity.*

**Keywords:** *good governance, development, media ownership, Nigeria, democracy, challenges*

## **I. Setting the Scene**

The triumphant return of democracy to Nigeria in 1999, after the experience of a military authoritarian regime many years after independence, has ironically failed to fulfill the aspirations of the people (Kumar, 2005, p. 374). Today the country has celebrated her 53 years of independence, but there is still a feeling of hopelessness, lack of direction, lack of vision and dissatisfaction in the nation. The 14-year old democratic opening has failed to address the many challenges that have bedeviled and continue to confront Nigerian life. These are the ethnic, communal and religious sectarianism, the Boko Haram terrorist uprising, the breakdown of social, political and economic institutions of governance, the neglect and lack of security of lives and property, the over-concentration of the economy on oil and the attendant ripples, the low and pitiable standard of living especially for the majority of the masses, the dilapidation and lack of physical infrastructures, and the lack of quality and people-centered leadership in all spheres, amongst others. The feeling of what Kumar (2005) has called "Afro-optimism," a massive upsurge witnessed in the aftermath of the "third wave of democratization" and 'second liberation' (p. 374), seems to have been punctured amidst the deep seated divisions inherent in Nigeria's body politic. As Agozino (2009) would further observe:

The inability of the democratic policies taken on by the democratic leaders in Nigeria to contribute to the transformation of the lives of ordinary people is down to the point made by Ake: they are elite focused and mainly urban-based programs that do not impact the lives of majority rural dwellers – they serve the purpose of maintaining the neo-colonial status of the country under imperialism. (p. 569)

This Nigerian situation is pretty much the same as in many other African countries, where the ideals of modern liberal democracy are touted to be practised and which were sold to us by the

West. Nwauwa (2005) recounts that "Western efforts in African democratization seem to be all about hegemony and the spread of Western culture as part of globalization." He further argues that "democracy is... misused and abused in relation to Africa..." Nwauwa's contention is that prior to the introduction of Western liberal democracy in Africa, African countries practised their own indigenous democracies because:

Inherent in pre-colonial African traditional political systems were democratic values and mechanisms for checks and balances that were disrupted, however, by the consequent European colonization. The main problem with Western-sponsored democracy and democratization is that they tend to be culturally biased and insensitive to indigenous political initiatives. (Nwauwa, 2005)

Magbadelo (2003) also notes that "Africa's recent experiment with democracy is a result of the developments in Eastern Europe and the pressure on Africa's dictatorial regimes by western donor countries to begin democratization" (p. 149). With such a flawed democratic background, it is not surprising then that the Western-styled democracy most African countries have patronized has yielded not much of a positive impact on these African nations, including Nigeria. The resultant ripple effect is that, as Magbadelo (2003) points out, "democratic governance in much of Africa is more of a departure from established practice" (p. 149). It comes as no surprise then that for decades now, discourses on Africa, African media and issues of governance portray Africa as still 'coming up' on the global democracy agenda. This reality under the weight of our chequered history: colonialism, apartheid, struggle for independence, military rule, underdevelopment and a miscellany of others. Adetula (2011) writes:

It is generally acknowledged that the failure of democracy in many societies is due essentially to weak democratic structures and underdeveloped political institutions. The weak

governance environment in Africa is characterized by underdeveloped institutions of democratic accountability, and this situation presents an extraordinarily high risk for democracy. Indeed, there is a fear that this trend could undermine the foundations of democratic transition. (p. 13)

Adetula's fears seem to be well-founded as there has been a clarion call for another type of governance in Africa, other than the currently practised liberal democracy. Ezeani (2013) has called it "Cooperative Collegial Democracy" where he argues for a new form of democracy – a "democracy without tears." While it is not our aim to argue that African countries should evolve their own democratization process to counteract the Western liberal democracy that has not been able to work for them, it is our belief that Africa need to hasten its pace in development and the pursuit of the ideals of good governance. In all this, the role of the media inevitably comes into play since communication is fundamental to development (Ekwelie, 1996, p. 6) and the media have become the most influential communication platform in the modern world (Agba, 2002, p. 248). African media are among the forces that have shaped and continue to define the establishment of democracy in Africa following the triumph of democratic forces in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Tettey, 2001). However, one certainly recognizes that the media do not operate in a vacuum. Much as they are powerful in society, their performance is conditioned by certain social structures in which they are embedded. Among these is ownership which is popularly believed to be of direct and decisive impact on how much the media are able to rise above narrow sentiments in advancement of common goals. This situation is a reality in Nigeria.

## **II. Nigeria: The Media Role and the Veracities of the Good Governance Model**

Good governance is a vexed concept which exact meaning has apparently defied consensus among scholars. Definitions of various dimensions – political, generic and academic – have been

given by various sources, each definition tending towards a particular bias. Good governance is seen as a normative concept; an evaluative category relating to how well the affairs of a people, particularly a state, have been managed. In an ideal sense, good governance will produce desirables like "common good," "equality," and "social justice" among such other dividends. The conceptual and applicatory dilemma of "good governance" has been encapsulated in the question: "What is the 'good' in good governance?" (Idahosa, 2006, p. 67).

Ideally, and in the modern context, the idea of good governance has been associated with democracy; hence its gaining popularity among liberal democratic states and theorists. It has been a key concept for democratic development in many countries around the world during the past few decades. United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNESCAP (2009) states that "Good governance is an indeterminate term used in development literature to describe how public institutions conduct public affairs and manage public resources in order to guarantee the realization of human rights." The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) comprehensive policy document (1997) sees good governance as "characterised by participation, the rule of law, effectiveness and efficiency, transparency (built on the free flow of information), responsiveness, consensus orientation, equity, accountability, and strategic vision." While there may not have been a generally accepted definition of the concept of good governance, what may have become clear from the foregoing is that good governance is governance that enhances individual and common development in all relevant dimensions. It is a negation of corruption, lack of accountability, mediocrity, favouritism, abuse of human rights and press freedom and all such phenomena that tend to undermine human progress in society.

We look at Nigeria and wonder how she measures up with the realities of the good governance ideals. Rating Nigeria's human rights index for 2012, Amnesty International, notes:

Nigeria's human rights situation deteriorated. Hundreds of people were killed in politically motivated, communal and sectarian violence across the country, particularly after the April elections. Violent attacks attributed to the religious sect Boko Haram increased, killing more than 500 people. The police were responsible for hundreds of unlawful killings, most of which remained un-investigated. The justice system remained ineffective. Around two thirds of all prison inmates were still awaiting trial. There were 982 people on death row. No executions were reported. Forced evictions continued throughout the country, and violence against women remained rife. (Amnesty International, 2012)

Given such a scenario presented of Nigeria, expectations of the media in contributing to the attainment of good governance have become highly accentuated, and continue to be a great subject of interest. The media keep both the government and the citizenry informed as well as being saddled with the duty of a watchdog role in all aspects of governance, and recognized as "the policing institution over the fundamental objectives and direct principles of state policy as well as the citizen's Fundamental Rights" (Oyovbaire, 2001). In a country like Nigeria, ensuring a responsive and responsible government is tough, and continually creates dilemmas for the media practitioners, as the government employs various measures to make the media conform to its whims and caprices. Complementary to the above role is the media's role in mobilising the citizenry. Governance is a coin with two sides; the leaders and the led – neither of which can exist without the other. In other words, active participation of the citizenry is required for governance to be effective (Idahosa, 2006, p. 4; Kukah, 1997, p. 13). It is also the media that set the social agenda and it is on their platform that the discussions arising from the agenda are held.

So the duty lies on the media to exploit their overwhelming communicative strength to ensure regular and efficient flow of information from the domain of power to the domain of followership and within the latter.

### **III. The Development Media Theory**

Cognisant of the above outlined role of the media in engendering good governance in Nigeria, this argument could be located within Development Media theory. The theory, which emerged in the 1980s, came as a result of what was believed to be a widening gap noticeable between the developed and developing countries. The classical theories of authoritarianism, libertarianism, soviet unionism and others were found to be more applicable to the developed Western democracies and not to their developing and underdeveloped counterparts. One of the salient and fundamental tenets of the development media theory according to McQuail (2010) is that media should accept and carry out positive development tasks in line with nationally established policy. The primary goal is to use the press to serve the general good of a nation by making the media function as government instruments for achieving economic growth, political stability, national sovereignty, and cultural development (Okunna, & Omenugha, 2012). The theory is reputed to be peculiar to the developing nations who aspire to achieve various developmental needs.

Unfortunately, the tenets of this theory seem to have turned the media in these developing nations to mere megaphones of their owners who could be the government or private people who often have some form of political, ethnic or religious leanings. Many times the press merely claim to serve the national interest, a term that has become loosely used in Nigeria. Kukah (1996) warns that we should be wary of this term for "the reality however for nearly all postcolonial states is that the emerging elite has had no problems collapsing national interests with its own personal, selfish interests" (p. 136). Given the political scenario in Nigeria, the

distinction between the state and those who control it becomes blurred. This Nigerian situation and other similar situations across Africa, clearly negate the principles of the development media theory. Continually, media in Nigeria face the dilemma of whose interest to serve – that of the public or that of its ‘masters.’

#### **IV. The Dilemma of Media Ownership: An Overview**

Ownership in relation to the media refers to the proprietorship rights which someone, a group of persons or an institution, exercises over a media establishment. These rights are weighty and far reaching and encompass the power to determine the corporate policy, editorial slant, content and workforce of such media establishment. In the immediate sense, media ownership confers the power of the ultimate gatekeeper under whose auspices other parties in the gate-keeping chain operate. In the remote sense, it confers power of decision making in the political and socio-economic realms of the society. Little wonder media ownership is a much coveted privilege with governments, institutions and individuals scrambling to grab it or at least determine who grabs it and how he/she uses it.

The impact which media ownership has on the operation of the media is decisive. It is based on the commonsense assumption that he who pays the piper calls the tune. The owner of a media house can hire and fire reporters and editors, and here lies the ultimate source of what has become known as ‘ownership pressure’ in media ethics. In a more direct tone, Okunna (2003), argues that "the publisher of a newspaper, for instance, could pressurise an editor to write an editorial in a particular way, or even request the editor to publish a ‘canned’ editorial written by the publisher or his or her surrogate" (p. 89). Jika (1984) notes that media independence starts where the fundamental interests of the owners ends. According to him, "the whole noise about



press freedom is nothing but a hoax, a farce, a propaganda policy being branded by the ruling class to hoodwink the gullible masses" (as cited in Ezeah, 2005, p. 141).

In Nigeria ownership of the mass media therefore is an issue which has generated a great deal of public attention and heated debate (Edeani, 1990, p. 19). Similarly, Ezeah (2005) agrees that media ownership and control is a controversial issue in the social and political discourse, especially when it is placed against a democratic system. In Nigeria, since the birth of democracy, several clarion calls have gone out on the need for the media to live up to its fundamental functions of informing, educating, entertaining and indeed in playing its 'watchdog' 'crusade dog' and 'guard dog' roles over the government and the citizens. However, in the effective performance of these essential and sensitive roles, issues such as patterns of ownership of the media in question could be a huge determining factor.

The constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Section 36, Subsection 11) makes it explicitly clear that "every person shall be entitled to establish and operate any medium for the dissemination of ideas and opinion..." Consequently, in Nigeria three main typologies of media ownership exist: ownership by government, ownership by private persons/institutions and co-ownership by government and private persons. Though Moehler and Singh (2011) contend that "there are strong reasons to expect that citizens in new democracies would place considerably more trusts in private media organisations than in public ones," and that "government-owned media in Africa have a history of subservience to authoritarian regimes" (p. 276) our review below will show that the challenge of ownership is both a burden for not just the government-owned media but also for privately-owned media in Nigeria.

## **V. Media Ownership versus Good Governance in Nigeria: Recurring Trends**

As in any other clime, the influence of ownership on media operation is absolutely real in Nigeria. As a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-party nation, the differences arising in these states are continually played out in the media. Since the press is critical to good governance, this trend would naturally have some impact on good governance in the country. We take a general look on some trends marking the relationship between media ownership and good governance in Nigeria and show how ethnic, religious affiliation and political interests have remained stoic challenges for media practice in Nigeria.

#### *A. Influence of Ethnic and Religious Affiliation*

From the very beginning, ethnic and religious sentiment has been a key variable in the Nigerian political equation whose impact has been decisive and continuous. Obviously, not even the domain of mass communication is immune from this contagion of ethno-religious frenzy. The ethnic and religious affiliation of an owner appears to have continually influenced recruitment, editorial policy and audience base of media houses. From a historical standpoint, Adedeji (2009) comments on this fact as follows:

The role of ethno-regional sentiments in shaping the content of our national discourse has always remained too visible to be ignored. The press itself has not been left out. From the onset, in the earliest era of our post-independence press, this scenario has made itself clear. *The West African Pilot, Nigeria Tribune* and *New Nigerian* have all shown undisguised signs of ethno-regional bias in their handling of national issues. The owners of these papers wielded significant political power in their respective regions; they were equally popular among their peoples, and their papers thus served as a platform for reinforcing ethno-regional interests and solidarity as well as consolidating their regional powers and influence. (p. 56)

To better drive home our point on the impact of the ownership's ethno-religious affiliation on the capacity of the press to engender good governance, we consider two notable cases as follows:

*1. Case One: The Danish Cartoon Crisis*

Early in 2006, a fully fledged crisis erupted in Maiduguri, North of Nigeria, dominantly Muslim, over a cartoon in a Danish newspaper that allegedly discredited Prophet Mohammed. The crisis spread to other parts of the country, notably Onitsha in the eastern part of Nigeria. In a study conducted by Okunna and Omenugha (2008), the researchers examined the *New Nigerian* newspaper owned by the governments of the 19 northern states and *Daily Champion* owned by Chief Emmanuel Iwuanyanwu, a paper considered to be dedicated to the cause of the Easterners, mostly inhabited by the Igbo Christians. They found that both newspapers were more interested in reporting "their own side of the stories."

Both newspapers failed to bring out the senselessness of the supposed cause of the crises, but suggested the 'wrong' done to "their people." The message is clear: "we are different." The constancy with which the media in the country use potentially divisive words like 'northerners', 'easterners', 'kinsmen', 'our people', etc may also be instructive here. Thus, the press which should set a proper agenda for discussion of such a serious national issue becomes enmeshed in ethno-religious bias and 'kith-and-kin' journalism.

*2. Case Two: The Hausa-Yoruba Ethnic Clash*

One of the notable ethno-religious crises that have visited Nigeria since the birth of the Fourth Republic is the Hausa-Yoruba clash of 2002. The *New Nigerian* and the *Punch* newspapers are the focus here. The *New Nigeria* as explained before leans towards the Northern Hausa interest, while the *Punch* is seen as a Yoruba newspaper. Analyzing the press reports of the ethnic crisis, Omenugha (2004) concludes that the newspapers were interested not in reporting the news as it

was, the events as they occurred, but to reconstruct them in manners that tended to serve the ethnic interests of their respective ownerships. The tragedy here is that the principles of good governance are the least thought of as the media grapple with these challenges arising from ownership and government control.

### *B. Influence of Political Interest/Affiliation*

The political aspiration and affiliation of a media owner is a critical factor in the way the media perform their role in Nigeria. Some media owners are into active politics, while others are not. Those into active politics naturally have known political affiliation, ideology and aspiration, while those who are not may, however, have some vested interest in the political domain given the link between the political sphere and the media sphere. The two require each other for growth and sustenance (Nwosu, 1993, p. 34). Thus, Petley (2004) argues that "the relationship between journalists and politicians, is in fact much more collusive than either side would like to admit, and has become even more so with the growth of media into ever more vast corporate entities."

It is against this backdrop that politics constitutes a critical force in the relationship between good governance and media ownership. The owner's political affiliation cum interest may overwhelm the media's capacity to play the impartial umpire in political relations, which naturally are critical to good governance. We briefly examine a number of cases to demonstrate this paradigm.

#### *1. Case One: Eastern Regional Crisis of 1953*

One of the most consequential political crises ever recorded in Nigeria was what has become popularly regarded as the Eastern Regional Crisis of 1953. Though about three decades old, the event is still worthy of mention as it culminated in the partisan press that has remained endemic in Nigeria today. It was one remarkable incident that led to the dissolution of the Eastern

Regional House of Assembly. The popular belief is that the crisis was precipitated by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (foremost Nigerian nationalist). This was credited to his return to the Eastern part of Nigeria in search of political relevance after he had suffered a political disaster in Western Nigeria following the incident where most of his party loyalists switched to the Action Group (AG) after they had been elected into the Western House on the platform of the NCNC party. This left Azikiwe, who would have become the Regional Premier on account of his party's majority seats, turning an opposition leader overnight. Having arrived in the East, where Professor Eyo Ita, a politician of Ibibio tribe was sitting as the Premier, Azikiwe began to plot his recovery agenda. Achebe (1983) recounts what follows thus:

Using his privately owned newspapers (*West African Pilot*, *Nigerian Spokesman*, *Eastern Nigerian Guardian* and *Southern Nigerian Defender*) and political muscle, Azikiwe maligned and forced Eyo Ita and his team out of office and proceeded to pack his own cabinet with primary school teachers, ex-police corporals, sanitary inspectors and similar highly motivated disciples who were unlikely to dispute anything he said. So the rule of mediocrity from which we suffer today received an early *imprimatur in Eastern Nigeria, of all places!* ... [This event] contributed to the suspicion of the majority Igbo felt by their minority neighbours in Eastern Nigeria... and from which the Igbo have continued to reap enmity to this day. (pp. 58-59)

On the role played by the *West African Pilot* in particular in achieving this supposedly selfish political agenda, Onyia (1997) writes that "it was indeed sad watching the highly respected *West African Pilot* newspaper becoming an instrument for the sheer vicious propaganda that finally led to the collapse of the Eastern House of Assembly" (p. 34). To Achebe (1983), the agenda which the press used to achieve "was unnecessary, selfish and severely damaging in its

consequences" (p. 58). Thus, we have a typical case of the media promoting the political interest of the owner while sacrificing common interest (good governance) at the altar of selfish agenda of the proprietor.

### *2. Case Two: Jim Nwobodo versus C. C. Onoh*

In the build-up to the general elections of 1983, which ushered in the second administration of the Second Republic, a serious political battle ensued between the incumbent governor of old Anambra State, Jim Nwobodo of the Nigerian National Party (NPP) and C. C. Onoh of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN). NPP had access to state media, being the party in power in the state while Onoh, who belonged to the party that was in power at the federal level, had access to the federal government-owned media. The war of words was intense between the two politicians as each attempted to outsmart the other in the contest for a better public image ahead of the oncoming polls. The role of the state government media was described as "shamelessly biased in the way it desperately sought to idolise the governor while unscrupulously painting his opponent black ... C. C. Onoh was only too fortunate to have the services of the federal government-owned Nigeria Television Authority to air his replies and counter-accusations" (Onyia, 1997, p. 56). This situation represents a typical case of the media failing in their duty as an impartial umpire as a result of ownership pressure. It is to be noted that the journey towards good governance begins with elections where the citizens make choice of those they believe have what it takes to provide them good governance. When the media therefore fail to objectively inform the citizens for prudent voting decisions, they are by implication frustrating good governance from the very beginning.

### *3. Case Three: Senator Chris Anyanwu versus PDP*

A more recent case similar to the above happened in Imo State during the 2011 general elections in Nigeria. Senator Christine Anyanwu, having been elected into the Senate on the platform of the People's Democratic Party (PDP), wanted to run for a second term under the same party. When however, she could not get the party ticket (as the ticket had rather gone to her contender, Kema Chikwe) she defected to the All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) which gave her its ticket. Then the battle line was drawn between her and the PDP for the occupation of the Owerri Senatorial District seat in the next legislative year. Not unexpectedly, this battle was taken to the media where the gladiators engaged in a war of words. Being the ruling party in the state then, the People's Democratic Party had the privilege of employing Imo Broadcasting Corporation while Senator Anyanwu employed her own Hot FM radio station. It was "indeed a dirty war as the two media houses sought to run down the opponents of their respective owners. No doubt, the listener must have been embarrassed on some of the occasions when the language became so uncouth and demoralising" (Emezie, 2011, p. 12). As in the last mentioned case, the media, owing to the owners' political interest/affiliation, reneged on their duty of enhancing good governance in proactive terms through helping the citizens make the right choice.

## **VI. The Verdict**

From these exemplars that span over the years, can one rightly say that the media in Nigeria has failed to rise above the constraints of ownership to efficiently execute its role vis-à-vis good governance in Nigeria? Apparently, this would prove a difficult question to answer given the usual complexity inherent in social relations such as represented by the "media ownership-good governance linkage". However, one may still go a step further to ask: Can the Nigerian media possibly rise above its ownership in the first place? Admittedly, the possibility of this feat appears far-fetched based on the overriding powers which ownership naturally confers.

Experience shows that not even the so-called free press of the Western world has attained this feat. For instance, both the BBC and VOA are known to be influenced, to varying extents, by the interests of their respective government owners (Ojobor, 2002, p. 8). Similarly, their private counterparts are many a time found to compromise objectivity in the course of pandering to their owners' interests (Badgikian, 1983; Gilens, & Hertzman, 2000; Meier, n.d.; Petley, 2004).

Against this background, one understands why it may be too harsh to hastily brand the Nigerian media as un-performing because they are influenced by their respective ownership. At the same time this is not to be seen as justifying undue ownership influence on the media given the serious danger it poses to efficient media practice (Okunna, 2003, p. 83). However, the dynamics underpinning the relationship between the media and their ownership on one hand and between them and the society on the other must be clearly understood for one to appreciate the extent of the problem at hand. The media is part of the larger social system, and hence is condemned to all forms of influences from this system (Sassen, 2002, p. 365). While traditionally, the media has been saddled with such lofty responsibilities as being the societal watchdog, the voice of the voiceless, etc., radical media thinking, a later tendency in media scholarship has identified how deeply entangled the media are in the intricacies of the politico-economic life of the society which highly compromises their independence. Within this paradigm, scholars have agreed on how fundamentally the political and economic interests of media owners have increasingly defined journalistic values in the contemporary times (Badgikian, 1983; McChesney, 1989; Petley, 2004).

Therefore, rather than heaping the blame on the media, one could more safely return a verdict of "collective responsibility," that is, viewing the failings of the media within the larger context of the failings of the entire social system. In other words, it would be more reasonable and



helpful if we chose to see the shortcomings of the media as a reflection of the shortcomings of the larger society in which the media are embedded. The ownership patterns and their intricacies are part of the social system, and together with other social forces, they condition the role and performance of the media within society. Imbued with this insight, we may now proceed to explore some possible solutions to the challenges posed by media ownership to good governance in Nigeria.

## **VII. Addressing the Challenges of Media Ownership to Good Governance: Lessons for Nigeria**

Given the complexity of the present situation, it will be indeed superfluous to imagine that a meaningful solution could be attained by merely sermonising that the media should take up the challenge of asserting their independence vis-à-vis ownership pressure. Rather, a more holistic solution – that will touch the root of the problem by taking into account the contributions of all relevant stakeholders in the media business – could be much more preferable.

### *A. At the Level of the General Society*

At the level of the general society, government has a lot to do in the area of press freedom. Greater freedom for the press will tend to motivate reporters and editors of government-owned media houses to work with less fear of the owners' wrath. Similarly, the owners of the private media will have less need to restrain their staff in the fear of offending the government of the day. One will not quickly forget how owners of media houses in Nigeria kept their editors under the pressure of "treading softly" in the face of the hostilities of the successive governments, especially during the military regime. Again, the urgency of abrogating all legislation antagonistic to press freedom as well as implementing the newly enacted Freedom of Information Act 2011 is critical here. In regard to the government-owned media houses, the

nation may be better off copying some international models and domesticating such in the nation. For example, British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) has a Royal Charter which fixes the government grant to the station thus removing from the government the power to determine the amount to allocate to the station annually (Baldson, 2010). This arguably might increase the editorial independence of the media. In general terms, there is the need to strengthen the institutional framework for implementation of press freedom in the country to address all possible loopholes over the years observed (Ademola, 2006, p. 99). Another dimension to this is that the government and the society in general could work towards creating more alternative mass communication platforms such as community media. These will serve as checks to the overbearing tendencies of the owners of the mainstream media houses. By such devolution of the power of media control in the country, a more democratised mass communication culture will be nurtured while the damaging impact of ownership will become gradually weakened.

#### *B. At the Level of the Media Professional Bodies*

The media professional bodies like the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), Nigerian Guild of Editors (NGE), Newspaper Proprietors Association of Nigeria (NPAN) and the Nigerian Press Council (NPC), being the custodian of journalistic values, definitely have some roles to play in addressing the challenges of media ownership to good governance in the country. The Nigerian Press Organisation (comprising NUJ, NGE and NPAN) could serve as a valuable platform for journalists and editors to meet face-to-face with their proprietors for useful exchange on this perennial problem. Such regular communication could go a long way in bringing about consensus as to what is acceptable and what is not vis-à-vis the relationship between the professionals and the owners of their media houses.

The NUJ and the NGE may take up the task of sensitizing their members on the need for asserting their independence. Ademola (2006) notes that what we refer to ownership influence does not always reflect the will of media owners "as on many occasions some editors and journalists go to ridiculous extents to impress their employers even when these employers are indifferent, and at times even to the degree of embarrassing them" (p. 23). Sensitization or even sanctioning by the professional bodies may help in addressing the challenge. Importantly, the NUJ as a trade union has been known to have employed pressure in advancing the interest of members from time to time. For instance, there have been cases of where the union has closed down and picketed media houses on account of their failing to meet their responsibilities to their employees. Such energy could also be directed towards pressuring media owners to concede some decent degree of independence to their workers.

#### *C. At the Level of Individual Media Houses*

Notwithstanding the obvious difficulty in engineering a change in the ownership-employees relationship at the level of individual media houses, some breakthroughs are absolutely possible when the remedying measures have begun effectively at the two higher levels. Then, one may not be asking for too much if they expect the impact of these measures to naturally diffuse to this third level. But very importantly, media owners on their own may help by reflecting realistically on what they stand to gain or lose by their manner of exercise of ownership power over their media establishments. The fate of the defunct *Daily Times* of Nigeria may serve in guiding them to the correct judgment. That great newspaper, once the largest in West Africa, suffered the fate of being taken over by the government at the apex of its glory; what followed was the predictable suffocation of its editorial independence, and the rest is history.

#### *D. At the Level of Individual Journalists*

There is need for a new crop of journalists who are fearless and courageous; a new crop of journalists who are professional and ethical, who do not dance to the music of their masters; who are not lured by "brown envelopes"; and a new crop of journalists who have national rather than parochial interests; who would rather give their life than mislead the people.

### **VIII. Conclusion**

This article has been able to problematize the challenge facing Africa's democratic transition and development. While recognising the role of the media in this, the article insists that Nigerian media, as elsewhere in Africa, battles with some challenges that clog its wheel in fulfilling its role in enthroneing good governance in the society in which it is embedded. One of these challenges is the ownership pattern, politics and pressure. This often leads to dilemmatic media practices, as shown in the exemplars from Nigeria media scene over the years. Such dilemmas, the article suggests need to be tackled for the media in Nigeria and indeed the rest of Africa to contribute meaningfully to our good governance agenda. The onus to achieve this is placed not just on the media themselves, but on the government, the entire Nigerian society and the media practitioners themselves. This is in line with Tettey's (2001) contention that "the onus for strengthening the role of the media, both private and public, as democratic instruments should, at least, be partially borne by the rest of the society..." (p. 28).

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