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Presenting children's rights' issues in Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers

Dr Olusola Oyero¹

Abstract

A number of people get most of their information from news in the media. Thus, the way we identify, define and respond to social issues largely depends on how those issues are presented in the news. This study sets out to establish how the media cover children's issues, with a view to establishing whether the media help to expand or constrain the understanding of children's rights. Through content analysis, two newspapers each from Nigeria and Ghana are compared. The findings show that the presentation of children by the two countries' newspapers will not deliver the expected understanding of child rights' issues, due to underreportage of children by the newspapers. Only 448 stories were identified in 1 200 issues of newspapers over five years. Besides, children's issues are not given extensive treatment by appropriate media genres, were presented as not newsworthy, and children's voices are poorly represented in issues that affect them. It is therefore necessary for a more determined effort to be made in placing child rights' issues on the public agenda by giving them their place in news presentation and treating child rights as a development issue following the principles of development journalism and media's responsibility to society.

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¹ Department of Mass Communication, College of Development Studies, Covenant University, Ota, Nigeria. Email: oyero.sola@gmail.com. Phone: +234-39250556

Introduction

Children's rights are claims that all children have for survival, development, protection and participation. It is necessary to secure these claims for children if the future is to be sustainable. It is against this background that all efforts are made to ensure that the rights of children are guaranteed. The first global attempt to bring issues affecting children to the fore was the 1924 Geneva Declaration of the Rights of the Child. This was followed by the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child and the proclamation of 1979 as the International Year of the Child by the United Nations.

But the most notable event connected to children's rights was the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was adopted and opened for signature, ratification and accession by UN General Assembly resolution 44/25 of November 20, 1989. It became effective on September 2, 1990. About 191 countries have since ratified it (Unicef 2002), including Ghana and Nigeria. The Convention is child-centric and places the child's needs and rights first, ahead of the parents' or others'. It requires that states act in the best interests of the child. The Convention also assigned certain responsibilities to the media in the pursuit of the fulfilment of child rights; among which are to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and ensure that the child has access to information (Unicef 2002:65-66).

It is against this background that the Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media (1996) and the Oslo Workshop (1999) were held. The relationship between the rights of the child and the media was established in 1996 at the Asian Summit on Child Rights and the Media held in Manila, the Philippines (Hurights, 1996). Part of the Summit's resolutions is that media content aimed at children should be of high quality, made specifically for children, and should not exploit them but support their mental, social, moral and spiritual development. When the media enable children to hear, see and express themselves, their culture, their languages and their life experiences, it will affirm their sense of self and community. In much

the same way, media should be made accessible to children when they need it and when the content is aimed at them (Hurights, 1996).

The Oslo workshop of 1999 noted that “the child/media relationship is an entry point into the wide and multifaceted world of children and their rights to education, freedom of expression, play, identity, health, dignity and self-respect, protection; and that in every aspect of child rights, in any element of the life of a child, the relationship between children and the media plays a role” (Onumah, 2004:65; The MediaWise Trust, 2003). The Challenge is a call to action with the aim of ensuring that the overwhelming power of the media for good in the lives of children is identified, encouraged and supported, while the potentially harmful effects are recognised and reduced. The Oslo Challenge also assigns the media practitioners the crucial role of acting as a catalyst for the realisation of children’s many unfulfilled dreams. The media should empower children to make informed choices and actively participate in society with a view to helping to realise their rights to life, freedom of expression, education, sound health, and protection from abuse, exploitation and violence.

It is against the backdrop of the roles and challenges given to the media in respect of the rights of the child by the aforementioned Convention and resolutions that this paper examines how Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers have given attention to issues that concern children. The objectives of the study are to:

- compare the extent of the coverage given to child rights by selected Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers in terms of frequency, level of prominence and types of journalistic genres used in reporting child rights’ issues;
- determine which government-owned newspapers and privately owned newspapers give greater commitment to child rights’ issues;
- examine the extent to which the selected papers expose child abuse;
- determine the issues (themes) that the newspapers report on; and

- identify the categories of people that the newspapers engage on the issue of child rights.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of this paper is based on the Social Responsibility and Development Journalism theories. The idea that emerged from the Hutchins Commission report of 1947 formed what is known today as the Social Responsibility theory of the press (Nerone, 2002). The hub of the Social Responsibility theory is that the media should be used for the public good. It emphasises the need for an independent press that scrutinises other social institutions and provides objective, accurate news reports. Though it canvasses for the freedom of the press, such freedom places obligation on the press; it should be responsible to society for carrying out certain essential functions of mass communication in contemporary society (Siebert, Peterson and Schramm, 1963; McQuail, 1987). It calls on the media to be responsible for fostering productive and creative “Great Communities” (Baran and Davis, 2003:109), and suggests that media should do this by prioritising cultural pluralism – by becoming the voice of all the people – not just elite groups or groups that have dominated national, regional or local culture in the past. It also points out that the media, in carrying out their obligations, must adhere to the highest ethical standards.

Development journalism refers to the practice of journalism concerned with gathering, packaging and disseminating development-oriented news and information (Adebayo, 1990:45). It involves reporting on ideas, programmes, activities and events that are related to improving people’s living standards. In other words, the media ought to be committed to contribute to the overall goal of development, to promote cultural and informational autonomy, to support democracy and show solidarity with other developing countries (McQuail, 2005). Basically, it is assumed that journalism is able to influence the development process by reporting on development programmes and activities. Accordingly, it is the journalists’ duty to “critically examine and evaluate the relevance of a development project to national and local needs, the difference

between a planned scheme and its actual implementation, and the difference between its impact on people as claimed by government officials and as it actually is" (Aggarwala, 1979:181). This means that news should not only be defined in terms of conflict, timeliness and unusualness, but rather in terms of commitment and participation (Okigbo, 1991:9). Okigbo (1991:9) further itemised some of the roles that mass media should perform in the development process. They include:

- providing access to a wide variety of people;
- determining the people's needs for development information and programming for these needs;
- supporting horizontal and vertical flows of information;
- supporting cultural communication; and
- raising people's awareness and adoption of new methods that promote development.

Soola (2003) added to this list that the media should:

- help government's and people's agendas for development to converge;
- explore and integrate the potential of traditional and interpersonal networks into mass media development and activities;
- mobilise resources for development programmes and projects.

Thus, in this view of media's role in society, the media have a responsibility to promote the rights of the child and to protect them from harm in the media. Similarly, the media should be occupied by the issues affecting children, supporting children in every way possible to attain a proper childhood and sustainable future.

The role of the media in promoting child rights

The media are influential because they penetrate every segment of modern-day society and effectively influence how people view themselves, their neighbours, their communities and their world. Media representations are the primary source of information on social

problems for many people (Hutson, Liddiard and Campling, 1994). Maley (2000: 37) for instance, notes that: "In social and cultural matters, the various media provide the main platforms of debate, and their choices of subjects, participants and opinions shape the agenda and much of its content." The media play a significant role in forming and influencing people's attitudes and behaviour (Brawley, 1995).

Goddard and Saunders (2001) draw attention to the essential role of the media in increasing the society's awareness of, and response to, child abuse and neglect. News and features could be used to report child abuse cases, research and intervention strategies. Such media attention paid to child abuse can positively influence public opinion, professional and political responses to the circumstances in which children and young people find themselves. Ericson, Baranek and Chan (1987:3) observe that journalists play a major role in constructing what is considered "deviant" in our society and, therefore, what is "normal". Journalists do not merely reflect the work of others who define deviance and attempt to control it, but are themselves in some ways agents of social control; they are "a kind of deviance defining elite" who articulate the "proper bounds to behaviour" in our society (Ericson, Baranek and Chan, 1987:3).

In addition to news stories, feature articles and investigative journalism, sporadic mass media education and prevention campaigns could be launched. These campaigns could broaden communities' knowledge of child abuse and neglect, influence people's attitudes towards children and young people and change behaviours that contribute to, or precipitate the problem of, child abuse and neglect in our communities.

Though it has been argued that complex attitudinal or behavioural change requires more direct forms of citizen contact and intervention, the media at least are effective in building citizen awareness of an issue (Freimuth, Cole and Kirby 2001; McDevitt, 1996; O'Keefe and Reed, 1990; Reger, Wootan and Booth-Butterfield, 2000; Saunders and Goddard, 2002). Besides, mass media campaigns and coverage of children's rights play a significant role in placing the relevant issues on the public and political agenda. Lindsey (1994:163) also asserts

that “media has a central role in mediating information and forming public opinion. The media casts an eye on events that few of us directly experience and renders remote happenings observable and meaningful”.

Parajuli (2004) also notes that the media can highlight children’s issues by allowing children who have been working (in the worst form) as domestic servants, on the streets, in factories and mines/quarries as well as those rehabilitated from any organisation to participate in their media programme. He adds that children, being the future of a country, must be provided with education, socialised, motivated and equipped with all the basic necessities for their personality development. In this connection, the rights of the children to education, health, communication, participation, physical and moral support are some of the major components for their well-being. So the media have to raise the awareness of children’s situation to relevant NGOs or government. In other words, mass media education and children’s rights campaigns present ways of breaking the cycles of suppression and denial.

Method of study

The method adopted in this study is content analysis research design. Content analysis is a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Wimmer and Dominick, 2003:141).

The population for this study comprised all newspapers published in Nigeria and Ghana between 1999 and 2003. With the use of stratification, the newspapers were separated along the lines of ownership: those owned by the government and those that are privately owned. Furthermore, between these two categories, only the national newspapers were considered appropriate for selection because this is a comparative study of two nations. Consequently, from the Nigerian national dailies, *Daily Times* was the only government newspaper published during the period under study; it thus constituted the selected sample. *The Guardian* was randomly

selected (through a simple random technique) from the list of the privately owned national newspapers. Ghana is said to have 11 national newspapers, but only *Daily Graphic* – a government-owned newspaper – is truly national (Kafewo, 2006), and thus constituted the sample. *Daily Guide* is included in the sample because it is a leading privately owned newspaper and the only national daily paper giving the *Graphic* some form of competition. Therefore, *Daily Times* and *The Guardian* were selected from the Nigerian newspapers while *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* were selected from Ghanaian newspapers. It is hoped that the study will be a continuous one so as to monitor the trend of the coverage of children's issues by the Nigerian and Ghanaian press.

Two factors informed the choice of the years of investigation, which were 1999 to 2003. Firstly, landmark events took place during this period in respect of the child and the media, among which were the passing of the Children's Act of 1998 by the Ghanaian Parliament; the formation of the Oslo Challenge in the year 1999; the African Regional Summit on Media for Children which was held in Abuja, Nigeria in 2000; the launch of Magic (Media Actions and Good Ideas by, with and for Children – a network initiated by Unicef and the Norwegian government); and the passing of the Child Rights Act of 2000 by Nigeria's National Assembly. Secondly, one of the objectives we set out to achieve in this study was to examine how government-owned newspapers covered child rights' issues in comparison with privately owned newspapers. To make for a fair representation of the newspapers in the countries, it was necessary to draw from both government-owned and privately owned newspapers. While this was easy with respect to Ghanaian newspapers, Nigeria's only government-owned national newspaper, the *Daily Times*, was privatised in August 2004. Since we wanted to use a Nigerian government-owned national newspaper, we were compelled to stick to that period.

A total of 1200 issues of the newspapers constituted the sample size. Through the use of simple random sampling, five issues were selected in every month of the five-year period. Thus, 300 issues per

newspaper yielded 1200 issues from the four selected newspapers. The unit of analysis comprised all articles or stories on child issues in the form of news, features, opinions, editorials, pictures or letters to the editor. They were examined for frequency of reporting children's rights issues, prominence given to the reports in terms of newspaper page placements, and people quoted as news sources. The data were analysed using percentages.

Content categories

The units of analysis were examined in the following categories:

- Journalistic genres (types of editorial matter) – comprising news, features, editorials, opinions and pictures. Cartoons are not included.
- Prominence – categorising the front-page items as 'most prominent', back page as 'prominent' and inside-pages' items as 'least prominent'.
- Child abuse exposure – frequency of reports on physical injury upon a child, assault of a minor, sexual abuse, neglect, armed conflict and trafficking.
- Source of report – whether it was locally sourced or from wire services.
- Primary subjects – the issues or themes that the stories focused on. They are: (1) Plights of children/abuse – these are stories on difficulties confronting children and reports on child abuse but without proffering solutions to the problems; (2) Advice to parents/children – including counsel given to parents and guardian; (3) Welfare stories on children/philanthropy – philanthropic deeds to children such as donations to schools and motherless babies' homes, or scholarships; (4) Children involvement in sport/entertainment – reports on children involvement in sports, music and other forms of entertainment; (5) Efforts to redress harmful situations – stories on what is being done to improve children's bad situations, or solutions offered to children's problems, such as opening new schools, introduction of free feeding in schools, immunisation for children; (6) Juvenile delinquencies – antisocial behaviour of

juveniles; (7) Children's efforts for their own care – stories on what children are doing to help themselves, like children's parliament reports, children's clubs, and associations' activities. (8) Other: themes that do not belong to already mentioned categories, such as birth registration, or disciplinary actions against children.

- People quoted: individuals who were contacted as news sources in the reports. These include: (1) Government agents – these are individuals working for government irrespective of their professional leanings. (2) NGOs/advocates – these are independent individuals or groups who are championing the cause of children irrespective of their professional calling. (3) Police/court – The police or court of law reported in the news in respect of children. (4) Parents/relatives – people who spoke primarily as parents/guardian/relatives on children's issues. (5) Donors – those who render philanthropic deeds to children. (6) Teachers/administrators – school teachers and administrators like head teachers and principals. (7) Politicians – elected officers in the government like the state governors, or legislators. (8) Researchers/professors/experts/doctors – these are professionals who make statements about children's situations out of their professional base, without speaking for the government. (9) Children. (10) Others – including clergy, neighbours and journalists.

Cohen's Kappa reliability (*k*) test method was adopted to calculate the intercoder reliability. The values of intercoder agreement were interpreted using Landis and Koch's (1977) interpretation guidance. Eight major variables were examined for intercoder reliability, ranging from substantial agreement to almost perfect agreement between the two ratings. They included child right issues (0.80), genres (0.83), prominence (0.91), source of report (0.90), exposure of abuse (0.90), primary subjects (0.82) and people quoted in the reports (0.73).

Results

Figure 1: Coverage of children's issues by the selected newspapers

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentages
<i>The Guardian</i>	96	21.4
<i>Daily Times</i>	97	21.7
<i>Daily Graphic</i>	170	37.9
<i>Daily Guide</i>	85	19
Total	448	100

Figure 1 shows the coverage given to child right issues by the four newspapers. A total of 448 stories were covered over the five-year period of study. *The Guardian* had 21.4% of the stories, *Daily Times* had 21.7%, *Daily Graphic* had 37.9%, while *Daily Guide* had 19%. *Daily Graphic* reported child rights' issues more than the three other newspapers. The summation of reports of the newspapers, based on country of publication (as shown in Figure 2), shows that Ghanaian newspapers gave greater coverage to child rights' issues with 56.9%, than Nigerian newspapers with 43.1%.

Figure 2: Coverage of child rights by country

Countries	Frequency	Percentage
Nigerian newspapers	193	43.1
Ghanaian newspapers	255	56.9
Total	448	100

Figure 3: Distribution of child rights coverage by newspaper ownership

Government-owned papers	Privately owned papers
<i>Daily Times</i> 97 (21.7%)	<i>The Guardian</i> 96 (21.4%)
<i>Daily Graphic</i> 170 (37.9%)	<i>Daily Guide</i> 85 (19%)
Total 267 (60%)	Total 181 (40%)

As seen in Figure 3, 60 per cent of the stories on child rights are published by government-owned newspapers, while privately owned newspapers had 40 per cent. It then means that government-owned newspapers give greater coverage to child rights than privately owned newspapers in both countries at the time of analysis in this study.

Figure 4 shows that the four newspapers reported children's issues mostly as straight news. The *Guardian* devoted 58.3% of its total stories to straight news, *Daily Times* had 44.4%, *Daily Graphic* had 82.3% and *Daily Guide* had 88.6%.

Figure 4: Journalistic genres adopted in coverage of child rights

Journalistic Genres	Newspapers			
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>Daily Guide</i>
News	56 (58.3%)	43 (44.4%)	140 (82.3%)	75 (88.2%)
Features	19 (19.8%)	23 (23.7%)	17 (10%)	5 (5.9%)
Editorial	4 (4.2%)	4 (4.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Opinion	3 (3.1%)	7 (7.2%)	12 (7.1%)	0 (0%)
Picture	14 (14.6%)	20 (20.6%)	1 (0.6%)	5 (5.9%)
Total	96 (100%)	97 (100%)	170 (100%)	85 (100%)

Figure 5: Prominence of coverage by the newspapers

Story placement	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>Daily Guide</i>
Front-page lead	6 (6.3%)	8 (8.2%)	7 (4.1%)	6 (7.1%)
Front-page minor	5 (5.2%)	3 (3.1%)	7 (4.1%)	9 (10.5%)
Back-page lead	2 (2.1%)	4 (4.1%)	4 (2.4%)	0 (0%)
Back-page minor	5 (5.2%)	2 (2.1%)	4 (2.4%)	2 (2.4%)
Inside-page lead	40 (41.6%)	57 (58.8%)	50 (29.4%)	24 (28.2%)
Inside-page minor	38 (39.6%)	23 (23.7%)	98 (57.6%)	44 (51.8%)
Total	96 (100%)	97 (100%)	170 (100%)	85 (100%)

Figure 5 reveals that most stories on child rights are found inside the pages of all the selected newspapers. *The Guardian* published 81.2% of all its stories on children (for both lead and minor stories) in the inside pages of the papers. *Daily Times* had 58.8% inside-page lead stories, followed by 23.7% inside-page minor stories. *Daily Graphic* also published 57.6% stories as inside-page minor and 29.4% as inside-page lead. Inside-page minor stories dominated the *Daily Guide*'s coverage of child rights, with 51.8%, followed by inside-page lead stories.

Figure 6: Coverage of child abuse by the selected newspapers

	Newspapers			
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>Daily Guide</i>
Child abuse stories	22 (22.9%)	8 (8.2%)	10 (5.9%)	49 (57.6%)
Non-abuse stories	74 (77.1%)	89 (91.2%)	160 (94.1%)	36 (42.4%)
Total	96 (100%)	97 (100%)	170 (100%)	85 (100%)

Figure 6 presents the extent to which the newspapers expose child abuse. Of all *The Guardian's* stories on children, 22.7% were on child abuse, while 77% were not on abuse. For *Daily Times*, 8.2% of its stories about children centred on abuse, while the remaining 91.2% were not. *Daily Graphic* recorded 5.9% child abuse stories, so 94.1% did not focus on abuse. *Daily Guide* had 57.6% child abuse stories and 42.4% that did not focus on abuse. It was the *Daily Guide* that reported child abuse most among the four newspapers.

Figure 7: Sources of child rights reports by the newspapers

Sources	Newspapers			
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>Daily Guide</i>
Local	69 (71.9%)	82 (84.5%)	162 (95.3%)	73 (85.9%)
Wire service	27 (28.1%)	15 (15.5%)	8 (4.7%)	12 (14.1%)
Total	96 (100%)	97 (100%)	170 (100%)	85 (100%)

Figure 7 above shows that most of the reports on children were locally sourced. *The Guardian* had 71.9% reports sourced locally, as opposed to 28.1% reports from wire services. *Daily Times* published 84.5% locally sourced news and 15.5% from wire services. *Daily Graphic* reports had 95.3% local sources and 4.7% from wire services. For *Daily Guide*, 85.9% were locally sourced, while 14.1% were from wire services.

Figure 8: Primary subjects (themes) covered by child rights' reports

Child rights' issues	Newspapers			
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>Daily Guide</i>
Plights of children/abuse	40 (41.7%)	35 (36.1%)	34 (20%)	35 (41.2%)
Advice to parents/children	6 (6.3%)	11 (11.3%)	28 (16.5%)	2 (2.4%)
Welfare stories on children/ philanthropy	4 (4.2%)	9 (9.3%)	39 (22.9%)	10 (11.8%)
Children involvement in sport/entertainment	2 (2.1%)	6 (6.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Efforts to redress harmful situations for children	26 (27%)	27 (27.8%)	54 (31.8%)	32 (37.6%)
Juvenile delinquencies	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (1.2%)
Children's efforts for their own care	5 (5.2%)	4 (4.1%)	3 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
Others	13 (13.5%)	5 (5.2%)	11 (6.4%)	2 (5.8%)
Total	96 (100%)	97 (100%)	170 (100%)	85 (100%)

As shown in Figure 8, the newspapers reported more on plights and difficulties faced by children. In *The Guardian*, 41.7% of its stories were devoted to the plight of children. This was followed by efforts that are made to redress the harmful situation of children, with 27%. Of the *Daily Times* stories on children, 36.1% were on the plight of children, 27.8% on efforts to redress the children's poor situation, 11.3% focused on advice to parents, and 9.3% on philanthropic deeds to children.

It was only *Daily Graphic* that reported more on efforts to improve poor children's situation, with 31.8% of its stories. This was followed by philanthropic gestures (in terms of donations) to children with 22.9%. The plight of children, including child abuse, constituted 20% while stories on advice to parents and children took 16.5%. *Daily Guide* also reported more on the plight of children, with 40.2% of its stories. Of its children's stories, 37.6% were on efforts to improve children's poor situations, advice to parents/children constituted 2.4%, and philanthropic deeds got 11.8%.

Figure 9: People quoted in newspapers' child rights' reports

Categories of people	Newspapers			
	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Daily Times</i>	<i>Daily Graphic</i>	<i>Daily Guide</i>
Government agents	11 (15.5%)	10 (17%)	35 (24.8%)	10 (13.9%)
NGOs/advocates	29 (40.8%)	20 (33.9%)	32 (22.7%)	10 (13.9%)
Police/court officials	7 (9.9%)	7 (11.9%)	9 (6.4%)	37 (51.3%)
Parents/relatives	4 (5.7%)	1 (1.7%)	2 (1.4%)	5 (6.9%)
Donors	2 (2.8%)	4 (6.8%)	31 (22%)	4 (5.6%)
Teachers/ administrators	3 (4.2%)	2 (3.4%)	11 (8%)	1 (1.4%)
Politicians	4 (5.7%)	3 (5.1%)	5 (3.5%)	2 (2.8%)
Researchers/ professors/ experts/doctors	5 (7%)	4 (6.8%)	5 (3.5%)	0 (0%)
Children	2 (2.8%)	3 (5.1%)	4 (2.8%)	2 (2%)
Others	4 (5.9%)	5 (8.3%)	7 (4.9%)	1 (1.4%)
Total	71 (100%)	59 (100%)	141 (100%)	72 (100%)

Figure 9 focuses on people quoted in the news. Nigerian newspapers mostly quoted NGOs and advocates, *Daily Graphic* quoted government officials the most, and *Daily Guide* mostly quoted police/court officials. For *The Guardian*, NGOs and advocates were quoted in 40.8% of stories, followed by government agents or officials, with 15.5% and police/court officials 9.9%.

In *Daily Graphic*, government agents were quoted in 24.8% of the stories, followed by NGOs/advocates with 22.7%, and donors with 22%. *Daily Guide* recorded the most quotations of police and court officials, in 51.3% of its stories on children.

Discussion

The extent of coverage given to child rights by *The Guardian*, *Daily Times*, *Daily Graphic* and *Daily Guide* newspapers shows a gross under-reportage of children's issues. In fact, one can say that children seemed to be invisible in the newspapers' content. A total of 300 issues of the newspapers were sampled for analysis for each of the newspapers, making a total of 1200 issues. It is amazing that only 97 stories (21.4%) came from *Daily Times*, *The Guardian* had 96 stories (21.4%), while *Daily Graphic* had 170 stories, representing 37.9% and *Daily Guide* had 85 stories (19%). This means that there were several days when children's issues did not feature at all in the newspapers' coverage. If the newspapers were to feature a child rights' story every day, we would have 1200 stories. Thus, a study of 448 stories shows that adequate attention has not been given to child rights issues. It follows then that these newspapers have not practised the requirements of development journalism, which demand that awareness should be given to development issues.

This finding is similar to others carried out on children issues by McManus and Dorfman (2002), Moss (2001) and McNamara (2004), which all show under-representation of children and young people. It appears, then, that children are generally under-reported in the media.

There are many possible explanations for this. Journalists may consider young people to be unimportant in societal decision-making processes, or immature, ill-informed or indeed, not interested in current affairs. Besides, young people do not purchase newspapers regularly, nor do they usually have disposable incomes to do so. Not only that, but some codes of practice, such as the code of ethics for journalists in Nigeria and Kenya among others, suggest that journalists should not interview or photograph those under the age of 18 on subjects involving their personal welfare in the absence and

without the consent of their guardian (Nigerian Guild of Editors, n. d.; Kenyan Code of Conduct for Journalists and the Mass Media, n.d.). Because this might give rise to editorial delays, it could discourage journalists from using young people as sources for stories. Journalists tend to feed at convenient tables where information is readily available, easy to access and on the record. Thus, the special status of children and young people may serve to work against them in terms of media coverage.

The finding has shown that Ghanaian newspapers gave greater attention to child rights than Nigerian newspapers did; the difference in the coverage is very significant. As observed in the literature, Ghana seemed to be making better progress in respect of child rights than Nigeria. In the first place, Ghana has been ahead of Nigeria in the formulation of policies and the passage of the Child Rights Act. Since 1997, several important measures, including child rights' legislative reform and related policies, have been instituted to bring Ghana into conformity with international human rights standards on children. Legislation passed includes the Criminal Code (Amendment) Act 1998, The Children's Act 1998, Child Rights Regulations 2002 and The Juvenile Justice Act 2003. All these meant that Ghana has made greater progress in this area than Nigeria, which similarly reflected on the press performance. Secondly, the child rights' indicators in terms of child mortality showed greater improvement in Ghana than Nigeria. Unicef's annual reports on the state of world's children (1997 to 2007) consistently show that the situation of Ghanaian children were better than Nigerian. All these put together suggests better performance on the part of Ghanaian government than Nigerian.

This is also evident in the categories of people quoted in the newspaper reports as shown by our data. Government officials were the most quoted of all the source categories in Ghana's *Daily Graphic*. The dominance of government officials in statements about children is an indication of government's commitment to children's well-being. It thus means that the press can only support a government that is making progress in bringing about development.

Development journalism advocates media support for government in achieving positive development tasks; this is only possible where the government has embarked on such tasks that the the media can support.

Our findings further show that government-owned newspapers reported more on child rights than the privately owned newspapers. Although the difference in the coverage given by these two newspapers in Nigeria is not significant, we must nonetheless conclude that government-owned *Daily Times* performed better than the privately owned *The Guardian*, on the basis of the number of pages that these papers published. *Daily Times* published an average of 40 pages while *The Guardian* had twice that number, that is, an average of 80 pages; whereas *Daily Times* reported 97 stories compared to *The Guardian's* 96 stories. Ghanaian newspapers' coverage confirmed better performance of government-owned newspapers on child rights' reportage than privately owned newspapers. We thus conclude that government-owned papers gave greater attention to child rights than privately owned papers. This is because children's issues are of not much economic interest; besides, since the private newspapers are more commercial and profit-oriented, it is expected that they would not give as much attention to children's issues as the government-owned newspapers would.

The newspapers adopted a variety of print media genres in the reportage of child rights. All four newspapers predominantly used the 'straight news' format in reporting child rights. This means that the newspapers are more concerned with delivering first-hand news of child rights to the public. Straight news comes in piecemeal and does not allow for a comprehensive report. Features are more appropriate for thorough treatment of any issue. They allow background information to be gathered and provide detailed information to educate the readers on any issue. The newspapers, however, did not use the feature genre much in their reportage: an evidence of lack of depth in their treatment of child rights' issues.

There is also low engagement of the public on the subjects of child rights, as reflected in the low coverage of opinion. The situation is even worse with the privately owned newspapers. This shows that the newspapers either did not carry the readers along actively on the issue of child rights, or the readers were indifferent to the issue. We also see that the newspapers did not get involved in presenting many opinions on the child rights' issues. While 4% of the Nigerian stories were in the form of editorials, the Ghanaian newspapers had none in all the samples analysed. In fact, the Ghanaian newspapers reported the issues mostly as straight news (over 80% of their stories on children's rights). There is therefore no balance in the reportage of child rights.

The level of prominence, in terms of page placement, given to a report has implication for the extent to which newspapers are able to raise any issue to the plane of discussion. The results show that reports on child rights were buried within the newspaper pages. This is an indication of weak newsworthiness of child rights' stories. The *Monitor* (n.d.), illustrated the significance of front page news as showing strong newsworthiness. It noted that every front page magnifies stories that appear on it. For example, the front-page story in *The New York Times* will likely be broadcast on the evening news, summarised by the wire services, ripped-off by ten thousand bloggers, and otherwise spread everywhere. *Times* front-page stories influence elections, national policy – and even launch wars. The concentration of child rights' reports on the inside pages then means that the newspapers did not consider child rights' issues as a subject that deserves great focus.

The study went further to examine the extent to which the newspapers reported child abuse. The abuse here is not limited to sexual abuse alone; other forms of abuse such as child labour, neglect, armed conflict and trafficking were considered. We observe that Nigerian newspapers did not give much attention to child abuse – an indication of inadequate presentation of the subject. Saunders and Goddard (2002) noted that media coverage of child abuse and neglect of children performs an important and significant role in placing issues

on the public and political agenda. They emphasised that such media coverage increases society's awareness of, and response to, child abuse and neglect, as well as positively influences public, professional and political responses to the circumstances in which children and young people find themselves.

The analysis of the reports also focused on what was being said about child rights. Most of the substantive pieces concerned difficulties that confront children. These challenges included cases of abuse, children suffering from diseases, children that are out of school, those who are victims of accidents and disasters, etc. Newspapers also reported on efforts being made to redress harmful or generally disadvantageous situations that some children experience. These included governments' activities to that effect, the efforts of advocates and NGOs, such as fora held to discuss promotion of child rights and to increase advocacy on them. It is worth mentioning that welfare of children was generously reported on by the Ghanaian newspapers.

We also examined the individuals quoted in the newspaper reports. This shows to whom the newspapers turn when they need information and reveals the dominant opinion represented in the news coverage. For the two Nigerian newspapers, child rights' advocates and NGOs are predominant voices, followed by government officials and agents. This shows that the struggle for child rights is being championed by advocates who are doing a good job in getting their voices into the news. While advocates and NGOs had fair coverage in Ghanaian newspapers, the government-owned *Daily Graphic* quoted government agents most frequently. This is not surprising for, as a government-owned newspaper, it is expected that it would give greater attention to government activities than would the private media. The *Daily Guide*, for its part, quoted the police and the court most in its coverage. This is also expected, since *Daily Guide*, as shown in our previous analysis, reported more child abuse than the other three newspapers. We see a generally low coverage for other categories of people such as teachers, donors, politicians and parents, as well as children themselves. It is surprising, however, that the newspapers gave fewer opportunities to children to speak out on

issues that seriously affect them. The hub of the Social Responsibility theory is that the media should be used for the public good and “become the voice of all the people – not just elite groups or groups that had dominated national, regional or local culture” (Baran and Davis, 2003:109).

Conclusion and recommendations

This study set out to examine the coverage given to child rights by comparing Nigerian and Ghanaian newspapers. We discovered that the coverage given to child rights by the four newspapers drawn from the two countries is generally low. This calls for newspaper reporters and editors to step up the attention given to children. Against the backdrop of child rights as a development issue and the fact that the media have great roles to play in the realisation of children’s rights, there is a need for newspaper organisations to expand the coverage given to child rights. It will also be necessary for the government to formulate a policy guideline to compel newspapers to devote a certain percentage of their news coverage to issues that will serve the purpose of protection and promotion of the rights of the child. The news organisations can facilitate this by setting up children’s desks in their newsroom. The desk must be equipped with well-trained journalists who are familiar with the details of child rights and materials on child rights so as to ensure excellent delivery on child rights issues.

It is also a challenge to Nigerian newspapers to improve on their performance, since Ghanaian newspapers did better than Nigerian newspapers in reportage of children’s rights. The Nigerian press community happens to be the biggest in Africa and constitutes one of the most resilient and daring segments of Nigeria’s civil society (Olukoju, 2004). One therefore expects the Nigerian media, as part of their social responsibility functions, to improve on previous performance by playing a more active role in covering development issues like child rights.

Moreover, the newspapers should strive to balance the format for presenting child right issues in order to achieve adequate presentation of the details of child rights. Presenting some stories in feature format

will allow background information to be added to the report, thus giving the readers the full import of such stories. In other words, the readers will have the opportunity of understanding the full content of the issue of child rights under focus – from the cause to the consequences and then the resolution of the issue. Similarly, the use of opinion articles and letters to the editor will allow expression of divergent views, which would help policy-makers in understanding the public perspectives on the issue.

Furthermore, child rights, as a development issue, need to be presented as newsworthy stories. It follows, then, that efforts should be made by the newspapers to present more of the children's stories on the front and back pages of their papers. Putting children's stories on the front page will thus increase their newsworthiness. As there are many stories competing for the front page, one way around this is to set some children's news headlines in the front page, while the stories continue in the inside pages. This will to some extent push child rights' issues to the forefront of social issues.

Finally, the better performance of government-owned newspapers in reporting children's rights calls for continued sustenance of government-owned newspapers, as they are in a better position to report development issues than privately owned newspapers. Because of the commercial interest of privately owned newspapers, the drive to make profit and succeed as a business may not allow them to give much attention to issues that are not of economic interest. Therefore, there is a need for government-owned media to continue operations, basically for development purposes. It is unfortunate that the Nigerian *Daily Times* was privatised in August 2004, leaving the country without a national government newspaper. This is then a challenge to the private national newspapers to endeavour to give greater attention to development issues such as child rights than they currently do. However, the state government-owned newspapers should raise the standard of their papers by expanding the horizon of their coverage, and taking the challenge of supporting child rights, rather than being used predominantly as government propaganda machines within their states.

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