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An Evaluation of Press Coverage of Children's and Women's Rights in Nigeria

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Abstract

Factors like military incursion in the political life of Nigeria and brazen mismanagement of public affairs few occasions civilians came into power have over the years, cripple political, economic, social, ecological and cultural developments in Nigeria. Women and children largely constitute the principal victims of these combined political, social, ecological and economic crises to the extent women's and children's rights have been neglected over a long period of time in Nigeria. This study however, aimed to ascertain the nature, frequency and volume of coverage given to issues relating to women's and children's rights in the Nigerian news media. Content analysis was used to analyse the content of three randomly selected Nigerian Newspapers. Data obtained for the study were analysed using tables and simple percentages. Summary of results showed that the twin rights issues were poorly covered even as they were denied prominent positioning in the Nigerian press.

Key words: Press; Children and women's rights; Human right; Gender; Development; Mass media; Press coverage and Nigeria

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INTRODUCTION

It was "Folake" who was jailed after she accused a man of rape. A domestic worker, she said her employer's husband had forced her into his bedroom and made her watch a violent videotape before forcing her to have sex. A medical examination supported her allegation. Yet she was the one brought to court, charged with slander for making the accusation, and remanded in prison until her family could raise the bail money to have her released. The material evidence of the crime, handed over to the police, was later said to have disappeared. No charges were brought against the man she accused (AI, 2004, p.1)

Sometime in 1999, an uncle sexually assaulted a little girl of six years old. The matter was taken to court and prosecuted. In giving judgment however, the magistrate set the accused person free for lack of [corroboration]. This was in spite of the bloodied pants, the testimony of the mother who noticed the pains while bathing her, and the medical evidence from a government hospital. The magistrate said collaboration meant testimony from another person who witnessed the alleged act. It was the type of miscarriage of justice that I could not take. Here was a woman who was courageous enough to go to court in a society where silence on violence against women is the norm only to be told she could not get justice due to the technicalities of the law (AI, 2004, p.1).

The above preface to this study vividly encapsulates the isolated cases and numerous social, legal, political and cultural problems facing women and children across the globe. In many parts of the world, women and children have suffered the ugly consequences of social, political and economic abuses. Yet every human being is entitled by nature and international human laws to enjoy certain inalienable rights. This explains why issues relating to human rights and privileges are very important to human societies including freedom of information. In fact, Article 19 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human

Rights states quite clearly that “everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression – and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any medium and regardless of frontiers (cited in Hachten, 1996, p. 159).

Broad as the notions of humans rights are, Hosken (1981, pp. 1-10) observes that significant differences abound in the freedoms inherently possessed by or recognized for men and boys, as well as those for women and girls. This is traceable to the inherent historical and traditional bias that tends to define limits on the exercise of rights by different sexes. By nature, certain rights are outrightly conferred on some people to the detriment of others on the basis of gender or age or both. All these abuses undermine the Fundamental Human Rights (already cited above). It emphasizes that no “distinction of any kind, such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (UN General Assembly Publication cited in JHR, 2003, p. 3) should deny anyone the rights and freedoms spelt out therein. The key idea is that, “as human beings, we are all entitled to equal treatment and opportunities, despite our origin, gender, economic situation, ethnicity, etc” (JHR, 2003, p.4). Kelsey and Peterson writing for *Journalists for Human Rights* (JHR) further conceptualized the term ‘human rights’ in the following way:

Rights can be civil, cultural, social, economic or political. For instance, the right to eat, the right to shelter, the right to practice any religion and the right to free expression, are all fundamental human rights. They mean that we, despite our background, must have equal access to each of these rights. The concept of human rights therefore underlines that all human beings are entitled to certain standards of treatment and freedoms, affirming our moral equality (JHR, 2003, p. 4).

The constitutions of most nations recognize fundamental human rights. In Nigeria, for instance, Section 17 subsection 2(a) of the Constitution states that “every citizen shall have equal rights, obligations and opportunities before the law” (1999, p. 12). This is the idea that informs the codification and subsequent ratification of the International Bill of Rights to which most nations of the world adhere. Though some countries have not ratified it, such countries are bound to respect the sanctity of human rights by adhering to International Customary Law - a moral code which forbids slavery, torture, arbitrary deprivation of life, arbitrary arrest and detention, denial of freedom of thought, conscience or religion, presuming a person guilty until proven innocent, executing children and pregnant women, permitting the advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred, denying people of marriageable age the right to marry, and denying minorities cultural, religious or language rights.

Based on these legal frameworks and moral codes, it is expected that certain tradition-bound rights and obligations that tend to favour some people over others

should give way to the enthronelement of equal rights for all men and women as well as adults and children. Ideally, this is what it should be. In practice, that is not the case. This explains why respect for children's and women's rights have been and will continue to be on the front burner of both national and international debates, discourse, campaigns and conventions. In the context of women's rights, Lockwood (2006, p. 52) explains that issues associated with the notions of women's rights include but are not limited to the right to bodily integrity and autonomy; vote (universal suffrage); hold public offices; work; fair wages and equal pay; own property; education; serve in the legal contracts; and have marital, parental and religious rights.

In the case of children's rights, the United Nations at its General Assembly of 20 November 1989 ratified and adopted the rights of the child to include but not limited to freedom of: expression; thought, conscience and religion; association; privacy; access to appropriate information; parental responsibility; protection from abuses and neglect; protection of child without a family; adoption; education; social security; standard living; protection from child labour, sexual exploitation and drug abuse; protection from sales, trafficking and abduction, and protection from torture and deprivation of liberty.

Since the ratification and adoption of women's and children's rights by United Nations, Nigeria and many other countries that are signatory to the charter set up various committees to oversee the implementation of these rights within their national boundaries. In Nigeria, for instance, the National Child Rights Implementation Committee was set up to facilitate the realization of the United Nations Convention on the rights of the child. Also, various government agencies, non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations have risen in support of full implementation of women's and children's rights in Nigeria.

1. STATEMENT OF RESEARCH PROBLEM

Military usurpation of power has crippled political, economic, social, ecological and cultural developments in Nigeria for many years. The matter was made worse by brazen mismanagement of public affairs few occasions civilians came into power. In spite of the excess revenue accruing the nation's generous endowment of petroleum deposits (about \$320 billion since 1970) and other abundant mineral resources, socio-economic, political and ecological developments in Nigeria have remained low due to corruption and gross mismanagement of public fund. For instance, the former self-styled military president Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida's regime has not been able to account for the \$12bn excess oil revenue generated during the Gulf crisis (dubbed Gulf Oil Windfall) several years after, even when the same Babangida has made several attempts to go back to office as civilian president of Nigeria.

The consequences of all these have been low economic performance characterized by hyper inflation and low per capita income; crippled public service delivery, politics of winner-take-all, and widening social inequality and gap between the privileged and the less privileged. However,

Women and children constitute the principal victims of these combined political, social and economic crises. In fact, the NPC and UNICEF (2003, p. 2) further reported that:

Nigeria made less progress over the past four decades in reducing mortality among under-five children than almost any other country in Sub-Saharan Africa – even when compared to countries that have experienced long civil wars. As Nigeria enters the 21st century, it is still a tragic fact that almost one in every five Nigerian children dies before reaching the age of five. The under-five mortality rate is 30 times higher than in the industrialized countries. Likewise, women still face a high risk of death in pregnancy or during delivering: the maternal mortality ratio remains about 100 times higher than in the industrialized countries.

Similarly, Nwosu and Nwodu (2003, p. 1) found that poverty which is a consequence of poor management of public affairs has pushed many Nigerian children into forced labour even as the system denies them their rights to decent life and education. Consequently, women's and children's rights have been neglected over a long period of time. However, the estimated 60 million Nigerian children no doubt, deserve greater attention in public management than any other segment of the population in that children represent the country's future. And, realistically, Nigeria cannot expect to prosper and hold its place in the world in the 21st century with a majority of the children progressing into adulthood poorly educated, frustrated and facing an uncertain future (NPC and UNICEF, 2003, p. 2).

The same applies to women. In spite of the emphasis on equal rights, women suffer institutional alienation from mainstream policy making and resource allocation. No meaningful progress in the advancement of women is therefore expected until there is a fundamental change in this regard. This is the main thrust of the advocacy for Gender and Development [GAD]. Indeed, the 1995 Beijing platform for action cited in Fab-Ukozor (2003, p. 261) states that:

...governments and other actors should promote an active and visible policy of mainstreaming a gender perspective in all policies and programmes so that before decisions are taken, an analysis is made of the effects on women and men respectively **including children**[emphasis by the authors].

This can hardly be achieved in a socio-political system that is rooted in large-scale corruption and widespread mal-administration. This perhaps explains why Nigerians hailed the successful transition of political power from one civilian administration to another in May 2007 and 2011, following national elections. Expectations among Nigerians in general as well as advocates for gender and development were that the return to democratic

government would pave way for full recognition and strict implementation of people's rights in Nigeria with particular regard to women and children's rights.

While this hope may not have been dashed given that democracy is gradually gaining firm ground in Nigeria, it is in this context that this study examined systematically the extent to which the news media contributed to public knowledge of the importance of protecting women's and children's rights in Nigeria. Examining mass media's role in this direction is very crucial given that the mass media play indispensable roles in public information campaigns in every society. The role of the mass media is grouped by Nwodu (2009, p. 321) into three broad categories, namely:

- Traditional functions which include educating, informing and entertaining the public.

- Institutional and social responsibility functions which include watchdog function - offering constructive criticisms of government and institutions (i.e. the media as watchdog of society; advocacy function (championing campaigns for a cause) which Nwosu (1996, p. 18) describes as "crusade function"; and correlating the environment, which entails objective interpretation of issues.

- Situational function which entails conferring status on issues and individuals in the society; setting and mirroring agenda for public discussion; issues backgrounding and framing; and determining issues salience through their reports. These categorizations are consistent with the views of other scholars like Baran (1999, p. 132); Dominick (2002, p. 237); Daniel (2003, p. 119) and Nwosu (2007, p. 9) who agree that through their reports on and interpretation of issues, the mass media system of any society help to define social realities for the audiences.

- As both social institutions and business concerns, the mass media constitute an indispensable arm of human society. In this context, what the media choose to emphasize or ignore affect how people perceive or understand the issues. This is in tune with the agenda-setting function of the media (White, 1973, p. 245; McCombs and Shaw, 1974, p. 28; Edeani, 1990, p. 180).

This study proposes that the extent to which the mass media cover or fail to cover women's and children's rights in Nigeria will certainly affect the Nigerian public's understanding of the issues relating to such rights. However, it is not quite clear whether the Nigerian news media actually report issues relating to women's and children's rights.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

There is an abundance of literature which suggests that the mass media in Nigeria are guilty of partisanship (Omu, 1978; Uche, 1989; Nwosu, 1990; Okigbo, 1992; Onyisi, 1996; Enemaku, 2003; Nnadi, 2008). Related to this are findings which show that political issues receive far greater attention in Nigerian mass media than other important issues like health, education, environment, oil and gas, and

social issues (Edeani, 1990; Akagbosu and Omoruyi, 2004; Galadima and Enighe, 2004; Fab-Ukozor, 2007).

In the Nigerian social environment where mass media emphasise political matters to the detriment of other relevant issues, the citizens are denied knowledge of those relevant issues that are rarely or poorly reported in the media. This is evident in the fact that "the mass media have the ability to create and nurture vivid images of events in the people's minds through the amount and style of coverage they give to events" (Edeani, 1990, p. 180).

By setting social agenda, framing events and acting as stop gates for news flow (much of these are discussed under theoretical framework below), the mass media affect what the audience members pay attention to; what they regard as important; and what they ponder about. It is not out of place, therefore, that how much media audiences in Nigeria know about crucial issues of women's and children's rights will depend more on the style of media coverage and frequency with which the issues are covered in the country's mass media. This position is supported by the theoretical frameworks of this study.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

Agenda setting, gate-keeping and framing analyses provide theoretical backing to this study. This section starts with an analysis of the agenda-setting theory of mass media. It is then followed by an examination of gate-keeping process of news selection and with an examination of how news media frame events and news reports. The notion of agenda setting started with Lippmann's (1922, p. 3) observation that the mass media mediate between the "world outside and the picture in our heads". Cohen (1963, p. 13) reinforced this view by asserting that the press is "significantly more than a purveyor of information and opinion". Cohen submitted that the press "may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling readers what to think about" (1963, p. 14). Lippmann and Cohen's submissions were mere expressions of personal observations which lacked empirical foundation. It was McCombs and Shaw's (1974, p. 28) study which established an empirical link between media agenda and public agenda. Based on the outcome of their study, McCombs and Shaw stated that:

Mass media have the ability to transfer the salience of items on their news agenda for the public agenda. We judge as important what the media judge as important...by deciding what to emphasize in their news page, the media set agenda of the day. (1974, p. 28)

Since McCombs and Shaw used the outcome of their study of an American presidential election to advance the argument that the mass media set agenda for public discussion, the theory has received critical and sustained attention from researchers. Central to the agenda-setting theory is the idea that the media influence the level or

importance that people attach to what they see, read or hear from the mass media. This suggests that the mass media shape how audiences construct social reality. For example, by selecting certain events and ignoring others and by determining how the selected events are reported, journalists influence the way the public perceive social reality.

Agenda setting theory is quite relevant to this study because if the media set the agenda of public discussion, we assume that sustained media coverage of women's and children's rights will directly influence the level of importance the Nigerian public attaches to the issues. Therefore, the more attention the mass media devote to women's and children's rights, the more likely the public will consider them to be important. White (1973 p. 245) for example argued that "...the world looks different to different people, depending not only on their personal interest, but also on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers they read".

Closely related to agenda setting is the notion of media framing. There is abundant literature on how the news media frame news events which substantially affects how the public perceives news events (Entman, 1993, 1991; McLeod and Detenber, 1999; Scheufele, 1999; Peng, 2008). According to Entman (1993, p. 52): "*To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described* (italics maintained as in the original). Gitlin (1980, p. 7) states that frames provide an organizing framework for journalists who report news events and the public who consume the news. News reporting styles and conventions (e.g. space and time allocation, headline size, placement or positioning of news stories, use of quotations, etc.) are reporting devices used by journalists and editors to increase or reduce the salience of a news report.

In this case, salience means "making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences" (Entman, 1993, p. 53). Therefore, the level of importance which news media attach to an event could be determined by looking at what is included, excluded or suppressed in the news story. Thus, Peng (2008, p. 362) describes framing as "a process of inclusion and exclusion". Similarly, Entman (1993, p. 55) suggests that "frames call attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions". It is not in doubt therefore that what the media in Nigeria include or exclude in the process of framing women's and children's rights issues will determine to a large extent how the audiences will perceive the issues.

Gate-keeping theory also lends support to this study. The origin of the theory is traceable to Lewin (1947, p. 35), a psychologist who studied how 'theory of channels

and gate keepers' affect social change. The study which was carried out in the domain of psychology no doubt suggests that Lewin's "theory of how 'items' are selected or rejected as they pass through 'channels' could be applied to the flow of news" (Shoemaker et al., 2001, p.233). Since White (1950, p. 38) adapted Lewin's theory to the study of what guides newspaper wire editors' selection of news, several studies on gate-keeping have followed. Many of them sought to establish the degree to which journalists' subjective judgment influences news selection and whether there were in reality, well defined and consistent objective (rather than subjective) patterns of news selection (White, 1950; Gieber, 1956; Hirsch, 1977; McQuail, 1987; Singer, 1998).

In the context of mass communication, gate-keeping emphasizes the existence of a number of stop gates in the media which potential news events or items pass through starting from the sources (who decide what to share with others via the media and what to conserve to themselves) to journalists (series of reporters, sub-editors and editors) before such news events or items can be accepted and published as news or rejected and thrown into trash can as unusable materials. The fact is that a number of events (scheduled and unscheduled) compete for coverage by news media on a daily basis. In the same way, field reporters are faced with the challenge of what to cover in preference to several other events. In the newsroom sub-editors, editors and editors-in-chiefs are also confronted with the challenge of choosing from an array of news items a few of which can make news of the day. By deciding whether women's and children's issues should scale through several gates in the media and what aspect of the issues should be allowed to pass through the gates, the media by implication, influence Nigerian audience members' construction of reality as regards the issues.

Drawing strength from the literature review and the theoretical frameworks, this study aimed to ascertain the nature, frequency and volume of coverage given to issues relating to women's and children's rights in the Nigerian news media. Other objectives of the study were to:

- 1) Determine and understand the regularity of Nigerian media coverage of women's and children's rights.
- 2) Understand how women's and children's rights issues were framed in the Nigerian press.
- 3) Understand various forms of coverage of women's and children's rights issues in Nigerian press.
- 4) Determine the volume and direction of media coverage of women's and children's rights.

Based on the objectives, the following research questions were framed and investigated in the study:

- 1) What is the frequency of coverage of women's and children's rights issues in Nigerian press?
- 2) How did the Nigerian press frame women's and children's rights issues in news reports?
- 3) What were the dominant forms of coverage of women's and children's rights issues in the Nigerian press?

- 4) What is the volume and direction of coverage of women's and children's rights issues in the Nigerian press?

4. METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was used in this study because it enabled the researchers to investigate how Nigerian newspapers reported women's and children's rights. Given that the subject of inquiry cuts across diverse socio-cultural, ethnic, political and economic interests, three national newspapers were selected by means of random sampling without replacement. The newspapers were not selected on the basis of ethnic leaning or background. The researcher wrote down names of national newspapers in circulation within the period of study in separate sheets of paper; folded the papers and put them inside a sack; the papers were shuffled and the three newspapers were then selected randomly without replacement. Through this means, *The Champion, Punch and The Guardian* emerged as the newspapers selected for this study.

The study was limited to a period of one year 2011 with a view to establish a concrete pattern and trend of coverage given to women's and children's rights by the selected newspapers. The first month of each quarter of the year was sampled. This meant that the January, May and September editions of the randomly selected newspapers were studied while Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday editions were purposively selected and examined every week. Overall, 120 editions of each of the selected newspapers were nominated. This gave rise to a total of 360 copies of newspapers within the period of study.

Coding guide and coding sheet were used to obtain data for the study. To control the study and to further enhance the validity of the expected results, two research assistants were engaged in the coding. Coded items were tested for reliability and validity. This was done by finding out how many times the coders agreed or rejected agreement in coding. To ascertain the reliability of the coding process therefore, the researchers engaged two independent coders to code a sub-sample of 13 units and the coders were found to code in similar way up to eleven times. The inter-coder reliability was determined by using Holsti's formula cited in Wimmer and Dominick (2003, p. 157) thus:

$$\frac{\text{Reliability}}{N1 + N2} = 2m$$

$$\frac{2(11)}{13 + 13}$$

$$\frac{22}{26}$$

$$= 85\%$$

Coding agreement was therefore judged to be reliable given that the inter-coder agreement was 85%. Impliedly, the coders were able to code in similar ways up to 85% of the time; hence the outcome of the coding was taken as a reliable instrument for informed analysis.

- **The units of analysis**, which are the manifest contents to be examined in the selected newspapers and their corresponding attributes, were:

- **Frequency of coverage** of women's and children's rights - with the number of mentions of the issues in the selected newspapers categorized as (i) 1 – 2 times; (ii) 3 – 4 times; and (iii) 5 mentions and above.

- **Story placement** was categorized as (i) front page (FP); (ii) inside pages (IPs); and (iii) back page (BP). In the process of grading and framing the news, most times media men tend to increase or reduce the salience of news item through the positioning or placement of the story. In this case, stories placed in the front page are usually considered most important by both the editors and the audiences followed by those placed in the back page and next, the inside pages.

- **Form of coverage** was categorized as: (i) straight news story; (ii) editorial; (iii) feature story; (iv) opinion articles/columns; (v) letters; (vi) photo news; (vii) advertorials/supplements (viii) public enlightenment campaign; and (ix) cartoons.

- **Dominant issue covered:** This was concerned with the women's and children's rights' issue covered most. There were four categories namely: (i) Development rights which covered access to education, resources and women empowerment (ii) survival rights which covered mortality and mobility among women and children, HIV/AIDS impact on women and children, human settlements, water and environmental sanitation; (iii) protection rights which covered women's and children's with disabilities; abuse and violence against women and children; harmful traditional practices (such as child marriage, females genital cutting often referred as mutilation, widowhood, divorce and inheritance); exploitation of women and children (such as child labour, child begging, sexual exploitation and trafficking of women and children; women and children in conflict and humanitarian emergencies; (iv) participation rights which covered children's participation in decisions affecting them,

women's participation in society's programmes, and women and children involvement in decision making.

- **Major actors in/sources** of women's and children's rights were news categorized as (i) international organizations/agencies (such as UNICEF and UNDP); (ii) various levels of government and government agencies; (iii) NGOs/CBOs; (iv) Multi-national Companies/ corporate organisations; (v) Professional bodies (such as Nigerian Union of journalists, NUJ; Nigerian Bar Association, NBA; Nigerian Medical Association, NMA; Advertising Practitioners' Council of Nigeria, APCON, Nigerian Institute of Marketing, NIMARK etc); (vi) women organizations; (vii) individuals/ philanthropists.

5. ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

Data for the study were collected based on the stipulated units of analysis. Coding guide and coding sheet were used to collect data for the analysis. Simple percentages and tables were used to analyse data collected for the study and to provide answers to the research questions. Before analysing the data, it is instructive to clarify that contrary to the 120 copies of newspapers originally proposed to be studied not all the editions that fell within the sample period were found due largely to perennial poor record keeping in the libraries. This shows that though scholars like Nwodu and Koga (2009, p. 14) have reported that this nagging poor record keeping problem facing content analytical studies in Nigeria has improved tremendously, the syndrome has not been completely overcome. Following the system of selecting samples from the sampling frame therefore, the researcher obtained a total of 102 copies of *Champion*; 111 copies of *the Guardian* and 109 copies of *Punch* newspapers yielding a total of 322 copies of newspapers as against 360 copies proposed earlier. This final figure was used in the analysis because it was considered to be a fair representation of the original sample size. Details are presented in the table below.

Table 1
Number of Newspapers and Stories on Women's and Children's Rights Found Within the Sample Period

Newspaper title	No. Of newspaper proposed	No. Found within sample frame	No. Of stories on women's rights	No. Of stories on children's rights	Total no. Of stories on w/c's rights
champion	120	102	22	18	40(33.6%)
The Guardian	120	111	25	17	42(35.3%)
Punch	120	109	19	18	37(31.1%)
Total	360	322	66	53	119(100%)

Source: Researchers' 2012 Content Analysis.

Based on the data shown in Table 1, answers to the research questions are presented in tables below.

Research Question One

What is the frequency of coverage of the women's and children's rights issues in the Nigerian press?

Data in Table 2 show low frequency of coverage of women's and children's rights in the Nigerian press. Of

a total of 322 copies of newspapers studied, only 119 reports on women's and children's rights were found. In terms of the number of mentions made about women's and children's rights, it was found that 87.4% of the copies of newspapers studied mentioned the issues up to 1-2 times; while 12.6% mentioned the issues 3-4 times and none recorded 5 mentions and above.

Table 2
Frequency of Coverage of Women’s and Children’s Rights in the Nigerian Press

Frequency	Newspaper titles			Row total
	<i>Champion</i>	<i>The Guardian</i>	<i>Punch</i>	
1 – 2 times	35	33	36	104(87.4%)
3 – 4 times	5	9	1	15(12.6%)
5 times and above	-	-	-	- (0%)
Column Total	40	42	37	119(100%)

Source: Researchers’ 2012 Content Analysis

Research Question Two

What is the dominant positioning of women’s and children’s rights in the Nigerian press?

Table 3
Dominant Positioning of Women’s and Children’s Rights in the Nigerian Press

Newspaper titles	Number studied	Stories on w&c rights	Story positioning			Row total
			Fp	Ips	Bp	
champion	102	40	2	35	3	40
The Guardian	111	42	4	37	1	42
Punch	109	37	5	32	-	37
Column Total	322	119	11(9.2%)	104(87.4%)	4(3.4%)	119(100%)

Source: Researchers’ 2012 Content Analysis

Figures in Table 3 show that most of the stories published on women’s and children’s rights were buried in the inside pages of the newspapers studied. Precisely, 9.2% of the stories were placed on the front page (FP), 87.4% were in the inside pages (IPs) while 3.4% were found on the back page (BP).

Research Question Three

What is the major form of coverage of women’s and children’s rights issues in Nigerian press?

Table 4
Major Forms of Coverage of Women’s and Children’s Rights Issues in Nigerian Press

Newspaper Titles	News	Editorial	Cartoon	Opinion/ Article	Photo news	Features	Letters	Advert	PE Campaign	Sup	Row Total
Champion	18	2	2	8	2	4	2	-	2	-	40
The Guardian	19	2	1	6	2	5	4	1	1	1	42
Punch	17	3	3	4	1	4	3	1	1	-	37
Total	54(45.4%)	7(5.9%)	6(5.5%)	18(15.1%)	5(4.2%)	13(10.9%)	9(7.6%)	2(1.7%)	4(3.4%)	1(.8%)	119(100%)

Source: Researchers’ 2012 Content Analysis. Note: “PE” represents Public Enlightenment while “Sup” represents Supplement

This study examined the dominant forms of coverage given to women’s and children’s rights issues. Data in Table 4 show that 45.4% were news stories, 5.9% were editorial, cartoon recorded 5.5%, while opinion/articles recorded 15.1%. The figures also show that 4.2% of the coverage comprised of photo news, 10.9% were features

stories, letters received 7.6% of coverage, ads received 1.7%, coverage, public enlightenment campaigns were 3.4% while supplement received 0.8%.

Research Question Four

What is the major direction of coverage of women’s and children’s rights in the Nigerian press?

Table 5
Major Direction of Coverage of Women’s and Children’s Rights in the Nigerian Press

Newspaper Titles	Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral	Total
Champion	27	5	8	40
The Guardian	24	9	9	42
Punch	24	6	7	37
Total	75((63.0%)	20(16.8%)	24(20.2%)	119(100%)

Source: Researchers’ 2012 Content Analysis

Analysis of the story direction show that 63.0% of the stories were favourable to the women’s and children’s rights issues, 16.8% were unfavourable while 20.2% were neutral to the issues of women’s and children’s rights.

Research Question Five

What are the dominant women’s and children’s rights issues covered by the newspapers?

Table 6
The Dominant Women's and Children's Rights Issue Covered by the Newspapers

Newspaper titles	Development rights	Survival rights	Protection rights	Participation rights	Row total
champion	9	19	10	2	40
The Guardian	11	22	6	3	42
Punch	12	17	7	1	37
Total	2(27.0%)	8(48.7%)	3(19.3%)	6(5.0%)	119(100%)

Source: 2012 Content Analysis.

Data in Table 6 show that survival rights which are concerned with mortality and mobility among women and children, HIV/AIDS impact on women and children, human settlements, water and environmental sanitation received greater attention (48.7%) in the media more than other forms of women's and children's rights. This is followed by development rights (27.0%) which involve access to education, resources and women empowerment. Furthermore, protection rights which concern women and children with disabilities; abuse and violence against women and children; harmful traditional practices (like

child marriage, females genital cutting, widowhood, divorce and inheritance); exploitation of women and children (like child labour recorded 19.3% attention while least or minimal attention (5.0%) was given to participation rights involving children's participation in decisions affecting them, women's participation in society's programmes, and women's and children's involvement in decision-making.

Research Question six

What is the major source of news on women's and children's rights issues in the selected newspapers?

Table 7
The Major Source of News on Women's and Children's Rights Issues in the Selected Newspapers

Newspaper title	Major news source						Total
	International Orgs/agencies	Govt./ Govt. Agencies	Ngos/ cbos	Multinational Companies	Women groups/ orgs	Individuals/ philanthropists	
champion	15	4	9	-	10	2	40
The Guardian	17	4	10	1	9	1	42
Punch	19	3	7	1	7	-	37
Total	51(42.9%)	11(9.2%)	20(16.8%)	2(1.7%)	32(26.9%)	3(2.5%)	119(100%)

Source: 2012 Content Analysis

Analysis of the major news and information sources concerning women's and children's rights showed that International organizations/Agencies like UNICEF led the advocacy for support of the twin rights with 42.9% followed by Women Groups/Organisations and NGOs/CBOs with 26.9% and 20.8% respectively. Data further showed that various levels of governments and their agencies recorded 9.2%; individuals/philanthropists recorded 2.5% while Multinational companies scored the least with 1.7%.

DISCUSSION

The study showed that the Nigerian press did not give sufficient attention to the coverage of women's and children's rights. For example, of the 322 editions of the newspapers studied, 119 (27%) editions covered issues relating to the subject of inquiry while 203(63%) did not cover the issues. Even within the 119 edition of the newspapers that covered the issues, the frequency of mentions of the issues of interest was found to be low as 1 – 2 mentions dominated with 87.4%; 3 – 4 mentions were 12.6% while none was found within 5 mentions and above. This finding reinforces earlier research findings by Edeani

(1990); Akagbosu and Omoruyi (2004); and Galadima and Enighe (2004) which showed that the mass media in Nigeria often give more coverage to political issues than other pressing issues of national interest. The implication however is that the press in the country should be sensitized to live up to their social responsibility role of conferring status on salient issues of public interest such as women's and children's rights in the country. Women are very crucial in nation building while children are very important for generational continuity – the reason issues concerning them should be given prominent attention in the press.

The outcome of the study also showed that 87.4% of the stories on women's and children's rights were found in the inside pages of the newspapers leaving insignificant 9.2% and 3.4% respectively for the front and back pages. This simply implies that while not enough coverage was given to the issues, the little coverage on the issues found were not accorded the prominence they deserve. Positioning the bulk of the stories on women's and children's rights in the inside pages while leaving only 12.6% for both the front and back pages that are considered strategic positions in the press shows that the press did not consider crucial issues of women's and children's rights important enough to merit the strategic

positions. This finding corroborates the agenda setting theory in which White (1973, p. 245) and Ndolo (2009, p. 6) agree that much of what the public know about issues around them depend so much on the map that is drawn for them by the writers, editors, and publishers they read. The finding is also reinforced by notion of media framing which Entman (1993, p. 55) argues that it involves calling “attention to some aspects of reality while obscuring other elements, which might lead audiences to have different reactions”. The media have power to structure and determine what the audience members consider important by the amount of prominence the media give to issues and how issues are packaged and presented to audiences. It may not be out of place therefore that in view of the manifest poor prominence given to women’s and children’s issues in the Nigerian press, the audiences may have poor knowledge and perceptions of women’s and children’s rights’ issues.

A test of forms of coverage given to the twin issues showed that the coverage cut across diverse forms of media contents with news dominating others with 45.4%. The idea of giving diverse forms coverage to the issues is considered a welcome development in view of the fact that such development will facilitate easy exposure to and diffusion of the issues among the audience members. This is true given that the knowledge of uses and gratifications theory of the mass media has shown that individuals have needs for which they look up to mass media for clue (Katz et al, 1974 p.20). Reporting issues of women’s and children’s rights in diverse forms will therefore help to keep the issues in the minds of the audience members regardless of what their choice of media interests and contents might be.

The researchers also examined the direction of the coverage given to the issues of interest to the study and found that 63% of the coverage was in favour of women’s and children’s rights; 16.8% were unfavourable to the rights while 20.2% were neutral. This is in consonance with the gate-keeping and framing roles of the media. While gate-keeping theory as earlier pointed out, emphasises that journalists and editors at various levels and stages of news flow decide what is to be published or broadcast (Shoemaker et al., 2001, p. 232), media also frame events by determining what quantity of and facts about the events to be highlighted and how they should be highlighted (Peng, 2008; Entman, 1991; Entman, 1993; McLeod and Detenber, 1999). Thus, the more favourable coverage the media continues to accord women’s and children’s rights’ issues, the more members of the audience will be favourably disposed to the issues to the extent of joining the advocacy for such rights.

An evaluation of the dominant form of women and children’s rights issues covered by the selected newspapers showed that survival rights were given more attention than any other aspects of the rights, followed in descending order by development, protection and

participation rights. The worrisome aspect of this finding is that participation rights received least attention (rated 5.0%). This development is not considered healthy in view of the fact that if truly the press should commit itself to the propagation of and mobilization for the protection and actualization of women’s and children’s rights in Nigeria, the issue of participation rights with particular reference to actively involving women and children in decision making should receive priority attention in the press.

Finally, analysis of the major news and information sources concerning women’s and children’s rights showed that International organizations/Agencies like UNICEF are leading the advocacy for support of the twin rights with 42.9% followed by Women Groups/Organisations and NGOs/CBOs with 26.9% and 20.8% respectively. The import is that in spite of the huge concern raised by these concerned groups, various levels of government and multinational companies that dominate the country’s economic activities (particularly in the oil and gas industry) have not done much to promote women and children’s rights. It is even worrisome that the multinational companies that should structure the promotion of women and children’s rights as part of their social responsibility to the people of Nigeria are lagging behind individuals/philanthropists. The reason behind this might be traced to the way the mass media frame issues relating to women’s and children’s rights in Nigeria. The framing analysis as earlier pointed states that the media frame events by determining how much of the events should be highlighted in the media; what fact about the events should be highlighted; when and how the events should be highlighted (Peng, 2008; Entman, 1993; Detemher, 1999). Thus, through the poor dominant positioning of women’s and children’s rights in the inside pages of the newspapers which is part of the framing devices, the newspapers had the impression that these issues are less important to worry about.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study focused on empirical evaluation of press coverage of children’s and women’s rights in Nigeria using content analysis as the research method. Summary of the outcome of the study showed among others that:

- Enough mentions were not given to the twin rights issues in the little coverage given to them.
- Most stories on the rights issues were buried in the inside pages thereby giving very minimal prominence to the issues.
- News items more than other forms of media contents dominated the forms of coverage given to the issues.
- Survival rights received greater mention in the press more than other forms of women and children’s rights.
- International organizations, NGO/CBOs and women’s groups more than others champion most of the news and other publications concerning women and children’s rights

– an indication that various levels of government and their concerned agencies as well as multinational companies have not done much in this direction.

Based on the findings therefore, the researchers recommended that the Federal Government of Nigeria, multinational companies and international agencies and organizations should sponsor elaborate combined methodological studies to ascertain the correlation between press coverage of women's and children's rights and the audience perception-cum-attitude to the issues. A study of this nature will no doubt help us to ascertain whether we are making progress in the dissemination and diffusion as well as advocacy of the important issues of woman and children's rights.

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