

Media and the Challenges of Peace Building in Period of Insurgency

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ABSTRACT: *The paper examined the ways by which the Nigeria media could be used to address the challenges of peace building in period of insurgency. The discussion was in the context of the Boko Haram insurgency that emanated from Nigeria and spread to the neighbouring countries of the Republics of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The paper reviewed the challenges of media and terrorism. Conflict situations are important to the media providing them with news materials, issues and events to analyzed or comment on. But terrorism or insurgency, much as it offers news materials to the media, also puts journalists and media houses in danger¹. An environment riddled with terrorist's attacks is unhealthy for media work. Even from this perspective, the media have a role in the campaign for the current insurgency to be conquered and for peace to return to the larger society.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The media are important sources of information on the activities of insurgents or terrorists depending on one's preferred term of reference to the phenomenon that primarily takes place in Nigeria, but also crosses the border into the Republics of Cameroon, Chad and Niger. The attention of the media on issues of insurgency gets heightened because of the level of violence involved, the number of people being killed, the styles used to launch attacks, the displacement of people, the efforts of the security forces, the uncertainty and threat to law and order, the lack of security and safety and the larger disturbance to peace. Conflict situations are important to the media providing them with news materials, issues and events to analyzed or comment on. But terrorism or insurgency, much as it offers news materials to the media, also puts journalists and media houses in danger². An environment riddled with terrorist's attacks is unhealthy for media work. Even from this perspective, the media have a role in the campaign for the current insurgency to be conquered and for peace to return to the larger society. This paper examines the challenges to media and peace building in period of insurgency.

In times of insurgency the media are caught between two concerns. The first is the concern with the media reporting/coverage giving publicity to the activities of insurgents and encouraging them to continue with their attacks³. In this concern, the media are expected to either censor news reports about the insurgents or down play reports on their activities. The second concern is that media reporting/coverage should help to rally people together and provide support to the authorities, particularly the security forces, to defeat the insurgency. Either of these positions has implications for the media and peace building. The first requires the media to

¹ The bomb attacks on *ThisDay* newspaper in Abuja Reporters Without Borders (2012) 'Government urged to Protect Media After Two Car Bomb Attacks on Newspapers' April 27 <http://en.rsf.org/nigeria-government-urged-to-protect-media-27-04-2012,42384.html>; the killing of NTA journalist in Maiduguri, Zakariya Isa and another TV reporter, Eneche Godwin Akogu, are ready examples. See Reporters Without Frontiers (2011) 'TV Journalist Shot Dead in Northern City, Islamic Group Claims Responsibility' October 25, <http://en.rsf.org/nigeria-tv-journalist-shot-dead-in-25-10-2011,41273.html> Also another report (2012) 'TV Reporter Gunned Down while Covering Kano Suicide Bombings' January 23, <http://en.rsf.org/nigeria-tv-reporter-gunned-down-while-23-01-2012,41741.html>

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³ McQuail (1992:247-8) states that: "The media have been said to give a platform (the 'oxygen of publicity'), as well as legitimacy, to some political aims of terrorism. They may undermine, by criticism, the police and other forces of order and fail to convey the enormity of terrorist acts. By simply reporting events they may encourage terrorism by way of contagion or imitation and collaborate with terrorist strategies which include the demoralisation of the public (McQuail, Denis (1992) *Media Performance: Mass Communication and the Public Interest* London: Sage.

blight or even censor the activities of insurgents. Insurgents thrive on the publicity they get from the media and have found ways of gaining media attention or use the new media to publicized their activities. The second position requires the media to take a definite stance against insurgency, supporting the authorities and rallying people to defeat it⁴. What is significant is the restoration of law and order and, hopefully, return to peace. The expectation is that the media would blend the two positions for balanced coverage and are also to provide context that could contribute to the process of peace building. But even contextual coverage is prone to attacks against the media in the drive to simply end the activities of insurgents and restore law and order. Beyond the idea of restoring law and order is the push for peace building.

In discussing the challenges of media and peace building, it is important to examine discourse on media and terrorism or what is referred to as insurgency in this paper. The literature on media and terrorism provides some light on the media and the challenges of peace building. It is important to clarify some key concepts that would be useful in the discussion in this paper. The key words are media, terrorism or insurgency and peace building.

II. CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

Media: this refers to the media of communication both modern and new. The modern media comprise newspapers, magazines, radio and television. The new media consists of the new communication technologies that are used for communication both on a mass and self-mass scale⁵. The new media include cellular phones that can access the internet (web sites ad blogs) and create and send messages through social media such as Facebook, twitter, You Tube and Whatsapp. Developments in computer, micro processing, computer and telecommunications technology have led to convergence⁶ and multiplied available sources and means of communication between citizens within a country and beyond. The modern media of communication also do recognize and accept the importance of the new media technologies and integrate them into their professional journalism practice. These new technologies have offered opportunities for audiences across the globe leading to the emergence of networks of cross national citizens uniting them on issues of common interest. The media are catalysts in the process of peace building.

Terrorism: Whatever the position on the media coverage of insurgency/terrorism, the media remain an important source of news and information. While terrorism as a concept has no universal definition, it is useful to come up with one in the context of this discussion. Terrorism for many in Africa was an alien action prevalent in the Middle East with some cases in Europe often conveyed by the media. The usual image of the terrorist was an Arab fighting for the Palestinian cause and ready to attack Israeli and American targets. Increasingly, with time the Arab terrorist came to be associated with Islam ready to attack American citizens or interest anywhere in the world motivated by the belief that it would earn them a place in heaven. In this context, there is no respect for territory as what matters was the target of interest to the terrorist in whatever country it may be located. The discourse on terror took on greater intensity with the event of 9/11 and the US sponsored war on terror. The emergence of Al-Qaeda introduced a trans-national dimension to terrorism on a wider scale. The emergence of the *Jama'atul Ahlus Sunnah Liddawa'ati wal Jihad*, People Committed to the Teachings of the Prophet and Holy War (Jihad), popularly referred to as Boko Haram unleashed on Nigeria terrorism with a theological claim. The Nigerian media faced a phenomenon at home that they were used to reporting from distant lands.

At its emergence and encounter with the security forces in Maiduguri in 2009, it was considered a local problem, a straightforward case of breach of law and order. The activities of the insurgents took on a different character starting with targeted killings of individuals, Islamic scholars that preached against its doctrine, politicians, police officers, prison warders, journalists, academics, soldiers and later turned to taking over villages and towns and placing them under their control. The insurgent group engaged in “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against noncombatant targets...”⁷ No one thought that BH was going to metamorphose into an insurgent group unleashing terror on Nigerian citizens and even resort to conquest of territory. While the activities of BH were unfolding after the military crackdown, it became difficult to

⁴ “The media can give ‘terrorists’ a bad name, provide a peaceful forum for grievances, diminish the level of terror and panic by information and generally collaborate with the forces of law and order.” McQuail, Denis (1992:248).

⁵ Castells (2010:xxviii) observes that ‘...the combination of on-line news with interactive blogging and e-mail, as well as Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds from other documents on the Web, have transformed newspapers into a component of a different form of communication: *mass self-communication*’. See *The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. I The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd Edn) Wiley-Blackwell: UK.

⁶ Straubhaar and LaRose (2004:4) argues that: ‘We should no longer think about the various media of communication – books, newspapers, magazines, radio, television, film, telephones and computers – as completely distinct entities. Advances in computers and telecommunication networks have led to their merging, or **convergence**, with conventional media. Straubhaar, Joseph and LaRose, Robert (2004) *Media Now: Understanding Media, Culture and Technology* (4th Edn) Thomson Wardsworth: Belmont, CA

⁷ <http://www.law.cornell.edu/uscode/text/22/2656f>

characterize them. Are they an Islamic group like Maitatsine causing social unrest or are they indeed an Islamic terrorist group bent on Islamising Nigeria? Over time BH has become an insurgent group using terror tactics in ways that are causing concerns in Nigeria, neighbouring countries and across the Western world.

The definition of terrorism as the challenge of the State's monopoly of the use of violence by non-state actors against civilian targets confines the phenomenon within national borders⁸. But it also carries a contested meaning as when nationalist groups fighting for African independence was branded as terrorists by Western governments. This was indeed the case with the African National Congress (ANC) that was fighting against racial terrorism that went by the name of apartheid, based on the assumed superiority of whites over other races. Other groups also emerged in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda and Democratic Republic of Congo and were characterized differently as either terrorists or rebels. In the sense of contesting the State's monopoly of the arsenals of violence, it was clear that these groups breached boundary definitions as they found sanctuary across neighbouring countries. BH activities have gone beyond Nigeria into the neighbouring countries of Cameroon and Niger, with possible sanctuary in Chad. Currently Nigeria and Cameroon bear the brunt of the activities of BH. From a national terrorist activity it has now crossed international borders and has become an issue of concern to the authorities in the Chad Basin area.

Peace Building: is associated with efforts aimed at violent conflict prevention, reconciliation, transitional justice, education for peace, communication for peace. It requires people to promote conditions of non-violence, equity, justice and human rights of all people, to build democratic institutions, building trust and enhancing communication among people in a way that contentious issues can be resolved without violence. The United Nations *Agenda for Peace* distinguishes among three concepts related to peace: peace-keeping, peace-making and peace-building. Peace-keeping is the intervention by third parties in a conflict, notably war, involving in most cases the deployment of military forces to separate the warring parties to allow for opportunity for peace making. Peace-making is the use of diplomatic efforts involving third parties mediating between the officials representing the parties in conflict to end the violence and work towards peace agreement.

Peace-building is a process that occurs after the intensity of conflict has ebbed, ended or agreement has been secured to end the conflict. The process of peace-building could start while the conflict is on-going with the aim of preparing the people for life after the conflict. According to Broome⁹ peace-building "attempts to establish confidence and trust between opponents, improve communication across conflict lines, and assist in developing cooperation and peaceful co-existence."

III. THE AFRICAN BORDER SITUATION

African borders were shaped by European colonial excursions which succeeded in cutting off people of the same ancestry, ethno-cultural and religious backgrounds, into different boundaries that created differences in citizenship. The result is that despite the recognition of the borders drawn by the European colonial overlords, people still sustain their ties even when they have been divided into citizens of different countries. Nigeria is a country surrounded by largely Franco-phone countries, namely the Republics of Benin, Chad and Niger. Cameroon is a Franco-phone country, but with a section of the country in the northern parts being Anglo-phone. The colonial definition of boundaries has separated the Fulani and Hausa speaking people into Nigeria and Niger; the Chamba and Efiki speaking people into Nigeria and Cameroon; and, the Yoruba into Nigeria and Benin¹⁰. The people have relations on both sides of the recognized and sustained colonial border divides. They trade with each other, observe common religious and traditional festivals, visit each other and speak the same language across the borders. While this European division separates people of the same cultures and traditions, it can still be a source of building stronger relationships and maintaining peaceful co-existence between Nigeria and its neighbours. It is a fact that there are border communities where the people freely interact with each other that have defied whatever artificial division exists between the people. Some communities are indeed trans-country: having a section of a community in both countries and the people living peacefully with each other. These are issues the media need to emphasize.

Nigeria, Benin, Chad and Niger are Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) member countries. The citizens of ECOWAS member countries enjoy freedom of movement without prior visa authorization under the Protocol on Free Movement of Persons. Nigeria shares very long borders with its neighbours, except its shorter border with the Republic Chad. People move across the colonially defined

⁸ Schmid and de Graaf (1982) came up with the following definition: Act of extreme and wanton violence and illegality undertaken for political ends by opponents of established authority in order to exert influence, directly on authorities or, indirectly, by creating a climate of public fear and shock, often enthralling innocent victims. See A. R. Schmid and J. de Graf (1982) *Violence as Communication* Sage: Beverly Hills, CA

⁹ Broome, Benjamin J. (2009) "Peace Theories" in Stephen W. Littlejohn and Karen Foss (eds) *Encyclopedia of Communication Theory* London: Sage, p 733

¹⁰ These are illustrations of how people of different ethnic and cultural origin have been split between Nigeria and its neighbours. A linguist will produce a more refined split between peoples and cultures across Nigeria's borders.

borders without regard to whatever official protocol it imposes on the movement of persons. The long borders are difficult to police making them porous with many entry points that are conducive for illegal activities and to persons who never cared about going through formal processing by immigration and customs officials. But to some the border makes no sense to them¹¹.

Boundaries are important in any discussion of media and peace building under periods of insurgency. There is the need to understand that borders as Strassoldo¹² points out can:

divide and unite, bind the interior and link it with the exterior; (they) are barriers and junctions, walls and doors, organs of defence and attack. Frontier areas can be managed so as to maximise either of such functions. They can be militarised as bulwarks against neighbours, or made into areas of peaceful interchange

The involvement of the media is to engender peace rather than war and promote stability between Nigeria and its neighbours. It has also been observed that

Somerville, Keith¹³ (2013) observes in “Africa's Borders - Porous, Unprotected and Blocking Trade and Economic Development” an analysis published in AllAfrica.com argues that:

Africa's borders are even more problematic than those in contested areas of Europe, Asia and Latin America. Whilst they are usually porous and almost impossible for weak state institutions, small armies and poorly funded police forces to control; they often divide peoples (especially nomadic ones like the Tuareg) and form huge obstacles to trade. Also, corruption and the desire of people to buy and sell goods across borders creates endless opportunities for smuggling, tax evasion and cross-border crime - not just problems in themselves, but often providing the funding for insurgency and revolt.

IV. MEDIA AND TERRORISM

In the context of national security concerns and in popular consciousness, terrorism is a negative act by people who have been radicalized and constitute a risk to society. The actions of terrorists/insurgents easily attract media attention not just as timely news, but also as a warning, the watchdog role of the media, suggesting that there is a problem that society needs to address. The larger society gets information on acts of terror from the media. The media help to shape the picture and character of terrorists through their reporting and commentary. For example, most of the information and what people get to know about BH, outside of the North East, come from the media. The modern media, however, are not the only sources of information as individuals with access and competence to information and communication technologies also send information immediately on terrorist activities. This increases the number of sources available to people. In spite of this, the modern media remain important sources because of the professionalism they bring to news reporting. Issues of accuracy, objectivity and neutral presentation of information remain important concerns, which individuals using news media may not respect. So the modern media are important sources for the mass dissemination of information on terrorism while also giving opportunity for online discussions. The United Nations Development Declaration has stressed the need “to ensure the freedom of the media to perform their essential role and the right of the public to have access to information”¹⁴.

The information role of the media has been questioned. The coverage of the activities of insurgency does benefit both the media and terrorists. The news on insurgency is useful in attracting higher media patronage, listeners, viewers and readers and insurgents gain publicity for their objective and interest¹⁵. Even in the era of access to new media technologies, terrorists still rely on the modern media for achieving their objectives. However, it is important to note that this publicity may not necessarily be always positive in favour of the terrorists. The increasing media framing of insurgent activities in the negative helps to organize public opinion against them by presenting them as demons, devilish/evil, and criminals. Because of the negative effects of their activities – killings, displacement of persons, taking over of territory and imposition of extremist versions of Islam – people tend to organize to not only oppose them, but also form vigilante groups to confront them. This has been the reaction in the North East, particularly in Borno and Adamawa States. BH launched attacks against *ThisDay* newspaper in Nigeria for what it describes as biased reporting against it. This is an

¹¹ Ekoko (2004:2) quoted Anthony Allot approvingly by observing that: Allot in a seminal study, had established that “not only cannot one precisely define the political relationship between the central authority ... and the peripheral communities owing allegiance to it, but there was no precisely defined boundary between their respective areas of jurisdiction ... a territorial boundary of minimum width ... did not exist, and could not be defined” Ekoko, Abednego E. (2004) “Boundaries and National Security“ being Text of an Inaugural Lecture Delivered at Delta State University, Abraka, 25th March pp 31.

¹² Cited in Ekoko (2004)

¹³ Keith, Somerville (2013) “Africa's Borders - Porous, Unprotected and Blocking Trade and Economic Development” in AllAfrica.com <http://allafrica.com/stories/201302120928.html> 12 February, (accessed: Dec 7, 2014)

¹⁴ United Nations Millennium Declaration, 2000

¹⁵ Weimann, Gabriel and Conrad Winn (1993) *The Theatre of Terror: The Mass Media and International Terrorism* Longman/Addison-Wesley: New York. Also Dowlin, Ralph E. (1986) “Terrorism and the Media: A Rhetorical Genre” in *Journal of Communication* Vol. 36, No. 1 pp 12-24

indication negative media reporting could result in backlash against journalists or their organization as already indicated above.

The activities of insurgents and the response by society, security agencies, politicians, religious leaders, what Hall calls 'structured access'¹⁶ or what Becker¹⁷ calls society's 'hierarchy of credibility', serve the media well in terms of getting news materials and opportunities for analysis and commentary. The activities of insurgents in the North eastern part of Nigeria, crossing largely into Cameroun, have attracted media attention and commentary. BH recognises the importance of the media and grants interviews to journalists, making phone calls to journalists in Maiduguri to cover their targeted killings and posting videos on U-Tube. They recognize that the media can help them to spread fear and force people into silence. BH access to the media had to depend on spectacular acts of violence inflicted mainly on unarmed civilian populations: the more the intensity of the violence, the more chances of media coverage. Two contrasting positions emerge from this. Government officials and political elites gain direct access to the media to condemn the acts of terror perpetrated by BH. For BH, recognising their illegal and illegitimate status and conscious of the consequences of coming out into the open, it had to resort to violence to gain indirect access to the media. The more the media cover their acts of violence, the more they remain in public consciousness. That is exactly what terrorist groups want.

The media become in that sense platforms for both the public and State actors, on the one hand, and terrorist groups, on the other. This is more in tune with the role of the media to remain balanced, neutral, non-partisan and objective. But can the media remain neutral or balanced giving opportunity to both sides to be heard any time they invite media attention? Insurgents, by definition, are violators of law and order that should not be given legitimacy through publicity. One of the concerns with giving terrorist/insurgent groups media exposure is the belief that this makes the media the 'oxygen of terrorism'. In other words, giving publicity to terrorists serves to increase their motivation. But a counter perspective to this suggests that, on a very different plane, giving voice to marginal groups may reduce their motivation to commit acts of terror. However this argument holds for those groups that have not yet been radicalised and taken the path of terror as means of actualizing their objectives, whatever they may be. It is reasonable to say that any group that has become radicalized and chosen the path of terror would use that to gain media publicity. It is important to note that media publicity on terror have certain useful purposes: giving information on dangerous areas, other parts of the country to prepare to take counter-terrorism measures, give information to security agencies to mount checkpoints for possible apprehension of perpetrators and identifying areas of safety for the citizen.

Media organisations are influenced, in their coverage of activities of insurgents, by their professional definition of what makes news: what is called news values or news elements. Insurgency contains elements of unusualness, conflict, consequence, human interest, proximity (geographical and psychological), drama, incongruous, personality, and timeliness¹⁸. No professional journalist or medium will neglect issues or events that contain some of these elements. The attention of journalists will focus more on close and dramatic events than on distant ones. It is not surprising that the media in Nigeria and Cameroon would pay significant attention to the activities of BH and also because the news about BH has threat value. News is a timely account of issues and events and no medium, in the competitive media world, would like to bring old news that people have already heard or read about in some media. No one will pay attention to such a medium.

Added to this is the style of news reporting which starts with the most important aspect of the story. Time in broadcast and space in print media are important considerations in rendering the news. This explains the obsession with gory aspects of stories: injury, deaths, displacement, destruction, victims, desertions, gallantry, etc. The emphasis on this leaves the media with charges of sensationalism and event-oriented, instead of process-oriented, reporting. Viewed in that context, the media do not tend to give deep background for the audience to understand issues in a context that has meaning. In a sense too, this contributes to creating anxiety and panic among the audience and insistent calls for the insurgency to end so that law and order could be restored. These are professional and organizational influences on the coverage of insurgency/terrorism.

Governments take different approaches to limiting the access of terrorists to the media. The Thatcher era in the United Kingdom provided examples of measures taken to deny giving media publicity to terrorists. This became a source of friction between the BBC and the Thatcher government in the 1980s. Media were barred from interviewing terrorists or not showing the faces of terrorists on television¹⁹. It was the hope that denial of media visibility would contribute to undermining their motivation and gaining significant attention

¹⁶ Stuart, Hall (1973) "The Structured Communication of Events" Stencilled *Occasional Paper No. 5*, Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, University of Birmingham

¹⁷ Becker (1967) states that: In any system of ranked groups, participants take it as given that members of the highest group have the right to define the way things really are... those at the top have access to a more incomplete picture of what is going on than anybody else. Members of lower groups will have incomplete information and their views of reality will be partial and distorted in consequence. See Becker, H. (1967) "Whose Side Are We On?" *Social Problems* Vol. 14 pp239-247

¹⁸ Chibnal, Steve (2010) "Press Ideology: The Politics of Professionalism" in Chris Greer (ed) *Crime and Media: A Reader* Routledge: Oxon pp201-214

¹⁹ Wilson, R (1997) "The Media and Intrastate Conflict in Northern Ireland" <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/dd/papers/media.html>

from the public. Pressure on the media was actually aimed at getting the media to support the official line and could be seen as taking sides against terrorists. In our context, the government and security agencies wish for blind media support without any form of critical appraisal. First, the government and security agencies claim that public media is government-owned media. Based on this political appropriation of this public resource by government and security agencies, they expect blind media support in campaigns against terrorists/insurgents. Second, by their definition, insurgents/terrorists are law breakers (without question) and must be demonised for their criminal activities. Third, what is most important is the stability of society based on respect for law and order. Based on this, the media are required to not only take a stance against insurgents/terrorists and black them out, but also to shut out dissenting voices. A recent government attempt to exert pressure on the media was the recent attack by the Nigerian military accusing Sahara Reporters, an online medium, of being a BH supporter.

There is suspicion between the media and security agencies in terms of gaining access to information from security agencies operating to battle insurgents. The security agencies assume that journalists cannot handle information on their operations responsibly and are also concerned that some of their operational strategies might be questioned by journalists. The practice in Nigeria is for the security agencies to appoint spokespersons, who may not respond promptly to media inquiries on developments in battling insurgency. The media working against the pressure of deadlines are left with no option than to publish information on activities of terrorists or accusations against soldiers. The response that the media usually get is condemnation as purveyors of falsehood or undermining the campaign against insurgents to restore law and order.

The media have learnt to form alliances with civil society organisations that have developed expertise in monitoring operations of security agencies and insurgents and their actions in either committing human rights abuses or engaging in inhuman and degrading treatment of people. The security agencies dismissed the report by Amnesty International on the human rights abuses in the North East and also embarked on seizure of newspapers based on what they described as security risk to the country²⁰. The alleged massacre of people living in Baga, Borno State, which invited international censure, was also a matter that the Nigerian security agencies tried and successfully blocked journalists from undertaking a credible journalistic tour of the site. There is the need for confidence building and support for both the media and security agencies to achieve the goal of restoring law and order and building peace.

V. THE CHALLENGES TO PEACE BUILDING

The discussion on the media and terrorism has indicated some of the possible challenges that could arise in peace building in insurgency situations: professional and organisational orientations of the media emphasizing the negative and event-orientation, the reduction of insurgency to law and order issue, the tension between authorities and media and seeming distrust between them, the attempts to control the media, the inability to have access to insurgents on a safe and guaranteed contact, all present their own difficulties in addressing issues of insurgency. There are some challenges relating to media and peace building under insurgency.

There is indeed recognition that contrary to the notion of media inflaming conflicts, they can also be used for peace building. But in the context of the current insurgency, it is for most security personnel and government officials, a desirable thing. There is no concerted effort to initiate the engagement of the media for re-orientation in news reporting on national issues affecting the nation. The suspicion that security agencies have of the media was displayed when various editions of newspapers were seized under the guise of a security report that dangerous materials were being conveyed. There is the need to build understanding and security orientation given to the media to understand the implications of how some reportorial actions could either put troops, the journalists themselves or the society in danger. The media can be an important source of news for the security people when insurgents trust that there are some journalists they can rely on so that their perspectives can be examined and ways of resolving the conflict other than through military means can be explored. Journalists that establish direct regular contacts risk being branded as insurgents by security agencies. There is the need to involve the media in conflict management strategies.

The Nigerian media suffer from divisions in their analysis and commentary on issues affecting the country. There is the challenge of discussing matters as affecting people of the same citizenship /residents affected by a common problem; instead, they promote division and give emphasis to issues of religion, ethnicity and region. The BH insurgency, for some of the private media is a northern problem rather than a Nigerian one. At some point, voices of religious exceptionalism and division were given prominence in news reporting whenever insurgents killed persons either through gun fights or improvised exploded devices. The framing of headlines and news stories emphasise either northern Nigeria versus southern or Christians versus Muslims. This arises because of the need to attract large number of audiences. Matters are reduced to mere contest or to

²⁰ See Amnesty International Report and Human Rights Watch Report

assertion of one section being more saintly than the other. The tendency is to disregard context for immediacy. For instance, there is a deliberate misrepresentation of the Almajiri, Qur'anic Islamic pupils/students, as street urchins and are often depicted as northern Nigerian organized army for Jihad. There is the need to have a more nuanced understanding of issues affecting any part of the country and be in the vanguard of explaining it as matters affecting Nigerian citizens without discrimination. For example, when a person dies in an insurgent attack the emphasis should be on the loss of a human being, without emphasising his ethnicity, religion or region. The reporting of BH activities tends to emphasise difference rather than the common humanity of the victims as residents in or citizens of Nigeria.

There is the challenge of understanding what conflict is among the media. The understanding is simply imagined as a contestation between two or more parties that resort to violence to achieve their objective. There is the challenge of understanding that conflicts are not just law and order issues; they speak to fundamental issues afflicting society. Conflicts need to be understood as presenting society with opportunity for positive change. It needs to be understood that some form of reporting from the narrow prism good versus bad would only exacerbate conflict rather than promote peace. That the media seem to have a negative orientation towards conflict. The studious approach by international development partners such as the Nigeria Stability and Reconciliation Programme (NSRP) of DFID/UKAID in training non-governmental organisations and the media on conflict sensitivity and conflict sensitive reporting should be encouraged. The Office of the National Security Adviser has also initiated partnership with civil society organisations to find ways of countering violent extremism in a more inclusive way. Through this peace building could be encouraged as the media can be properly positioned to practice conflict-sensitive and peace journalism: reporting is accurate, impartial and sensitive to words usage that do not inflame or create another conflict.

The social media is a major site for the exacerbation of conflict largely in the form of verbal violence: abuses, demonisations, scapegoating, generalisations of people, hatred, aversion, etc. Hate speech is very strong in discussing issues of insurgency. There is the need to find ways of using social media without resort to acerbic, caustic, pejorative or antagonistic language. There should be organized attempts to promote peace on social media. Peace promoting citizen media should be encouraged including the use of community radio. The communiqué issued at the end of the of the Cross-Border Workshop on Food Security and Cross Border Trade in the Kano-Katsina-Maradi of the Nigeria-Niger Boundary, 19 -21 September, 2007, planned to introduce cross-border initiatives among which was to: "establish joint border communication facilities, such as community radio networks for a wider dissemination of information on markets, prices, etc."²¹

Entertainment media also offer great opportunities for peace building, but tend to be left in most cases to interest and initiative of the practitioners. The entertainment industry is gradually developing, but it needs to have stronger partnership with government to get them to integrate peace building messages in their works. Music and home videos, to cite just two examples, can be employed for peace building purposes. For example, Nigeria and Cameroon can strengthen cultural ties between the two countries and also along the border towns and villages for peace building. This can be organized cultural shows, tours by musicians, exchange of radio and television programmes, etc. There are common languages that are understood between Nigeria and its neighbours that make this possible.

VI. FURTHER RECOMMENDATIONS

While it is good to report violent conflicts, the media are required to provide greater analytical depths and skills in reporting without giving birth to further violence or overlooking peace building opportunities. In other words, media coverage of insurgency should keep an eye on opportunities that will promote possible dialogue, greater communication between government and insurgents and contribute to conditions for building trust. The conventional media as professionals try to achieve this through respecting journalistic code of ethics. It is, however, important to review some of the ethical codes and take into account new developments that are prevalent principally in the social media, hate speech.

Countries in Africa strongly hold onto their colonially defined borders in spite of the rhetoric, going back to the 1960s, of working to promote African unity and create an African union. While movement of persons across ECOWAS countries is made comparatively easier across the continent, there is little flow of journalists crossing borders easily to do reportorial work. The emphasis on ceremonial activities of African leaders is useful in promoting unity, but the media do not seem to focus much attention on activities on issues across the borders. One may ask since the insurgency started in 2009 how many journalists were granted visas to cross the border to either Nigeria or Cameroon to do a first-hand reporting on the insurgency bedeviling the

²¹ The workshop was hosted by the Katsina State Government and jointly organized by the Famine Early Warning System Network FEWS NET/USAID) and the Sahel and West Africa Club/OECD in collaboration with the Nigeria-Niger Joint Commission for Cooperation (NNJC), Niger Food Crisis Unit, the National Boundary Commission of Nigeria and the Permanent Inter-State Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel (CILSS) and financed by the Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Niger, UNDP Niger and UNDP Nigeria.

two countries? Do the news media organisations in the two countries have cooperative news exchange to help them in reporting the insurgency? Such cooperation will be good to both sides. International news exchange and broadcast programmes between African countries started in the era of the demand for free flow and balanced information in the 1970s and 1980s (leading to the call for a New World and Information Order (NWICO)) have not been sustained. Yet these cooperative exchanges are important in building understanding across the borders.

The coverage of terrorism by the media is not the exclusive preserve of national media alone as international media also play important roles. Since the event of 9/11, the Western media using their powerful reach have also to be considered in issues of media, insurgency/terrorism and peace building. The Western media cover issues of terrorism not just as news but also as concerned nations targeted and affected by terrorists. The West and its media recognize that groups like BH, claiming to represent Islam, may pose a danger to them or their citizens in foreign lands. There is a global concern, driven by the West, of the spread of terrorism across the globe and in Africa. The Americans and Europeans have shown their concern by focusing on the activities of Al-Qaeda in the Maghreb, which go to invite the attention of their media. The Western media have been implicated in setting the tone for coverage of global issues and terrorism is no different. The irony of the presence of Western media is that it is local media that compete with them to disseminate news to the public. They tend to be first with the news and have the resources to cover events around the world, gives them an edge over the local media. The local media do suffer from controls by governmental authorities which affect the media coverage of issues of conflict and insurgency/terrorism.

Media need to regard conflicts as inevitable, but explore avenues for bringing parties into dialogue and discussion. The countries affected by insurgency have to harness their media resources – public, private and community media – and deploy them towards promoting peace, understanding, tolerance/accommodation and avoid humiliating individuals by refraining from resorting to hate speech to refer to individuals or groups. The human factor needs to be emphasized in media coverage. Though there are restrictions in broadcasting across borders using domestic media, it is important to take initiatives that will help in enhancing peace and understanding with our neighbours. International broadcasting will help in this regard such as Voice of Nigeria, which should ensure that it continuously upholds Nigeria's position of maintaining Africa as the centre-piece of its foreign policy. Stations such as Africa Independent Television (AIT), though available as subscription television, should also maintain its cultural programme Kakaki, which show cases Africa's cultures. Media Trust Limited, the publishers of Daily Trust, should also maintain its African of the Year award.

In an insurgency situation such as that of BH it is somehow difficult to establish and sustain direct contact with the insurgents towards dialogue and peaceful resolution. The insurgents have already become radicalized and oriented to believe that they can achieve their objective through violence an act of martyrdom: when they kill or are killed they go to heaven. May be this makes them impervious to negotiation and dialogue. Media reporting tends to demonise and criminalise them in the context of law and order reporting. Though that may be the case, the emergence of insurgency is an indication that all is not well with the society. The media can serve as that avenue for the spokespersons of insurgents to be given some opportunity to state their claims. This is because there may be no direct lines of communication between governments and insurgents. The media then will play the role of public diplomacy as against the secret approach that policy makers may desire. The failed attempt to dialogue between the Nigerian government and insurgents is a case in point. The media may be a platform for engendering such dialogue.

The media need to also serve as platforms for bringing the various peoples of the country to see the insurgency as a common national problem that require all citizens to unite to fight. They need to also encourage cooperation and support initiatives at joint action by countries affected by insurgency. There should be demonstrated support for the Multinational Joint Task Force set by the countries in the Chad Basin Commission and any cooperation between Nigerian and Cameroonian armed forces. It is clear now that the insurgency is not a Nigerian problem only as neighbouring countries are also affected.

VII. CONCLUSION

The media are treated with suspicion in issues that involve conflict and are particularly accused of fuelling the embers of conflict. But there is also the understanding that the media could be employed to promote peace. However, the media have been noted to contribute to the escalation of conflicts which raises concerns about their role. The media could serve both roles depending on how they are employed to play a role in conflicts. The emphasis now is on what the media could do to play a role in peace building considering the conflicts that occurred in Nigeria since 1999. They could also help in building peace between nations. But there is also the expectation that the media could also contribute to peace building efforts. Peace as a concept has no universally acceptable definition, but is related a combination of concepts that convey what it is. In most cases, there is a tendency to equate the absence of war as peace: tranquility, absence of chaos, no disturbance or a state in which everything works without hitches. But peace is more than that. Peace does not mean the

absence of conflicts, since conflicts are inevitable in all societies, but it means there are enduring mechanisms for resolution without resort to violence. In other words, peace is a situation in which people are anticipating and managing conflicts without resorting to violence and collectively engaging in managing social change processes in an inclusive way that improve the quality of life in the society.