Mobilising Pan African News Agency Participation in Global News Flow

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Abstract:
This is essentially an exploratory essay on the desirability of mobilizing Pan African News Agency participation in the present Global news flow. This paper explores the historical development of global news agencies, with emphasis on the Pan African News Agency. Attempts were made to examine the historical antecedents of the North-South Information dichotomy in post cold war era which was the off-shoot of the New World Information and Communication debate. In like manner, efforts made by various countries (especially countries in the Northern hemisphere) to correct the Global news imbalance were also analyzed. The paper concluded by proffering different strategies through which PANA could participate adequately in the global news flow. The strategies include but not limited to yearly payment of subscription by member countries for the effective funding of the agency; collective finance of African satellite by member countries; investment in science and technology; adequate funding of engineering and technical colleges in African countries; establishments and funding of science-oriented tertiary institutions in African countries; and allocation of 26% budget for educational sector in African countries.

Key words: Mobilising, News Agency, Global, News Flow, Participation

1. Introduction

It is an open secret that mass communication, be it national or international uses the services of bodies called adjuncts or extenders. These are agencies which specialize in the collection, processing and distribution of news and information of mass media and other subscribers and users. They are referred to as News Agencies.
In the words of Mort (1977:818) cited in Chuba (2002:259)

News is moved across borders by a surprisingly thin network of correspondents for various types of news organization, with widely disparate purposes. Some correspondents report back to the media in their own countries and them approach news from the point of view of specific readers and viewers. Others report to agencies, which distribute their dispatches regionally, globally or to internationally circulate magazines, and they attempt to achieve a more universal outlook including details of interest to readers from many countries. Cuba (2002) adds that a manifest feature of Mort's point is the classification of news agencies into three classes: These include;

1.1. International News Agencies

These are agencies that are referred to as World News Agencies. They operate on a global scale. The agencies in these categories include: Associated Press (AP) founded in 1948 and belonging to the United States, United Press International (UPI) established in 1958 and owned by the United State, Agence France Presse owned by the France, Reuter of Great Britain founded in 1951 and Telegraph Agensvo Sovetskovo Soyuza (TASS) i.e. The Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union founded in 1925 and owned by the defunct Soviet Union.

1.2. Regional News Agencies

These are news agencies which have correspondents and clients in many countries, but whose services are only within the region of their location. These news agencies include, but not limited to: Kyodo of Japan, Indian Press Trust (PTI), Tanjug of Yugoslavia, Pan African News Agency (PANA) and Non – aligned News Agency Pool.

1.3. National Agencies

These are news agencies that operate within a country. Nearly all the countries of the world have a national news agency, such as The News Agency of Nigeria, Ghana News Agency, among others.

2. Challenges of Africa in Global News Flow

Musa (2011) stated that the neo-colonial phase of Nigeria's political economy was becoming a source of frustration for the citizens and it was clear that the country's leadership needed to respond even if to retain legitimacy.

The issues of lopsidedness in the allocation of resources within and between nations, increasing poverty and a general trend of unequal development that had become topical at national, regional and international and were becoming a source of frustration. Africa vis-à-vis Nigerian state officials and their counterparts from other African countries engaged such issues at the then Organization for African Unity (OAU) forum, which is now called the African Union (AU). Both at the ministerial and Head of States' summit it was agreed that African countries must demand an end to the lopsidedness in the international distribution of resources. They also agreed that the negative representation of the continent in international media should come to an end. (See Galtung 1971, Varis 1986, Zassoursky 1986, Rancagliolo 1986, Nordenstreng 1986) in Musa (2011).

African leaders at the time could support their claim on the domination, subversion and erosion of their values not only by pointing to dominant images on television and other media but also by citing international studies.

The global production and dissemination of information and knowledge, as well as ideological influence, may be characterized by an analysis of the global structure of communication. One aspect of this structure is the international flow of information through different media.

Thus, in April 1969, the Pan African News Agency was formed. It was formed during a conference of Africa Ministers of Information at the defunct Organization of Africa Unity headquarter, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Chuba (2002) explained further that PANA is a news agency whose ownership belongs to member countries of the African continent. She highlighted further that the agency was established to counter Western Media Imperialism. The agency commenced operations in May 25, 1985 and its headquarter is located in Dakar, Senegal.

In a similar way, Musa (2011) expatiated that African leaders passed a resolution at the 1973 OAU summit at Nairobi to put forward a demand for New World International Economic Order and New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO). At this moment, most of the African countries were also participating in the Non-Aligned Movement; together with other world leaders in that forum they formed an international alliance for the agitation of equity, fairness and balance in the distribution of economic and cultural resources.

3. North-South Information Dichotomy

Even after the attainment of political independent by most of African countries, there exist imbalance of news flow between the developed and the developing countries. Uche (1996:1), opined thus:

It was the pernicious and prejudicial manner the media of the North continued to portray the regions of the South as areas of earthquake, national disasters, dictators, military coup-detat, economic chaos, conflicts, catastrophe, hunger, famine, political instability, AIDS, malaria, bureaucratic inefficiency, official corruption and the like that provoked the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debate.

The New World Information and Communication debate of the 80s, bordered on the nature, content, direction, quantity, fairness, balance and objectivity in transnational flow of information that is dominated by the agencies of the industrialized North.

According to Traber 1985 in Uche (1996), part of the reason why the South and perhaps rebelled against the unidirectional flow of international information is:

The right of nations to participate in a multidimensional flow of information on the basic of equity was one of the starting points in the demand for a new information order, which was mainly the concern of non-aligned nations (mostly, the developing countries of the South). It was their way of saying no to their increasing integration into the corporate village of global communication dominated by the North. Saying no to the freedom of private corporations to infringe on the rights of nation-state.

The South called for social equity and justice in information dissemination and a restructuring of the global Communication system. Musa (2011:259) gave a detailed finding of the NWICO. Musa says that a major outcome of the agitation for NWICO at UNESCO was the establishment of the Sean McBride Commission to study and advise the body on the state of World Communication Flow. The finding, according to Musa published under the title "Many Voices One World" confirmed among others that, there was lopsidedness in the global distribution of infrastructure and flow of communication. The report also disclosed that about 80% of news

going through World News rooms originates from the 'Big 4' international news agencies. These include: Reuters, Associated Press (AP), United Press International (UPI) and Agence France Press (AFP). The report added that developing countries were underdeveloped in international news but the dearth of communication infrastructure is one of their greatest challenges.

Musa (2011) hints further that two observations emerge from McBride Commission Report. First, its finding legitimized developing countries stand in NWICO. Second, its findings and recommendations on communication infrastructure in the developing countries provided the empirical basis for the appropriation of the agitation by many leaders of the Southern countries who, as a result resorted to asking for aid to improve the state of communication infrastructure as panacea to the global imbalance in communication and information flow. Both the United States and Britain were not comfortable with the resolution of the McBride Commission. At the climax of the resolution, both pulled out from the organization in 1984 and 1985. The United States only returned in 2001 after the ascending of the market system as a dominant global social order.

4. Conceptual Review

4.1. Global News Flow

Nonetheless, Information dissemination across nation is part of international relations. Oboh (2009:83) asserts that global news flow involves the movement of news and information signal across national boundaries thereby facilitating the interactive process between and among the various actors in international relations. He emphasized that Global News Flow is very germane in the sustenance of world peace, as well as for the steady socio-economic and political stability of the members of the international community (Oboh 2004: 319). It is also imperative to add that no matter how powerful a nation is, she cannot afford to live in isolation from other countries. The reality of the day is that no nation is self-sufficient, that industrial nations of the world rely on the Third World countries for most of the raw materials they need for their industries while the third world countries on the other hand, depend on the developed countries of the world for processed products, automobile and technology. Hence, under international trade, countries are usually encouraged to emphasize the production of goods and services, where they have the most comparative advantage. The interdependence among nations promotes world peace, as no nation will deliberately want to work at cross-purposes with the interest of other countries. This is why it is important for leaders to be conversant with the principles that underline the movements of information signals across national boundaries. Every dispute and war, between and among communities and nations, begins as a result of communication breakdown between two communities or nations. According to McQuail (2005, p 263) " The flow of news is positively correlated with other forms of transactions between countries. One need to know about those part of the world with which one trade with or with whom one is friendly or unfriendly".

Oboh (2009) states that the politics of global news flow has generated so much controversy that is yet to be resolved, even with the advent of the internet. Before the collapse of the Soviet Union in January, 1991, the disagreements that emanated from the excesses of global news flow polarized the world into North and South hemispheres. In the Northern hemisphere were countries assumed to have information advantage, to be able to initiate most of the news stories that were being reported by the transnational media organizations, including wire services; while in the Southern hemisphere, on the other hand, were countries perceived to be information dependent, on the media of the developed nations, relying on their media to set agenda on issues and matters of public importance. This was the reason why Opubor (1978) cited by Oboh (2009) concluded that "the present pattern of information news flow, which favours the advanced nations, has brought a change of media imperialism against the industrialized world." In fact, it was Lenin, who used this concept "imperialism" to describe the inevitable outcome of an advanced monopolistic capitalism of the West. He said, "in an effort to sustain production in the face of declining patronage, the Western capitalists decided to export their excess products and capitals to developing nations where labour and raw materials are relatively cheap and abundant" (Umechukwu 2001:200). Media imperialism, therefore, taking a cue from the above explanation, is simply the exportation of foreign culture, values and beliefs to the Third World countries by the Western press; and, consequently exposing the people to those televised foreign films and programmes, where Western culture is being advertised for adoption by the media and advertisers.

It was this charge of media imperialism, leveled against the Western press by the Third World countries that prompted UNESCO to set up the McBride Communication in 1977, to study the communication problems of the world. The Commission, based on its findings, recommended the evolution of a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO).

Nevertheless, the Western press and communication scholars rejected the recommendations of UNESCO, and they saw the proposal, for a New World Information Order, as an attempt to accord legitimacy and respectability to government ownership and control of the mass media, which the then government of Soviet Union stood for. They rather advocated for a free press system that allows for freedom of news and information dissemination.

This debate, about the imbalance of news flow between the North and South, became highly politicized in the 70's to the extent that it was caught up in the Cold War polemics. It was seen as an attempt made by media dependent countries to use UNESCO as a means towards achieving a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) that would establish some normative guidelines for international reporting (Hamelink, 1994: Carlsson, 2003) in Oboh (2009:85).

Unfortunately, McBride Commission Report that generated so much controversy did not empirically provide verifiable evidence to indicate the effects under-reporting had on the cultural identity of the developing countries. It was impossible for UNESCO to establish the causal-effect relationship between the media and culture because there are many other variables that determine the effectiveness of media messages on their target audience. The two dominant and opposed paradigms: the dependence and free press seem to rest on somewhat weak grounds empirically. The critical dependence model is based very largely on evidence of quantitative

news flow, with some limited interpretations of ideological tendencies of the content. There is little or no research on the posted effects of the content. The free press, on the other hand, makes large and unfounded assumptions about the cultural neutrality and ideological innocence of the content of the Western press (Biltereyst, 1995: 245-270). In fact, cultural properties are not vulnerable to the verbal attacks of the mass media and they are not what can easily be erased from the mind of an audience by a mere exposure to foreign films and programmes. It is what the audience has in mind and believes in that media messages re-enforce. If the Third World media audience believes that Western nations have better culture and esteemed value system that can enhance their standard of living, a gentle push by the Western press through adverts can make the people to reject their culture in favour of Western styles and values. Cairncross (1997:279) believed that "with the death of distance, many countries fear the power of American culture and the English language. They worry that their own languages will be swamped; and cultures and traditional industries overwhelmed. Both fears are largely unfounded." So, global media messages have no negative effects on a nation's cultural identity, as long as the people agree that culture and value system are not inferior to the ones being televised by the western media systems.

4.2. Media Flow in Post NWICO
However, Stevenson (1996) cited in in Suleiman and Adenle (2009) added that even though the New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO) debate failed to achieve its goal of a 'free and balanced' flow of information around the world, it did have several useful effects. These are: improvement in Western coverage of Third World items; several foreign newspapers the China Daily, Peoples' Daily, Al-Ahram, and the Financial Times have taken various steps to give due coverage to news items emanating from the Third World; training and development aid borne out of the NWICO debate -- the Centre for Foreign Journalists was established in Reston, Virginia, U.S, as one-stop centre for information about short-term training, long-term education and technology transfer programme. To date, the centre has hosted about 1000 visiting journalists, and carried out skill-refresher seminars for more than 200 Third World journalists in several languages; renewed interest in communication development: There was a renewed interest in communication is to make basic telecommunication service available to everyone on earth by the early 21st century; support for independent journalism: Part of the experience of trying to implement the New World Information Order.
On the other side of the coin, Tokunbo (2012) said inspite of the glaring fact and evidence, the Western media have not deviated from the distortion of news and "use of Pejorative adjective and stereotypes" two decades after Macbride report was published. Tokunbo emphasized that in its May 13th-19th 2000 edition, the United Kingdom based Magazine, The Economist went as far as referring to Africa as "the hopeless continent" in its cover story, Tokunbo continued thus…

In the words of Richard Dowden, the author of the controversial story in the magazine, "I am not an Afro-pessimist but Journalist in particular. I have a duty to reflect the reality. Africa is in a bad way. The sensitive issue is why? ---- I am also skeptical of those success stories in Africa proclaimed by the World Bank and the IMF and held up as models by the Western donors: Ghana, Uganda and Mozambique. They are relatively successful but they also happen to be the countries which hit rock bottom in the mid-1980s and had no alternative but to follow Western prescriptions and were, therefore given amount of aid which fulfill the prophecy of success." New African Magazine (2000).

Tokunbo then asked where objectivity and fairness which are the hallmark of journalism lies and what reality is being reflected? He asked further, how can a whole continent be labeled "Hopeless Continent" because some of the 53 nations that make up the continent are experiencing bad economics? May be Europe too should be labeled "Lost Paradise" as a result of the bad economy being experienced by Albania and many other European countries.
The Western media "are empowered to paint an image of Africa by listing its deficiencies with respect to western norms". For Africa to be part of "all the news that is fit to print as the motto of the New York Times says, it seems that news stories must include three elements: events, crisis and superpower conflicts"

5. Theoretical Framework
For a much talked about globalization, wire news and its impact on developing countries of the world, it is imperative to subject such a study to theoretical underpinnings. It is in this light that this study is built on two fundamental theories.

5.1. Technological Determinism Theory
This theory was propounded by Marshall McLuhan in 1967, and it states that inventions in technology invariably cause cultural change. McLuhan actually bought the idea that the technological advancement in the mass media has reduced the world into a "global village". In other words, the world has been reduced into a miniature, as a result of the "shrink" in distance, time and space. Put in another way, the globalised media caused a globalized village, where different cultures across the world are commonly shared.
Griffins (1994:335) assert that one of the major premises of the theory is that the dominant medium of any age determines the culture and dominates the people. Therefore, according to this theory, the medium is the "mass age".
Another premise of this theory is that, it is the changes in the modes of communication that determine and shape human existence and behaviour. Also, the theory holds that new technologies alter the entire way people use their five senses and therefore their entire lives. The reason is because inventions in communication are pivotal to human behaviour, as such innovations are an extension of some human faculties. For example, the books, which are products of ideas and thoughts, are an extension of the eyes.

5.2. Cultural Imperialism Theory
The theory states that global economic system is dominated by a core of advanced countries, while third world countries remain at the periphery of international communication systems; and at the long run, having little or no control over their economic, political and cultural development (tbsjournal.com). According to Ugande (2005:39), cultural imperialism theory became prominent in the 1970's as a result of the United States cultural hegemony. The theory formed the nexus for the highly heated new world information and communication order (NWICO) debate.

6. Pan African News Agency (PANA)
What later became Pan African News Agency was created by the defunct Organization of African Unity (OAU) in April 1969. The Agency was formed at a conference of African Minister of Information at the defunct OAU headquarter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.
It is imperative to state that the defunct OAU which was established in 1963 was intended to unite all African states against the forces of colonialism and imperialism and work towards the resolution of African socio-economic and political problems. Even before the emergence of OAU, there were three different blocs with ideologies and goals. These blocs include: the Casablanca group which comprise of Ghana, Morocco, Guinea, Mali and Algeria, the Brazzaville or African and Madagascar group which comprise of Cameroon, Congo Brazzaville, Ivory Coast, Senegal, Niger Republic while the Monrovia Group consist of Nigeria, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Ethiopia.
Essentially, the defunct OAU established PANA as its communication organ. PANA was established to counter Western media imperialism. At present, the OAU has given birth to African Union. On 9th July, 2002, African leaders having put all the necessary machinery in motion launched the African Union.
Even now, the African Union Act provides for six institutions: These include: establishment of Committee Of Intelligence and Security Service of Africa (CISSA), African Union Constituent Act, Economic Social and Cultural Council of AU, Peace and Security Council, The Secretariat, The African Union Parliament and Pan African Agency (Anyaele, 2003)
However, events and happenings around Africa vis-à-vis the world make PANA a necessity. Pan African News Agency need to be repackaged and restructure to act as the voice of Africa in the global news flow.
South Africa has proved to be a beautiful bride in the global telecommunication sector. According to Musa (2003) South Africa has attracted a lot of foreign Direct Investment because it is where Super Sports and M-net are presently located there. Musa explained further that the privatization of telecommunications in Nigeria as well as proliferation of mobile telephone companies have witnessed the incursion of South African Companies. Indeed, these are feats by African Countries which need to be disseminated through Pan African News Agency.
Again, both Nigeria and South Africa have provided an effective mechanism for conflict prevention, management, resolution, peacekeeping and security in Africa. Thus, it is high time PANA stepped up its role of disseminating news about these feats by African countries. At this juncture, it is essential to proffer various strategies which PANA could adopt in order to positioning itself strategically in the present global system.

6.1. Strategies to be adopted by PANA for Effective Participation in Global News Flow
- **Enforcement of Subscription on African Member Countries**
  African member countries need to pay yearly subscription so as to keep PANA alive. In the past, irregular payment of subscription was one of the factors that affected PANA. The lack of payment of subscription by member countries prevented PANA from carrying out its responsibilities. Now, member countries that default in the payment of subscription should be sanctioned.
- **Floating of Africa Satellite**
  Africa member countries should work together and contribute fund toward the mounting of African satellite in the space. It will give Africa sense of responsibility and recognition. More so, it will provide easy access to Pan African News Agency to collect, collate and disseminate news about Africa to the world.
- **Investment in Science and Technology**
  African leaders should invest heavily in science and technology. The investment should also cover the establishment of local science and technology that will manufacture both the soft and hardware that PANA will use for its service. This strategy will first, promote the growth of local science and technology companies and it will also create a lot of job opportunities for those who are trained in various science related fieds. It will also afford those employed the opportunity of having training on the new technology.
- **Adequate Funding of Engineering, Vocational Colleges in Africa**
  African leaders should focus more on the funding of engineering facilities in universities and vocational colleges. This is because science and technology is the bedrock of a nation's development. In addition, modern equipment and facilities should also be procured by government into these schools. The essence of this is for Pan African News Agency to have access to array of professionals in different scientific fields that will nurture it to meet the demand of the 21st century.
- **Budgetary Allocation for Education in Africa**
  African leaders should comply with the United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) policy that makes 26% budgetary allocation the benchmark for education in all member countries. The benchmark set for the educational sector is expected to make educational sector well structured. More curriculums should be designed in the area of

science and technology by tertiary institutions in Africa. This will further enable African countries to participate constructively in global news flow.

- **Growth of African Media Barons and Involvement in Merger and Acquisitions**
  Africa should strive towards providing budding media barons who could spearhead Africa's involvement in merger and acquisition of global media firms with business moguls like Rupert Murdock and other media owners.

- **Curtail Corruption and Mismanagement**
  Africa should put in place necessary punitive measures to curtail corruption among government officials and public servants. This will to a large extent reduce the menace of corruption and enable citizens to be part of mechanism for the growth and development of Africa.

- **Promotion and Sustenance of Democratic Government**
  Africa should continue to promote democratic government. Citizens should be allowed to vote and be voted for. In the same way, elected leaders should make adequate provisions for the welfare of their citizens. Coups and counter coups should be discouraged in the military. Rather, African military should be constructively engaged in post-conflict building processes of the neighboring countries. They should be constructively engaged in various United Nations post conflict building programs all over the world. They should also be engaged in the reconstruction, rehabilitation and rebuilding processes of their countries and not involve in politics.

- **Proactive Public and Private Initiatives**
  There should be an enabling business environment which will sustain public and private initiatives. These initiatives can cut across areas of the economy such as aviation, transportation, telecommunication, insurance and others. This measure will encourage foreign investors to invest in African economy which will ultimately contribute to its growth.

- **Provision of Infrastructure**
  African leaders should through their government agencies provide adequate network of roads, rail lines and wharfs. They should also put in place adequate security network to curtail terrorist groups like Boko Haram, Omatse and others

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