

AN ASSESSMENT OF NIGERIAN NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF WOMEN FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (W4CI): A STUDY OF FOUR NATIONAL DAILIES

Moses Chukwubuikem Ani

Page | 1

Department of Mass Communication,
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State,
08033416584
notibutchrist2k4@yahoo.com

Endwell Onyinye Nyekwere

Department of Mass Communication,
Rivers State College of Arts and Science,
Rumuola, Port-Harcourt
08030995979
onyifavour@gmail.com

Abstract: *A key strategy in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality has been the adoption of "Affirmative Action" to correct the age-long gender imbalance across societies. The assumption is that the Nigerian newspaper has not fared well in reporting women's political participation and decision making processes and this has been responsible for the exclusion of the interests of women in governance and development paradigms. This is why the Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI) was launched to mobilize women to take active part in politics. Hence, this study undertakes an assessment of Nigerian newspaper coverage of the W4CI with a focus on The Guardian, Daily Trust, Vanguard and Daily Sun newspapers. Using the content analysis and survey methods of research, the findings reveal that Nigerian newspapers frame issues relating to women in Nigerian politics based on the general perception held by the public. The agenda setting theory of communication was the theoretical foundation upon which this study was based as the paper recommends that Newspaper reports on issues should always relate such issues to the individuals' frame of thought to help such individuals draw informed conclusions in accordance to the level of knowledge possessed on such issue.*

Keywords: Gender Equality, Women for Change and Development Initiative, Newspaper Coverage

INTRODUCTION

Women have been side-lined in political participation in Nigerian as far back as the colonial era. Scholars believe that the non-inclusion of women in political participation and decision making processes has been responsible for the exclusion of the interests of women in governance and development paradigms. Page | 2

No doubt, gender disparity is glaring in Nigeria and many women are often hesitant to take active part in politics, not only because of the socio-cultural practices that poses great threat to them, but also because politics is such a male-dominated terrain and navigating its potential landmines could be fraught with uncertainty as well as hostility.

According to Irabor (2011, p.28) programme officer, Baobab for Women's Human Rights:

The truth is, the number of women in political offices was actually experiencing an increase until the 2011 general elections. In the first republic, we had just one female senator – the late chief (Mrs.) Wuraola Esan.... Mrs. Margaret Ekpo too won election into the House of Representatives. In the second republic, we had just one female Senator – Franca Afegbua. Then in the 1990s ... we had the likes of Senator Florence Ita-Giwa. We had only three senators in 1999 and that increased to four in 2003, and to nine in 2007. But from the outcome of the 2011 elections, we now have only seven women in the senate....

It is obvious that a lot of factors are responsible for the low level of women participation in Nigerian politics. These include: discrimination by the men folk, men constituting a larger percentage of party members, social, cultural and religious attitudes of the people to politics which relegates women to the background, preference for male education as opposed to female education, lack of finance which discourages women from participating in politics, family responsibility, and threat of violence.

It is on this premise that various pet projects have been initiated by first ladies of different regimes in Nigeria. From Maryam Babangida's **Better Life for Rural Women** to Mariam Abacha's **Family Support Programme**, from Stella Obasanjo's **Child Care Trust** to Turai Yar' Adua's **Women and Youth Empowerment Foundation**. Even a 'Second Lady' was not outdone – Titi Atiku's **Women Trafficking and Child Labour Eradication Foundation (WOTCLEF)** for war against human trafficking still rings a bell (Ajewole, 2011).

The **Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI)**, launched by Dame Patience Jonathan, wife of the former President of Nigeria came against the backdrop of giving a face-lift to women representation in the political landscape of Nigeria. Research has shown that all these projects were not based purely on altruistic intentions but rather to further the personal careers and gains of these first ladies. The major question to ask here is: were these projects actually agents of change in the plight of the ordinary Nigerian woman or child that they purported to support? The



first short-coming witnessed from the other projects is non-continuation of the projects. As soon as the husbands of these women leave office the projects ceases to function.

As this study focuses on how the press have fared in the coverage of the “Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI),” it carried out an assessment of the performance of the press in canvassing and advocating for more of women participation in politics. Feminists believe that the name ‘woman’ is synonymous to change, hence, the W4CI is a project aimed at promoting women’s participation in every area of human endeavour especially in the socio-economic and political sphere. The initiative is also trying to develop a mechanism to monitor and facilitate Nigeria’s progress towards achieving and demonstrating international agreements to which Nigeria is a signatory. As a signatory to the United Nations Charter on Child Rights, we are still battling with some states of the federation to domesticate the Child Rights Acts passed by the National Assembly. (Ugwu, 2011)

According to the National Officer, Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI), Hon. Chinwe Ugwu (2011, p.14):

The women for change initiative is championing the review and revision of laws considered inimical to the welfare and peaceful existence of women. And these laws abound in the country such as the tax laws, land use Act of 1976, marriage laws, inheritance Act and even the Electoral Act...

Mainstreaming women in the political terrain of Nigeria is perceived as the panacea to the emancipation and empowerment of the Nigerian woman. Although, Nigerian women have made gains in certain fields of human endeavour, problems still persist in many areas and women’s share in governmental decision making process remains an illusion.

In the wake of the Beijing conference of 2000, the key focus was that women should be given 30 percent representation in politics. Many newspapers took a stand on the negotiations for women representation in politics and ran columns on the issue. One of such was the editorial of *New York Times* (June 3, 2011), which said that the Beijing conference “established concrete targets and set timetables for measuring progress” but concluded that “most of what governments call action is still just lofty talk because of cultural resistance, financial constraints and a refusal to give priority to women’s issues.

The editorial pointed to a “1998 WEDO survey that found most of the governments represented at Beijing had drawn up plans to keep their promises and 64 countries had changed laws.” It credited growth of local women’s groups with bringing about these changes.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM



Nature is believed to have allotted a sub-ordinate position for women and the Nigerian society appears to see women as such even in politics. Today, the phenomenon that women are meant to be seen and not heard has great influence on individual approach to feminism. Every attempt to involve them in major decision making organs of government in Nigeria is treated with contempt. Even the press is believed to have contributed in the way people perceive women in a given society.

Although, there has been a steady increase in the number of women professionals over the past 20 years, most mainstream press coverage continues to rely on men as experts in various fields. Women in the news are more likely to be featured in stories about accident, natural disaster, or domestic violence than in stories about their professional abilities or expertise.

It is on this premise that this study undertakes an assessment of Nigerian newspaper coverage of the *Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI)*, a project by Dame Patience Jonathan, former first lady of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which aims at redefining the place of women in political participation in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

In assessing the extent to which the press has fared in the coverage of the W4CI, this study wants to find out how the Nigerian newspaper coverage of W4CI has portrayed women as agents of change. Hence, in specific terms the following are the objectives of this study:

- (1) To find out the amount of space which the newspapers allotted to stories and illustrations on the Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI).
- (2) To determine the level of prominence given to stories on W4CI project by Nigerian newspapers and reporters' assessment of the project.
- (3) To examine the slant of coverage given to stories on W4CI project.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In an attempt to address the issues raised from this study, the researcher formulates the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent did the Nigerian newspapers give adequate coverage (in terms of space allotment) to stories and illustrations on the W4CI project?
- (2) What degree of prominence was given to stories and illustrations on the W4CI project by the newspapers and how do reporters assess it?
- (3) What is the slant of coverage given to the W4CI project by the newspapers?

REVIEW OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES



In a male dominated world like ours, issues relating to gender usually tilt in favour of the men folk. Speaking on gender stereotype, Fagbemi (2004, p.11) has this to say:

Because gender is a perception, it influences the mindset of the people and therefore has a psychological undertone. Psychologically, it is anchored on the belief system and influences the attitude and behaviour, characteristic of the relationship between men and women in a given society. It refers to the social definition of being either a man or woman in a given society. For instance, when we say that a certain type of behaviour is not characteristic of a woman's behaviour, we are basing this judgement on our expectation as to how a 'real' woman would behave in a given situation. In large measure, such judgments are based on gender stereotypes and one of the puzzles of gender analysis is the pervasiveness of such stereotype and by extension, their origins.

Fagbemi (2004, p.23) in her study on "Gender and Development in Nigeria" pointed out that gender conditions in a given society are a first consideration before gender position. Kate Young, a female activist developed the concept of condition/position. According to her, development projects generally aim to improve the condition of people's lives. From a gender and development perspective, a distinction is made between the day-to-day conditions of women's lives and their position in society. In addition to the specific conditions which women share with men, this differential access means women's position in relation to men must also be assessed when interventions are planned and implemented.

Gender mainstreaming, as a concept, is taking account of gender equality concerns in all policy programme, administrative and financial activities and in organizational transformation.

This is what raises the issue of affirmative action which was the major focus of the international women conference held in Beijing China in 1985.

THE ORIGIN OF AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

As one of the cardinal objectives of the *Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI)*, the affirmative action is a concept which can be traced to the international women conference held in Beijing, China in 1985. According to the objective of W4CI, it pointed out that:

Although Nigeria women have made gains in certain fields of human endeavour, problems still persists in many areas and women's share in governmental decision making process remains a far cry. A key strategy in promoting women's empowerment and gender equality has been the adoption of "affirmative action" to correct the age-long gender imbalance across societies. Affirmative Action policies have become political instruments for meeting the needs of those who have been unfairly shut out of mainstream development and societal systems. (W4CI, 2010)

This cardinal objective is driven by the W4CI's vision of creating "a movement that will engender the mass awareness of women at all levels to their human rights and obligations as citizens of Nigeria.



The focal point in the 1985 Affirmative Action is that more women should be allowed to participate in politics. The agreement reached by member nations that attended the conference was that 35% affirmative action should be allowed in government.

According to Adebawale (2011. p.52):

Majority of these issues were extensively discussed and resolution reached at the 1995 fourth world conference on women in Beijing, popularly referred to as the Beijing Conference where a platform for Action adopted, affirmed that women have equal rights to participate in governance and, though that participation contribute to the redefining of the political landscape and agenda.

He further asserted that:

Since the Beijing conference, the world's attention to women's participation in politics has definitely been on the rise with many women occupying several sensitive positions while the likes of Mireya Moscoso of Panama (1999), Angela Merkel of Germany (2005), Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf of Liberia (2006), Cristina Fernandez Kirchner of Argentina (2007), have gone on to successfully contest elections to become the heads of governments in their different countries. The focus is however not on the world at the moment, but on the renewed calls for increased women participation in Nigeria with many citing the affirmative action adopted in Beijing and clamouring for women to be granted at least 35 per cent of political offices across the land.

The affirmative action has no doubt brought some level of significant progress for women in politics in other countries were women rose to the position of heads of government.

According to Ndujihe (2011):

At a time observers are saying that the increments were a far cry from the 30 per cent affirmative action presented by the international women's conference in Beijing, China in 1985, the figure has gone further down in 2011. Only seven (7) female senators (7.63 per cent) and 19 Reps. (5.28 per cent) were elected in 2011.

It is important to note also that out of the 7 female senators, 3 were re-elected and out of the 19 House of Representative female members, only 11 were re-elected. This result has raised several arguments from different people. Some believe that the fault is from the women folk, while others argue that it is as a result of the difficulty in the political terrain of Nigeria.

WOMEN FOR CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVE (W4CI)

The W4CI which is a gender-focused movement for mobilizing women from all walks of life to take interest in affirmative action, has been launched in some states, with women showing unprecedented interest in the initiative as they came out in their

thousands with enthusiasm and hope for a new dawn of recognition and inclusion. (Iniodu, 2011)

Table 1: A flag-off time-table of the initiative in about 13 states including FCT

S/N	ACTIVITY	DATE	VENUE	STATUS
1.	National Flag-off	16 th July, 2010	Women Development centre, Abuja	Flagged Off
2.	Anambra	20 th July, 2010	Awka	Flagged Off
3.	Imo	30 th July, 2010	Owerri	Flagged Off
4.	Kaduna	2 nd August, 2010	Kaduna	Flagged Off
5.	Bauchi	9 th August, 2010	Bauchi	Flagged Off
6.	Delta	20 th August, 2010	Asaba	Flagged Off
7.	Rivers State	23 rd August, 2010	Port-Harcourt	Flagged Off
8.	Enugu	12 th Sept. 2010	Enugu	Flagged Off
9.	Akwa – Ibom	14 th Sept. 2010	Uyo	Flagged Off
10.	FCT	15 th October, 2010	Abuja	Flagged Off
11.	Abia	18 th October, 2010	Aba	Flagged Off
12.	Bayelsa	22 nd October, 2010	Yenogoa	Flagged Off
13.	Katsina	25 th October, 2010	Katsina	Flagged Off
14.	Osun	22 nd November, 2010	Osogbo	Flagged Off

Source: (WACI, 2010)

The launch of the pet project few weeks after Goodluck Jonathan assumed office as president of the federal republic of Nigeria has generated reactions from several individuals and groups.

According to Ojeme (2011):

One of the major reasons often adduced for the poor perception of these programmes and rightly so is the elitist colouration they evoked. Meetings whether small or large often turned out to be a fashion parade of some sorts. What is more, wives of politically exposed persons and VIPs accompanied by their hordes of security aides often outnumbered the ordinary people for whom the pet projects were conceived for.

Indeed, this points to the fact that this project lack mass appeal and relevance to the short and long term goals of advancing the course of the Nigerian women. Scholars also observed that this pet project was launched in most PDP controlled states which is an indication that the project appear partisan.



In another submission, Ejikeme (2011) a legal practitioner pointed out that a recent newspaper report entitled: “crisis looms in first lady’s camp” sadly captured the apparent failure of the Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI). One of the highlights of the report was the poor showing of women in the just concluded party primaries across the nation. The report also regretted that the 35 per cent women representation in national and state government may be a mirage at the end of the day.

It was observed in the report that a women rights advocates smacked at the first lady’s project attributing the failure of Mrs. Sarah Jibril to get beyond one vote in the recent presidential primaries of the PDP to the floundering fortunes of the W4CI. According to a report compiled by the National Coordinator of National Women Rights Advocates, Mrs. Beatrice Maduemere (quoted in Ejikeme, 2011): “More women would have emerged in some of the party primaries had the first lady and members of W4CI lived up to the ‘ideals’ they propagated.”

Scholars believe that women have been known to propagate ideals and standards. Expectations therefore have always been high concerning women’s disposition over morals and leadership quests.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The dynamic nature of theories on press coverage suggests a paradigm shift from the usual approach the press give to issues. For the purpose of this study, the Agenda-setting theory was considered.

The Agenda-setting theory is epitomized in the famous quote by Bernard Cohen (1963) saying that “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about.” This stresses the fact that people need to orient themselves in a complex world full of complex issues. In the absence of other cues, people tend to judge the importance of issues from their salience in the media and to focus their attention on those presumably most important issues (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002).

According to Petty et al (2002, p.13) the media have little power to change people’s opinions but more power to re-enforce existing views. This leads to the important question: How are the views formed in the first place?

Hence, one may hypothesize that the media have strong effects the first time a new issue is discussed. In fact, several studies have found that media effects are stronger for issues that people are unfamiliar with (McCombs and Reynolds, 2002; Zaller, 1992).

Lippmann (1922, p.34) noted that the media shape people’s perceptions of that which they cannot experience directly. Those issues for which individuals have little personal



contact and for which they rely on the media as the primary and sometimes, only source of information are termed unobtrusive.

This explains the influence the press had on its coverage of the first pet project launched in Nigeria. What Nigerians know about the Women for Change and Development Initiative (W4CI) is largely based on what the media decide to tell them. This agenda setting from the coverage of W4CI is found in the patterns of coverage given to the project and how people viewed it over some period of time, a week, a month, an entire year. Page | 9

Here, we infer that the media set agenda only when citizens perceive their news stories as relevant and also when the issue covered is unfamiliar to them for the first time.

METHODOLOGY

The researchers adopted the content analysis and survey research methods. To examine the manifest communication content on the issue under study, the content analysis method served as a useful approach. Content analysis is a method used in studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables. This means that the content to be analyzed is selected according to explicit and consistently applied rules and treated in exactly the same manner.

Also, to generate responses from the journalists that reported the issue under study, the survey research design was used. This method gives one the opportunity to ascertain the views of those that reported the issue and facilitates credible basis for the generalization of result. Here, interview was the instrument used to collect data from randomly selected journalists that covered the pet project from the four national newspapers under study.

The population for the content analysis includes all the editions of the selected national newspapers under study. The choice of national newspapers is due to the national outlook of the phenomenon “women for change and development initiative”. The choice of the four newspapers (*The Guardian, Daily Trust, Vanguard and Daily Sun*) as representative of the universe of study (national newspapers) is for a proper representation of the geo-political distribution of the national newspapers in Nigeria. A random selection in ratio 1:3 of national newspapers in Nigeria (i.e. ratio of Northern newspapers to Southern newspapers in terms of location and ownership) was carried out. Hence, out of a total of twenty-five (24) national newspapers (Source: www.nigerianewspapers.com), one (1) was randomly selected from the six (6) Northern newspapers while three (3) was randomly selected from the eighteen (18) Southern newspapers.

In the context of this research, national newspapers refer to those newspapers that are circulated across at least more than 12 states in Nigeria. The researcher examined the manifest communication contents of these four newspapers for a whole year which amounts to (365 days x 4) = 1460 days. A sample size of 90 was drawn from the

population of study. Also, one journalist each (from the sampled newspapers) was interviewed and the results were used to complement that of the content analysis.

RESULTS

Table 1: *Summary of frequency and percentage of news hole on W4CI*

Below 100 words	Between 100 & 500 words	Between 500 & 1,000 words	Between 1,000 & 2,000 words	Above 2,000 words
1 (2%)	23 (55%)	14 (33%)	4 (10%)	0 (0%)

Some of the reports on the issues under study appeared as pictures only (picture story), hence, there was a decrease in the frequency of occurrence of number of words per story, because the number of stories decreased to 42 instead of 45 as earlier stated.

From the result, it is obvious that most of the stories recorded number of words between 100 and 500 and between 500 and 1,000 which accounted for 57 (88%).

There was no story that had above 2,000 words. Also, even the 4 (10%) stories that recorded between 1,000 and 2,000 words were mainly interviews and features, which by their nature; occupy more news hole than other nature of story.

Daily Trust was the only newspaper that had a story below 100 words, which appeared as news brief. Most of the reports on the W4CI were not detailed. There was little or no follow-up story to the event. The reason is because as the event (i.e. the launch of the pet project) ends in a particular area there are hardly anything to report until it is launched elsewhere on a later date.

The Guardian had more stories occupying between 500 and 1,000 words, the same applies to *Vanguard*, while *Daily Trust* and *Daily Sun* also had stories with number of words between 100 and 500.

Table 2: *Summary of frequency and percentage of placement of stories*

Front Page	Back Page	Inside Page	Total
2 (4%)	1 (2%)	42 (94%)	45 (100%)

Table 3: *Summary of frequency and percentage of story focus on female personalities to measure the level of prominence*

Dame Patience	Female Politicians	Women Generally	Total
12 (27%)	11 (24%)	22 (49%)	45 (100%)



From the above tables, front page stories accounted for 2 (4%), back page stories had 1 (2%), while inside page stories ranked highest with 42 (94%) of the entire pages of the newspapers under study.

It is important to note that *The Guardian* and *Daily Sun* did not record any front page story as the only 2 front page stories came from *Daily Trust* and *Vanguard*. These stories focused on Dame Patience Jonathan as a personality. None of the newspapers, except *The Guardian* had back page stories on the issue under study. Page | 11

On the female personalities used as focus, stories that were centred on Dame Patience Jonathan recorded 12 (27%) while that of female politicians had 11 (24%). The result also revealed that stories that focus of women generally ranked highest with 22 which represent 49% of the entire focus of story on the issue under study.

Another observation from the manifest content of communication in the newspapers under study is that all the pictures used in front page to portray the pet project were that of Dame Patience Jonathan as the brain behind the pet project.

Table 4: *Distribution of stories according to slant of coverage of W4CI*

Newspapers	Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral
The Guardian	5 (46%)	3 (27%)	3 (27%)
Daily Trust	5 (56%)	1 (11%)	3 (33%)
Vanguard	8 (80%)	1 (10%)	1 (10%)
Daily Sun	10 (67%)	2 (13%)	3 (20%)
Summary of Table			
Favourable Slant	Unfavourable Slant	Neutral Slant	Total
28 (62%)	7 (16%)	10 (22%)	45 (100%)

The importance of slant in newspaper coverage of issues of public interest cannot be over-emphasized. It helps to pattern the general thinking of individuals over certain issues and also aid the slant of debate such issue generate.

The result from the table above shows that favourable slant ranked highest with 28 (62%) in the coverage made by the four newspapers under study. By favourable slant we mean stories that portray women as agents of change in politics. This is in confirmation to what the W4CI stands for when used as a tool to mobilize women to take active part in politics (By favourable slant we mean stories on the W4CI that portray women as agents of change in Nigerian politics).

Also, from the result, unfavourable slant recorded 7 (16%), which ranked lowest in the entire 45 slant of coverage given to the W4CI by the newspapers. By unfavourable slant we mean stories about W4CI or women participation in politics that does not portray women as agents of change in Nigeria.

One major observation from the above result is that the entire unfavourable slants were drawn from opinion articles published in the newspapers under study. This is an indication that individual members of the society do not see women as agents of change going by the first impression they created at the PDP primaries in 2011 where the only female presidential aspirant could not secure beyond one vote.

Lastly, on the neutral slant, which consists of stories on W4CI that were neither for nor against the idea that women are agents of change in Nigerian politics, from the results, it recorded 10 (22%) of the entire slant of coverage by the newspapers on the issue under study. Most of the neutral slants came from the editorials, straight news and pictures.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Research Question 1: To what extent did the Nigerian newspapers give adequate coverage (in terms of space allotment) to stories and illustrations on the W4CI?

From the findings in this study, the newspapers did not give depth (enough space) to stories on the W4CI. This may not be unconnected to the earlier finding in this study that the launch of the project was filled with pomp and pageantry of wealth and display of affluence, which is not considered as something newsworthy by the newspapers.

The nature of stories on the W4CI that appeared as interview and features accounted for the largest amount of space (news hole) allotted to the issue under study (i.e. between 1,000 and 2,000 words). More so, full page adverts / picture story were also used to portray Dame Patience Jonathan as the brain behind the launch of the W4CI project.

There were also full page congratulatory messages to her credit on the successful launch of the project in the selected states. These were the spaces used which the researchers could not represent in words as they are more of graphics.

The ones accounted for in words were mostly between 100 and 500 words per story, which is not up to half of a page. Some were presented as news brief to make up the stories in a particular page.



One major finding from all the reports is that most of the stories that centred on the W4CI were largely infinitesimal (below 500 words), while those that talk about women participation in politics either through interviews or features accounted for stories between 1,000 and 2,000 words.

This finding agrees with a similar study on the face of news in Nigerian newspapers. According to Mavis et al (2012), their findings “reveal that the newspaper did not allocate enough space to news stories as asserted by Joseph (2011) with respect to the 45% allocation of news-hole in newspaper.” Newspapers don’t have space for frivolities as buttressed by a popular parlance that *facts are sacred and comments are free*.

The kind of information that must occupy the news hole of any newspaper must be such that can attract wider readership which will in turn translate to the economic advantage of the newspaper.

Research Question 2: What degree of prominence was given to stories and illustrations on the W4CI project by the newspapers and how do reporters assess it?

The level of prominence given to stories on the W4CI or women participation in Nigerian politics was measured using placement of stories and the personalities involved in the stories.

On the placement of the stories, the findings reveal that 42 (94%) of the entire stories on the issue under study appeared in the inside page leaving the front page and back page with 2 (4%) and 1 (2%) respectively.

Much of what people know about issues is based on how the media “set” them. Lack of prominence (in terms of placement) given to the W4CI project is responsible for the dearth of knowledge shared by most individuals, especially women, on the issue.

This is what the Agenda Setting Theory emphasizes. According to McCombs and Reynolds (2002),

...people need to orient themselves in a complex world full of complex issues. In the absence of other cues, people tend to judge the importance of issues from their salience in the media and to focus their attention on those presumably most important issues.

Also, even the ones that appeared in the front page of the newspapers under study gave prominence to Dame Patience Jonathan as the initiator of the project. The newspapers have succeeded in framing the issue about the W4CI to the person of the president’s wife. This informs the notion people have about the project that it is all about her.

The potency of the media in this respect is what McCombs and Reynolds, 2002 and Zaller 1992 pointed out in their assertion that:

..one may hypothesize that the media have strong effect the first time a new issue is discussed. In fact studies

have shown that media effects are stronger for issues that people are unfamiliar with.

This was further buttressed from responses gathered through the interview carried out in this study with the journalists that covered the project.

Interview extract:

Q: In your own opinion do you think the W4CI is personality-based or issue-based?

A (1): "I think it is both personality-based and issue-based because you cannot separate persons from issues they create." (*Daily Trust* correspondent)

Also, the responses from the correspondents from The Guardian and Vanguard agree with the above submission.

A (2): "It is neither personality-based nor issue-based but rather gender-based. This is because the major thrust of the W4CI project is to mobilize more women (not men) to take active part in Nigerian politics." (*Daily Sun* correspondent)

From the foregoing, all the above responses are actually saying the same thing but in different ways. When an issue is gender-based, it is also personality-based because it is persons that make up that gender and you cannot separate such persons from the issue that made them prominent. Persons in themselves cannot become prominent; it is either what they do or the office they occupy that makes them prominent.

Research Question 3: What is the slant of coverage given to the W4CI project by the newspapers and how do women assess it?

The straight news produced most of the favourable slant where women were portrayed as agents of change in Nigeria. This is contrary to what the opinion articles represent. The basis for the views expressed, which did not see women as agents of change was drawn from the outcome of the PDP primaries in 2011, where the only female presidential aspirant could not secure beyond one vote. This implies that women in themselves do not believe in their fellow woman.

Similar empirical studies on women in politics in Nigeria reveal that during the pre-colonial times women contributed greatly to the development in the country.

According to Attoe (2002):

Nigeria's development since pre-colonial times recorded tangible contributions by women politically and otherwise. Studies have shown that women have over time contributed socially, economically and politically to the development in Nigeria although not much attention is or has been paid to these various contributions.

The above assertion agrees with the findings made by Badmus (2006) that:



Although women did not have their franchise and as such did not contribute much within the political parties, they were still a force to be reckoned with outside the parties either in support of the various parties or just fighting for women's rights.

With the level of influence which is believed to have been made through the launch of the W4CI, responses from the Journalists show that women were not just mobilized but a sense of commitment have been inculcated in them.

Interview extract:

Q: Does this pet project by Dame Patience Jonathan really portray women as agents of change in Nigerian politics?

A: The general response to the question is in the affirmative but the journalists still pointed out that it is only female politicians that the project portrays more as agents of change not the average woman on the street.

Q: In your reports on this pet project or women participation in Nigerian politics, how do Nigerian women see the W4CI or what can you say is their general opinion or assessment of the project?

A: The general response to this is that women in general believe in the project based on what they get out of it (like bags of rice, wrappers, etc). They have not been fully sensitized on the ideals of the project.

Q: In what ways did the W4CI influence women participation at the April 2011 elections in Nigeria?

A: Some of the journalists believe that the project has failed in that regard; others claim that it did not start on time. According to them, "if given enough time the W4CI will produce a greater number of active women in politics"

The Daily Trust correspondent pointed out that the pet project has really succeeded to some extent in producing more women (about 14%) in appointive positions.

All these developments in the way and manner people (especially women) view the W4CI project is largely influenced by the tone (slant) of coverage the newspapers gave the issue.

The focus of the neutral slant is not on whether women are agents of change but rather on the rationale for the proposed funding of female politicians, which the report believes will corrupt their participation in Nigerian politics. It has also been observed that the terrain of politics in Nigeria is not favourable for women involvement. This is because there is violence and thuggery in Nigerian politics, which the female folk cannot easily cope with.

On the other hand, the unfavourable slant which was more pronounced in the opinion articles questioned the role that women played in mobilizing and encouraging other



women to take active part in politics. This brought the general notion that women are their worst enemies and that they don't really believe in themselves. This indeed does not portray them as agents of change in Nigeria, going by the outcome of the April 2011 election.

SUMMARY

The following are the summary of the finding:

- That the newspapers did not give depth (enough space, which is measured in number of words) to the W4CI and women participation in Nigerian politics. The reason for this, as discovered in the findings, is that most aspects of the W4CI lack newsworthiness.
- Due to lack of newsworthiness in some aspect of the W4CI project, it did not merit front page presence as it should and the personality involved (Dame Patience Jonathan) was occasionally reported, since she is the brain behind the project.
- The slant of coverage of the W4CI project and women participation in politics was more of favourable from the straight news and unfavourable from the opinion articles.
- That the journalists see this project as one that will go into extinction as soon as Goodluck Jonathan leaves office as the president of Nigeria. This also agrees with the findings from the content analysis that the W4CI has little or nothing that makes it newsworthy.
- That journalists see the W4CI project as both personality-based (portraying Dame Patience Jonathan as a force to be reckoned with) and issue-based (associating change with feminism)

CONCLUSION

From the above findings it becomes obvious that any event that the media sees as not being newsworthy is likely to receive low media attention even though such event might involve a public office holder. Also, there is correlation between what journalists think about an event and the slant with which that event is presented in the media. This is because the newspaper content cannot be anything different from the bias of the Journalist and also the editorial policy of the newspaper. Lastly, the stereotype built about women over time can be traced to continuous media representation of them and this tends to influence where the female gender is situated in the scheme of things in politics.

RECOMMENDATIONS



In view of the findings from this study, the researchers make the following recommendations:

- That any study on the assessment of newspaper coverage should employ survey as a rich ingredient in eliciting behavioural responses to media coverage of issues under study.
- Interpretative reporting should be employed on issues of national significance to guide the public in making well informed assessment of the issue.
- Newspaper reports on issues should always relate such issues to the individuals' frame of thought to help such individual draw informed conclusions in accordance to the level of knowledge possessed on such issue.
- Straight news slant should not focus on favourability of issues but to capture a balance of various slants to issues.
- Newspaper reports of issues should not just be based on personalities involved but should also consider the importance of such issue to the people and as such emphasize the importance more than the personality.

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