

# The Role of the Media in the Relationship Between Amnesty International and Nigerian Government

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## Abstract

The media plays significant role in shaping the perceptions and views of the people in any political system. The media has been the major means of dissemination information and shaping of behavior of people by the government and many organizations even up till international level like UN, EU, Amnesty International among others. Amnesty international is an international organization that advocates against Human Rights Violation and one of the aspect through which advocacy is advanced is through the press releases from the media. The article tends to examine the role and contribution of the media in the determination of the cat and mouse relationship between the Amnesty International (AI) and the Nigerian government.

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## INTRODUCTION

The media is regarded as the third estate of the realm. The media plays a significant role in the perceptions and views of the public on economic, political and social issues and this implication have been subjected to researches from various scholars (Barry 2004). It is generally believed that the knowledge, feelings and dispositions about the world besides firsthand experience is derived from reports from media (Wilson & Wilson 2001).

Lippmann's (1922) argued that the media capability to mould public mind. McCombs and Shaw (1972) buttressed this argument through the comparative research between the views of people and the major headlines of 9 local media outlet and discovered the perception of people can be shaped by emphasis of a particular news. The effort in finding out the correlation between people's perception about a particular issues has been a repeated process, it can be said that media agenda plays significant role aiding the molding process of human perception about a particular issue (Hong Et al 2018).

Miller and Krosnick (2000) asserted that media can alter and determine the ways people view the political leaders. For instance, the people evaluated President George Bush performance through the media reports on the end result of the gulf war in 1991 on the economy based on individual level of exposure and trust in the process. Even public opinion theorist like John & Zadler (1992 & 1996) believed that the media has significant influence on policy preferences of the people.

However, the media has been the major means of dissemination information and shaping of behavior of people by the government and many organizations even up till international level like UN, EU, Amnesty International among others.

Amnesty international is an international organization that advocates against Human Rights Violation and one of the aspect through which advocacy is advanced is through the press releases from the media. Elisa (2020). As noted by Nelson and Dorsey (2008) "the separation of human right began immediately after the Second World War II with the Universal Declaration of Human Right in 1948".

Amnesty International as an organization advocates against violation of human right like torture, press gagging, extra judicial killing, and police brutality among others. Their advocacy activities against injustice and violation of human right in Africa especially Nigeria cannot be overemphasized as the international nongovernmental organization involves in a lot of criticism and press releases through the media to advocate against violation of human rights.

However, there have been different conceptions of their amnesty international and their activities in Nigeria and the roles in Nigeria and roles played by the organization in shaping the perception of the people about their government through the local media well as the mode of response of the local to the press release of the organization.

The main aim of this research is to examine the roles of the media in the activities of the Amnesty International. Following this goal, the objectives of this thesis is to discover the. Critics of the Nigeria media against the Amnesty International, the views of the Nigerian media about the international aid provided by the Amnesty international and How Amnesty International is framed by the Nigerian media.

## Research Questions

The study seeks to address the following questions:

- 1) What are the Critics of the Nigeria media against the Amnesty International?
- 2) What are the Views of the Nigerian media about the international aid provided by the Amnesty International?
- 3) How is Amnesty International framed by the Nigerian media?

## Conceptual Clarification, Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### Mass Media

The media plays significant roles in the society because the society is a reflection of the level at which the media performs their function of information dissemination. Over the years there has been an increase in technology in the media world which has been accepted by the world starting from the print media like news papers to the electronic media like the radio and the televisions to social media like blogs and other types of social media platforms and all aimed at information dissemination and educating the masses (Nity, & Gaurav, 2017). However, the mass media majorly is structured to reach ample number of people. The radio, newspapers, magazines, books, and Internet media such as blogs, podcasts, and video sharing are the major and common platforms of the mass media.

The media in the present world is regarded as the fourth estate of the realm because it helps to mould, shape, influences the public perceptions in a democratic society. The media is an important institution in a democracy because it plays critical role in the acceptance and rejection of a public policy. Although, it is not constitutionally empowered to direct the affairs of the state but it is a powerful weapon in determining the perception of people about the government and her policies (Miller and Krosnick, 2000). According to Wilbur Schramm (1954), the media's functions in societal development can be categorised into three and they include:

1. To inform: in other words, before a society can be developed, the people must be well informed to information both at national and international level on the happenings and events that affects different aspects of people's life.
2. To instruct: this is an important role as it plays crucial role in human development. This is done by enlightening people on how to acquire and access new skills as well as the process of executing these skills.
3. To participate: the media also perform the function of participation by engaging people in the debates, helping in the conflict managements, creation of awareness and embarking on developmental programs that will improve the standard of living of the people in the society.

### International Non Governmental Organization

The Civil Society Glossary published by the Union of International Associations (UIA) defines an NGO is "A private international organization (as distinguished from an international intergovernmental organization), set up either in the form of a single association or as a federation of various national organizations. The most important N.G.O.s are given consultative status with the United Nations or its specialized agencies and with regional organizations". (The UIA) This definition implies that there is an important correlation between NGOs and International Organizations. At the international level, NGOs are like Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) but they differ IGOs are formed by government of a state (Caffarena 2001: 25).

At the international level, NGOs are known as International Nongovernmental Organizations and they can be seen as a world civil society because they play critical role in bringing the attention of governments to various issues that affects humanity at the global level like the issues of human rights, environment, development and humanitarian aid, amongst others. Lewis in his own argument posited that NGOs has three major characteristics and they include implementer, catalyst and partner (Lewis 2009: 2). As an *Implementer*, NGO can gather support for the people who need them. They help to mobilize resources by sometimes engraining in campaigning in soliciting for funds to support the success of the programme. As a *Catalyst*, they help to stir up, facilitate and ginger as well as promote the course an action for societal transformation. Finally, as *Partner*, the NGOs work closely with relevant government agencies and private individuals in order to achieve full implementation of policy objectives. However, most international nongovernmental organizations like INGOs are Oxfam, Save the Children, Action Aid, CARE and Amnesty International shares these similar characteristics.

### International Aid

When talking about international aid, it means the discretionary transfer of resources which can take any form especially in the financial, military, and humanitarian amongst others especially from developed nations to the developing nations (Ishwor, 2020). Majorly, international aid can take the form of loan or a grant. Some of these aids are refundable while some others are non refundable because it was ranted on humanitarian ground. There are many international organizations both governmental and nongovernmental that grant these foreign aids to

countries. For instance, the World Bank do lend loans to countries requested for them while international nongovernmental organisations like Oxfam, Amnesty International etc also give aids and grants on humanitarian ground.

In a bid to contribute to the global development, many countries of the world engages in the foreign aid whether as a donor or as a recipient or even as both as the case may be. Foreign aids have been argued by scholars to have both positive and negative impacts especially on the recipients (Muhammad and Ayaz, 2007). For instance, one of the positive benefits of the international aid as argued scholars in economics is that it can contribute to economic growth because it complement the national resources and national efforts in developmental process. On the other hand, foreign aid can be of negative effect because it increases the level of foreign dependency which can hamper economic and investment growth as well serving as a means to further enrich the elites since there is little or no accountability to such aid in the recipient nations. These foreign aid is more disadvantageous to Africa because it further enriches the elites, encourages corruption, hinders economic and investment growth, leads to economic instability as well as hampers democracy and rule of law.

### **Media's Perception of NGO's in Nigeria**

Generally speaking, newspapers and the media houses in Nigeria are characterized by their ownership, ethnic sentimentality, the professionalism of the workers amongst others (Aliagan, 2015). Media's perceptions about the activities of the NGOs in Nigeria whether local or international NGOs have been discovered not to really promote positive image of the NGOs. This can be supported by the findings of the research made by Oscar et al, (2017) which was conducted on the "Non-Governmental Organization in the Eyes of the Newspaper in Nigeria between 2013 to 2016" where they discovered that most news of the NGOs released by the media newspapers in Nigeria don't usually feature in the headlines in the front page which makes it difficult for the reader to easily get captured by the press release of NGOs whether the local or the international NGOs. They further discovered that if by any means the publications make the headlines, the news is sponsored by influential individuals, influential companies like these telecommunication companies which also serve as an avenue for them to advertise their products.

Also, it was discovered from the research hypothesis developed by Mathieu and Sophie (2015) in their research on mass media effects on nongovernmental organizations which state that "NGOs' objective function and NGOs' effectiveness: The role of media coverage" and "what was covered by the media?" It was discovered since NGOs aim to drive bad practices that can exist in a system, the media usually select the ones they feel it is news worthy of which the NGOs news related matter are not always taking the centre stage. The researchers were able to come to this conclusion after they discovered that "about 28% in the number of newspaper articles mentioning the names of international NGOs in Bangladesh during the period of 2002-2010.

### **Theoretical Framework**

#### **Post Colonial Theory**

Post colonial theory has had different interpretations by many scholars which eventually led to the development of two major schools of thoughts. These school or thoughts are the positive or the optimists school of thought while the second school of thoughts are the negative or the pessimist school of thoughts (Lazare & Amdrie, 2007:1171). The post colonial theory focuses more attention on countries that experienced colonialism as well countries that are not technologically advanced.

For the optimist school of thought like Kenyatta (1968:36); Bhabha (1994); Spivak (1988:197-221); Ashcroft et al (1989;1995); Sugirtharajah (1996:1-5); Dube (1996); Segovia (2000:11-34) and Punt (2001, 2003) believed that post colonialism is a new form of colonialism where the colonialist use the local and international agents like the NGOs to influence the social, political and economic situations in a country especially the non westernized nations.

For example, Bhabha (1994) argued that "postcolonial perspectives emerge from non-westernized countries' colonial testimony and the discourses of "minorities" within the geopolitical divisions of East and West, North and South."They intervene in modernity's ideological discourses that seek to give a hegemonic "normalcy" to the uneven development and disparate, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, race, communities, and peoples." To bolster the arguments of the optimists, Wole Soyinka (2006) observed that "what it is that invests the human psyche with the need to dominate others, regardless of race, state of development, or environment...?"

Indeed, Niyi Osundare (2002) argued explicitly from the activists' perspective that the theory: "More than other terminologies of the 'post-variety,' 'post-colonial' is a highly sensitive historical, and geographical term that calls into significant attentions a whole epoch in the relationship between the West and the developing world, an epoch which played a vital role in the institutionalization and strengthening of the metropole-periphery, center-mar.

Linking the perceptions Bhabha, Wole Soyinka and Niyi Osundare who of the positivists/optimists scholars discussed above, one can discover that they all see post colonial theory as what affirms continuous

institutionalization of colonial heritage, politically, socially, economically, psychologically even after granting the colonized nations independence through international economic policies and activities of other institutions like the governmental and nongovernmental international organizations. To this end, the positivist/optimists believed that every actions of the colonialists after the independence whether perpetrated directly through interference or through international organizations whether governmental and nongovernmental is subject to criticism from the affected states.

However, the pessimist viewed post colonial theory as a phenomenon that is ambiguous and lacks clarity. Scholars like Robert Young (2001), Stephen Slemon (1995) Abrams, Meyer (1999) amongst others. For instance Slemon (1995:100) citing Russell Jacoby's argument to illustrate how postcolonial theory is poses difficulties for the because of its "lack of consensus and clarity". Young (2001:67) supported by putting forward a simple question: "Why does the language of postcolonial criticism often seem so impenetrable?" However, all these lack of clarity of the post colonial theory posses' difficulty in reaching a consensus believe about the theory. In addition, the pessimists' school of thoughts does not only see post colonial lack clarity but the school of thoughts also view post colonial theory not fitting into the ever changing society in the non western world which is found in political, economic, social and even in the academic sector thus making it difficult to come up with a precise definition of postcolonial theory.

This theory however can be used to explain the activities of some of the activities of western world in the Third World Countries through the activities of international organizations whether governmental or nongovernmental most especially if looked from the positive/optimist school of thoughts which believed that post colonial theory is a form of colonialism where the colonialist use the local and international agents to influence the social, political and economic situations in a country. The study will focus on the activities of the Amnesty International in Nigeria and how they are promoting post colonial agenda in the country through the use of the media which is examined in the next sub-topic.

### **Roles of International Organizations in the Nigeria**

One of the most important contributions of governmental and nongovernmental international organizations in the third world countries like Nigeria is humanitarian activities, Amnesty International is an international nongovernmental organization that have performed humanitarian functions most especially on a moral ground in Nigeria. For instance, since the Boko Haram insurgency in the North Eastern part of Nigeria, Amnesty International have contributed immensely in giving humanitarian supports for the victims. They have also made series of reports on violation of human rights like how the government officials like the army were committing impunity, torture and ill treatment, excessive use of force amongst others (Amnesty International, 2020). All these efforts have made the Nigeria government to respond positively in tackling some of the human rights violation like ending the police group called SARS, staging a probe into the killings of armless civilian protesting at Lekki Toll Gate by the Lagos state government amongst others in order to avoid bad image in the international system.

Secondly, economic justification also shows that post colonial theory exposed the fact that it is a means through which the Western World intends to further their dominance on the third world countries. Still using Amnesty International and Nigeria as a case study, Amnesty International is very much concern about the economic rights of Nigerians. For instance, a report made by Chief Jonathan Wanyanwu to Amnesty International, March 2004, it was discovered that oil companies licensed by Nigeria government have and still violating the economic rights of the indigenous people of Niger Delta and the inactions of the government to curb their activities. Their activities lead to oil spillage and destruction of their ecosystem which also affects agricultural activities and thus depriving them of their economic rights and livelihood. Their reports over the years have forced the hand of the Federal Government to lunch 1 billion dollars to clean up Ogoni land in Rivers State in 2017 in line with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

In addition, post colonial theory became justifiable especially from the optimist point of view where the western world still found means to still want to penetrate and maintain dominance in Africa especially Nigeria. On Amnesty International, they still show very much concern about the political rights of Nigerians. This they usually do by also observing election processes in Nigeria like the 2015 and 2019 general election where they comment that it might be difficult for people in the community where Boko Haram insurgency is ravaging to participate in the election process because of the fear of attack by the insurgent group.

### **An Overview of the Relationship between the Activities of the Amnesty International and the Media in Nigeria**

The Amnesty International was established by a British Lawyer Peter Benenson who started the organization as a small group in the year 1961 in London. The popularity of the organization spur from the article he published in Observer Newspapers titled "The Forgotten Prisoners" published in 1965 and from there the organizations expanded within the first 10 years recording to over 850 volunteer in over 27 countries. Presently, Amnesty

International over 50 years has more than 7 million volunteers globally championing human rights campaign to be enjoyed by all as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international human rights standard. The organization gets most of her funding from donations from philanthropists and members. For instance, Amnesty International while celebrating her 50 years anniversary of existence pointed out how she raised over US\$2.5 million (Amnesty International, 2011).

However, the media is the major means of advocacy of the Amnesty International to help disseminate information and enlighten the world about human right violation all over the world especially in Nigeria. This same medium is adopted by the government and her institutions to debunk the Amnesty International reports. Consequently, this part focuses on the extent to which the media helps in molding the perceptions of the people about the government or the Amnesty International through their various press release and news settings

The activities of the Amnesty International and the reactions of Nigerian government has been tagged as cat and mouse fight as espoused by William Langland according to the Adedayo (2011). According to the Langland as explained by the author, the hostility between cat and mouse has been existing from time immemorial because of the constant interference with each other's activities and this has been brought into the scenario of bitter relationship between the Amnesty International and Nigerian government especially under President Buhari's administration.

This relationship will be pictured through a write up of Festus Adedayo (2011) which he titled "Nigeria Cat and Mouse Fight with the Amnesty International". In the article pioneered by the author, the main bone of contention was more on the checkmating and watchdog activities of the excesses and despotism tendencies of the Buhari's government by the Amnesty International whom the government seems to lack moral standing and legitimacy of operation within the country.

According to the writer, the article addressed the issues of allegations laid by the issue of the allegations Amnesty International against the Nigerian government led by President Muhammadu Buhari about series of scenarios of abuse and violation of human rights, shielding of one ethnic group and their activities from prosecution and several cases of injustice and the response of the Presidential spokesperson Garba Sheu. For instance, Amnesty International have alleged Nigerian government and its institutions according to the author of extra judicial killings in the southeastern part of Nigeria and other citizens elsewhere in other part of Nigeria as found in the case of #ENDSARS protesters, "heinous crimes of enforced disappearances of person", like the case of a university lecturer and activist who was whisked away by the State Security Service and his where about is unknown till date shielding of perpetrators of the Fulani herdsmen from arrest and prosecution, unlawful arrest and detention by men of the Nigerian police and the Nigerian Army. Even there were reported cases of abuse of the pressmen and women by the men of the Nigeria Police like the case of Adaobi Tricia Nwaubuni who was killed by the men of the Nigeria police in Cross River state and her body was donated to the Anatomy students as specimen at the University of Calabar amongst other scenarios.

In response to these allegations, Garba Sheu, the presidential spokesperson acted quickly in an angry manner by counter accusing the Amnesty International of championing "a tiny dot in the circle". He asserted that the group did not consider the activities of those using violence against Nigerian government, her institutions and her innocent citizens like what Nnamdi Kanu and his IPOB group were doing which is a threat to her internal sovereignty of which no country will encourage.

Secondly, they accused the Amnesty International of only coming after African leaders and government as well as their institutions through press release to frame and paint the African leaders and her institutions a bad image of a despot and tyrants as well as human right violators which they fail to do to the government in the western world and thus tagging the organization to lack legitimacy and moral standing to operate within the country. In fact, the second article analyzed by the author explained the quick counter purported report of the Amnesty International about the violation of human rights by men of the Nigeria military in order to debunk the report if eventually released to the public and thus urged the Nigerian government to take swift actions in seeing the organizations to the International Criminal Court for an attempt to mobilize the citizens against Nigerian government.

However, the bone of contention remains the fact that the Amnesty International will continue to act as the watchdog policing the Nigerian government. That is, the cat as Langland claimed and the Nigerian government, her institutions and her activities will continue to be the enraged rat of which will make them go at logger heads.

In conclusion, the solutions to these cat and mouse rivalry between the Amnesty International and the Nigerian government and her institutions is just about transparency by the Nigerian government in dealing with cases of human rights by allowing the men of the press through investigative journalism perform their functions. Also, justice for victims of abuse of human rights because if the government play the role of an unbiased umpire in prosecutions of the violators of human rights without delay because justice delay is justice denied, the cat which is the Amnesty International will have no justifications to criticize and paint Nigeria government and her institutions a bad image in the international system.

## Findings and Conclusion

As a result of this analysis, the following findings were discovered.

1. It was discovered that there exists two major actors in the international system which are the state and the non-state actors. The focus was on the non state actors and they can be seen in international organizations, multinational organizations and even international non-governmental organizations like the Amnesty International which is the main focus of this research work
2. In addition, it was discovered that the rich and powerful nations used these international organizations as a medium to control and further maintain their hegemony over the third world countries like Nigeria through their various activities in the third world countries.
3. Not only that, the media was discovered to be the major medium of advocacy of the Amnesty International to advocate for human rights, freedom and liberty of individuals.
4. Also, the powerful nations was discovered that the powerful nations are using the Amnesty International to control the Third World countries like Nigeria in their advocacy for human rights through the press release which determine the image of Nigeria in the international system.
5. Finally, it was discovered that the media is the main means through which the Nigerian government and her institutions and the Amnesty international embark on the cat and Mouse relationship.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations can be adopted to solve the issue of the cat and mouse relationship between the Nigeria government, her institutions like the military and the paramilitaries and the Amnesty International.

Transparency and accountability is very key to democratic practices in any political system which helps to guarantee fundamental human rights. This key feature of democracy is lacking in Nigeria thus drawing the attention of the international organizations like the Amnesty International to advocate for these rights and democratic practice.

Also, rule of law in Nigeria will also go a long way in reducing the opportunity for the Amnesty International to bring their advocacy campaign to the country consequently solving the incessant allegations of the organization in the country.

Furthermore, the media outlets and the journalists should embark on investigative journalism to confirm the facts and source of the information before publishing the news for public consumption in order to prevent the spread of fake news which will mould the perception of the people about the government of a country.

Finally, the international bodies should respect the sovereignty of these third world countries by reducing unnecessary interference into the domestic affairs of these nations through the various international organizations whether governmental or non-governmental.

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