REPORTING CONFLICT FROM SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY PERSPECTIVE: A PRESS PANACEA TO SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT.

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ABSTRACT

Sustainable development is often seen as a strategy to optimally utilize resources while minimizing damage to both the environment and life. Sustainable development cannot be achieved in a climate of conflict and violent conflict, by its very nature, leads to regression rather than development. The Bakassi Peninsula Conflict would have pitted Nigeria and Cameroun in a war situation but this was rightly averted by diplomatic efforts supported with responsible press coverage as this article argues. Content analysis and survey were used to generate data for the study. Using *ANOVA* for hypothesis testing, the study found that the select Nigerian newspapers were conscious of their social responsibility role of maintaining societal stability by not advocating war as a means of resolving the conflict which could be a template for African media in coverage of conflicts as a way of guaranteeing sustainable peace and development of the continent.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Bakassi Peninsula, Media, Agenda setting, Social responsibility, Conflict coverage.

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the issue of sustainable development, especially in third world countries, has taken a centre stage in international discourse. According to a 1987 report by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development entitled 'Our common future' as submitted by Ms. Harlem Brundtland, sustainable development is defined as "development that satisfies the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to satisfy theirs". Asemah (2011, p.316)) avers that "Sustainable development is the process of maximising the use of available resources in order to ensure the long-term well-being of present and future beneficiaries. Sustainable development is a (sic) continuous progress which aims for and maintains a constructive state of living in society as preserved by social institutions and systems". In essence, sustainable development is about the now and future. However, attention on this crucial matter seems to focus preponderantly on scientific and managerial ideas on resource utilization which would not endanger humanity. Certainly, this is a right step in the right direction because effective management of the environment is desideratum to the quality of life that people would live.

But beyond the beautiful ideas, conventions and resolutions that have been churned out in writings, conferences, summits and other academic fora on the vexed issue, there is the often downplayed factor of the role of peace building in the quest for sustainable development in such discussions. Unarguably, there is a clear nexus between the two concepts as emphasized in the report of the United Nations Secretary---General on the "Prevention of Armed Conflict" (A/55/985–S/2001/574 submitted by Galymzhan Kirbassov (No date) at the 8th Session of the United Nations Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals) which states that "conflict prevention and sustainable development are mutually reinforcing concepts. The relationship between these two concepts has been widely examined in various academic platforms". Development or the ability to sustain it, can hardly take place in an environment of rancour, discord and acrimony. Former president of Nigeria, Dr Ebele Goodluck Jonathan captured the essence of peace in national development when he asserted that:

> I have been involved in solving many problems in African countries for more than five years and I know the enormity and cost of conflicts, especially on the citizenry. We cannot afford that in Nigeria. If we were to have a political conflict in Nigeria, I am not sure the sub-region will be able to accommodate our citizens. My commitment is to always put the country before my personal ambition and that is what I have demonstrated (Vanguard online, 21 May, 2015).

Indeed, there must be a guarantee of sustainable peace before any meaningful development can occur as this article argues. Equally important is the fact that in the gamut of factors that makes for peaceful coexistence in any society, the role of the media in forging and sustaining peace cannot be overemphasized.

It is not gainsaid that conflict and crisis would always be factors in human existence which cannot be wished away. So long as man continues to live in a social relationship with another, conflict is bound to occur. This is why Anyadike (2009, p.321) says "Conflict is a recurring natural phenomenon which is inherent in every socio-cultural, economic and political settings characteristic of group interactions. However, depending on how it is handled, it could either be constructive, or it could be destructive". Interestingly, anywhere conflict occurs, the media are magneted to it because it is the ethical responsibility of

the media to report events in society and as Adesina (2009) has argued, "there is no particular time the public is more in need of information from the media than when the safety or even the survival of the public is threatened". Nwosu (2004, p.103) observes that conflict like other events or occurrences provide the media with new materials for their news presentation. But what should be of scholarly interest in all of this considered from the angle of mediation of social reality is: how do the media report conflicts? In other words, are the media acting responsibly in conflict reporting by not escalating them or they are goaded by economic, sectarian, racial, tribal, nationalistic and such other sentimental considerations rather than ethical responsibility in this all-important business?

Relating this puzzle to the Nigerian media landscape, one would discover that most scholarly works on media coverage of conflict in Nigeria carpet the media for being biased, inaccurate, partisan and insensitive to public interest. For instance, Pate (2004) has noted that the politicization and poor mediation of diversity and conflict issues in a pluralistic society like Nigeria have been partly accountable for the negative turn of events. Albert (2002), as cited by Pate, avers that the Nigerian media coverage of conflict and diversity often de-emphasize how to make a contribution towards a peace culture. Other scholars who have also found the media culpable of poor reportage of conflict include Galadima (2008), Ashong and Udoudo (2008), Oboh (2009), Mojaye and Unurhoro (2010).

On the contrary, a few academic voices have given the media a pass mark on the issue. Ganiyu (2009) posits, in his study of print media coverage of the Niger-Delta crisis, that media reports of the crisis contributed to each side's understanding of perceived opponents. Bashir (2006) has noted the positive role the media played in the 2001 Tiv-Jukun crisis in charting a course of reconciliation. Nwankpa (2011) has also found that the media deemphasized the use of violence in resolving the Niger-Delta crisis. And so, the dialectic on whether the media are dysfunctional in conflict reporting in Nigeria continues in the invisible college of researchers. McQuail (1977, p.71) in Anyadike (2009, p.322) believes that mass media have the social responsibility of mobilizing people towards positive change. Oso and Bello (2013) quote Dahlgren (2001, p.65) as saying that over the ages the "mass media have acted as agents of change while they also help to maintain continuity (and) provide stability…." This assertion obviously drags the media into the turbulent waters of conflict management. So, communication through the media can play both causal and remedial roles in conflict resolution (Njoku, 2006). As a causal factor, the media can intensify the conflict, while on the remedial plane, they can be instrumental to a peaceful resolution of the conflict.

What the foregoing analysis indicates is the fact that the media have become active participants and not just passive observers in conflict management especially in contemporary international discourse. Balabanova (2007, p.1) comments that:

> Arguably the reason why these wars within states have become conflicts of international concern
> is in some form related to the media. What follows from this is a picture of the world in which
> contemporary wars and modern news media attract each other. In this process, the media become
> a constitutive part of wars. They play a complex role in the conduct and prosecution of wars,
> which cannot be simply limited to being an observer of events. They have turned into
> participants and even catalysts in international crises.

The question is: to what extent do the media play this intervention role responsibly? This brings us to the issue of social responsibility as a core concept in this study. As a point of departure, we would say that socially responsible press behaviour is guided by the canon which underlined the Federal Communications Commission Act of 1934 in the United States: *In the*

public interest, convenience, and necessity (see Ijwo and Ogi, 2011, p.4). Social responsibility is, therefore, public-spirit driven. However, Enwefah (2010) is quick to reiterate the observation of Wiio (1983) that press fulfilment of the social responsibility role is dependent on a variety of internal and external contingencies, among which is the dilemma of balancing journalistic objectivity with the organizational imperatives of the individual media organizations. The journalist is caught in a web (a sort of tension of opposites) in which case he is faced with reporting issues as he deems fit professionally and reporting to meet up with the expectations of his organization and in the case of a conflict, the perception of the reporter's home government of the issue at stake.

For instance, Alemoh (2005) has noted that organizational imperatives have more influence on the ethical conduct of a journalist than the training the journalist obtained at school. In line with this thought, it is the submission of Pate (2004, p.7) that in dealing with the issue of professionalism in journalism "...one should be able to understand the contextual or operational environment in which the journalist practices" because according to him, "some of the journalists, even where they appear competent are often subdued by the attitudes and policies of their individual media houses to the detriment of their professional honour". But Enwefah (2010, p.96) is quick to assert that under the social responsibility theory, the media first and foremost owe their allegiance to the public before any other interest and that the major task of the media in this setting is to raise conflict to the level of discussion.

This study, therefore, analyzed how select Nigerian newspapers covered the Bakassi Peninsula conflict between Nigeria and Cameroun from the standpoint of adhering to the tenets of social responsibility. It could be recalled that the conflict gained prominence in the early 1980s and was finally resolved peaceably in 2006. Even though the dispute ended in a non-violent way, it is important to assess the contribution the Nigeria press made to the realization of this feat, a situation that could have resulted to a war. Martel (2003, p. x) has noted that "Anyone interested in the conduct of international relations in the twentieth century is aware of the significant—perhaps revolutionary—role that the media has come to play. Reportage and commentary in print, on radio and television, and most recently on the Internet, have profoundly altered the way in which states conduct business with one another".

In this regard, we need to evaluate if the Nigerian press reported the Bakassi Peninsula conflict with a view to encouraging the parties to the conflict to actualize a peaceful resolution to it in line with the resolve of both countries. In other words, did the Nigerian newspapers report the conflict objectively by placing public interest above other considerations with the mind of sustaining the peaceful diplomatic relations between Nigeria and Cameroun? Essentially, the major objective of this paper is to examine how strategically the Nigerian press reported the Bakassi Peninsula conflict with a view to facilitating its peaceful resolution.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Against the background of criticisms of the capability of the media to escalate conflicts through inordinate reportage, this study hypothesizes that: Newspaper coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was geared towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in line with the press social responsibility role of maintaining societal stability.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Concept of conflict/conflict resolution

Conflict has been defined in several ways depending on the academic orientation of each scholar. For this reason, Akpan (2011, p.xxii) citing Akpan and Galadima (2003) states that "There is no agreement among scholars on the concept of conflict, even though there is no disagreement on its manifestations and impact on the society" adding that "whatever perspective or position conflict is examined, its nature and goals are, technically speaking, the same and that is the existence of incompatible interests leads to conflict". To Otite and Albert (2001) in Anyadike (2009, p.323), conflict is the consequence of the pursuit of divergent interests, goals and aspirations by individuals and groups in defined social and physical environments. Obaje (2008) also cited in Anyadike (2009, p.323) notes that conflict is a situation when one party perceives the action of another party as blocking the opportunity for attainment of a goal. A case in point is the Bakassi Peninsula conflict, the focus of this study, which was obviously ignited because of the economic potential of the disputed territory. When there is conflict, there will certainly be the need to resolve it. Iji (2007, p.48) defines conflict resolution as:

> synonymous with the term peace; amicable solution, arrived at after trouble-shooting exercise in which two or more parties in discord agree to mend their co-existential fences; a temporary or permanent truce or cessation of exchange of aggression. Such cessation of mutual hostilities can be arrived at through litigation or adjudication, negotiation, mediation, arbitration or mere surrender by or subjugation and defeat of the weaker contenders.

From another perspective, Miller (2008, p.8) sees conflict resolution as "a variety of approaches aimed at terminating conflicts through the constructive solving of problems as distinct from a transformation of conflict". In the contemporary world, emphasis is placed more on Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) which stresses mediation, reconciliation, negotiation, adjudication, etc, in preference to war in resolving conflicts. As pointed out earlier, the media could be instrumental in the nexus of factors that engender a peaceful conflict resolution.

CONFLICT COVERAGE

Conflict has been seen as "the bread and butter of journalism" (Owens-Ibie, 2002 cited in Pate, 2011). Pate adds that studies have shown that the media have remained the most credible source of news and information to most people in crisis periods. He offers what could be a panacea to the problem of conflict reporting in the media when he declares that there is a growing interest in what is referred to as "peace journalism" which in his view entails "balance news coverage, positive education of

people about what is going on in a divided society, controlling dangerous rumours and providing a trusted source of information for all parties in a conflict."

Batta (2009) says that the media have the power to inform the public on issues and can somehow influence peace and conflict resolving behaviours of the public. He believes that the Nigerian media have not failed to report and provide coverage for conflict situations in the country but beyond this are the questions of what sort of coverage is given by the media and whether such can build peace and help to resolve conflicts or one that fans conflicts and endangers peace. Unfortunately, many scholars berate the Nigerian media for poor coverage of conflict as earlier cited in this study. The same observation has been made about media coverage of conflict in Africa. For instance, Esuh (2006, p.143) reports that:

> After a thorough assessment of media coverage of conflicts in the African Continent, panelists at the ACCE (2004) Regional Conference in Nairobi, Kenya came to the conclusion that 'the media are partly to blame for the condition Africa finds itself today. Coverage of conflicts is weak. At best, it comes in form of western perspective and viewpoints. There is very little that is African in content and context, hence the lack of direction.

Quite instructively, Anyadike (2009, pp.328-331) identifies seven approaches the media could use in facilitating conflict resolution as follows: i) Media acting as sources of information ii) Objective reporting iii) Dialogue iv) Countering misinformation v) Transformatory role vi) Interpretative role, and vii) De-emphasizing profit motive.

LITERATURE ON BAKASSI PENINSULA

The story of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict dates back to the colonial times in the chequered histories of Nigeria and Cameroun. Geographically and culturally speaking, the peninsula and its people have much affinity with Nigeria. An excursion into the ethnographic configurations of the disputed territory would reveal that the inhabitants of the peninsula are predominantly Efik and Efut, which are ethnic groups in the present day Cross River State, Nigeria. The name 'Bakassi' came from 'Bassey Eke' and that is Efik, according to the late Obong of Calabar, Edidem Nta Elijah Henshaw, reported in *The Guardian* (12 October, 2002, p.20). But another source, Otuka Anyasi, in a letter to the editor of *The Guardian* (16 August, 2006) claims that "The original name of Bakassi is 'Ubakansi' corrupted by contact with Europeans".

An article in Microsoft Corporation Encyclopedia (2008) entitled "Bakassi Peninsula" describes the Peninsula as a piece of land that juts into the Gulf of Guinea and adjacent to the border between Cameroun and Nigeria. The article notes that ownership of the peninsula has been the subject of a long-standing diplomatic dispute between the two West African nations until 2002. *The Vanguard*, 19 July, 2006 records that right from 1978 the tussle over the ownership of the Peninsula had started during the reign of Gen. Obasanjo as military Head of State, through Alhaji Shehu Shagari and eventually President Obasanjo again as a democratically elected President, adding that the options available to Nigerian leaders have been either to resort to aggression or diplomacy.

It is interesting to note that as at the time of the conflict, two prominent Nigerians, Senator Florence Ita-Giwa and Hon. Patrick Ene, (both Legislators), the latter being deputy Speaker, Cross River State House of Assembly were natives of Bakassi. Abang (2009) in Bassey and Oshita (2009) describes the Bakassi Peninsula as a low lying region bordered on the West by the estuary of the Cross River, on the North by the Akwanyefe River (also known as the Akpa Ikang) on the East by the Rio-del-Rey estuary, and on the South by the Gulf of Guinea. The oil-rich Peninsula consists of a series of Islands covering approximately 50 square Kilometres and occupied for the most part by long-established communities of Nigerians, in several dozens of villages. Also, history shows that at various times, the ownership of the peninsula triangulated among three contending European imperialists viz Germany, Britain and finally, France.

From the end of World War I (1914-1918) to the independence of Cameroun in 1960, the Bakassi Peninsula and present-day southwestern Cameroun were administered by Britain as part of Nigeria. However, in 1961, there was a plebiscite that enabled the British administered Cameroonian territory to join its counterpart as one country. Quite historically significant, Bakassi indigenes did not participate in this plebiscite. The costly assumption was that the territory already belonged to Nigeria. Obviously based on this thinking, the Nigerian government, in 1991, claimed that the Bakassi peninsula was still legally part of Nigeria. Cameroon countered with an agreement signed in 1975 by the then Nigerian military ruler Gen. Yakubu Gowon, which ceded the territory to Cameroon.

Nigeria refuted the agreement and in early 1994 invaded the Bakassi Peninsula. Fighting gave way to diplomacy by the end of the year, but armed clashes resumed in 1996. Cameroon requested that the matter be settled by the International Court of Justice (ICJ), which ordered both countries to cease hostilities. On 10 October, 2002, the ICJ ruled that the peninsula rightly belonged to Cameroon on the basis of the 1913 agreement, and ordered Nigerian forces to leave the area. However, Nigeria continued to occupy the region until the dispute was finally resolved in 2006.

By way of summary, this brief literature review has brought to the fore the following salient points. One, conflict is endemic in human nature and usually occurs as a result of clash of incompatible interest. Also, conflict could be managed by resolving it so that it would not degenerate into a crisis. The media could offer a platform for effective conflict resolution through responsible coverage. Finally, the Bakassi Peninsula episode qualifies to be termed a conflict because it was a clash of interest which would have pitted Nigeria against Cameroun in a war situation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Social responsibility theory of Mass Communication provides a theoretical plank for the study. Folarin (1998) discusses the social responsibility theory as part of the normative press theories. This scholar posits that the chief duty of the media operating with this theory is to raise conflict to the plane of discussion. Folarin further notes that in actual sense, social responsibility media theory owes its origin to the Hutchins' Commission on Freedom of the Press, set up in the United States of America in 1947 to re-examine the concept of press freedom as enunciated in the libertarian or free press theory.

In general, socially acceptable press behaviour was to be anchored in self-regulation, but if the press would not voluntarily behave, then there must be certain social structures (regulatory bodies) to ensure that it does behave in compliance with recognized social standards. This theory is relevant to this study in that newspaper coverage of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict is evaluated based on a) the commitment of the newspapers to enlightening the public on the conflict; b) the extent the newspapers raised the conflict to the level of social discourse; and c) the concern of the newspapers about building the peace agenda in the conflict.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Content analysis was employed in the study to evaluate newspaper coverage. The research method was suitable because "content analysis is a method of studying and analyzing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables" (Kerlinger, 2000 in Wimmer and Dominick, 2006, p.150) and, what will be used as units of analysis is recorded information in print. Also, survey method was used to determine if there was any organizational influence from the newspapers on the coverage of the conflict. The survey also gave an insight into the perception of the journalists who covered the conflict before, during and after the judgement of the International Court of Justice (ICJ).

For the five year period of the study, 7, 200 editions of the select newspapers formed the population. This is based on the assumption that each of the four newspapers published 30 editions per month. Both week day and weekend issues of the newspapers were included. However, four newspapers (*The Guardian, Punch, New Nigerian* and *Vanguard*) were purposively used in the study. It is pertinent to observe here that these newspapers were selected from the top ten national dailies in Nigeria as at the time of the research namely: *The Guardian, Punch, Vanguard, Tribune, ThisDay, New Nigerian, Champion, Daily Trust, Daily Independent*, and *Sun* (Batta 2010, p.84). Equally, the study was restricted to four national dailies which were believed to be a fair representation of the views of the larger Nigerian press on the issue at stake. In addition, all the select newspapers were in circulation during the study period.

The study covered January 1, 2002–December 31, 2006. This period was considered ideal because it marked the height of tensions in the conflict and covered the year of the ruling, and four years after the ruling up till the handover time. This has placed the research in a good stead to ascertain the role the Nigerian press played in reporting the conflict at this crucial stage till when the dispute was peaceably resolved. The sample size was determined by purposively sorting out the newspaper editions that actually covered the conflict. The reason for doing this was that using a probability sampling technique, some of the editions in which reports on the conflict actually featured might be skipped since the conflict was reported episodically. What this means is that the newspapers were carrying reports on the conflict in line with how events were unfolding around it. In most cases, one would not find the conflict mentioned in the newspapers over a fairly length of time until a major happening takes place concerning the conflict. This also accounted for the low number of editions (161) obtained after the rigorous sorting of the newspapers and the overall items published on the conflict by the select newspapers.

For the survey, all editors and reporters of the select newspapers constituted the population. A sample of journalists used in the study was drawn from those who actually covered the conflict. Two editors and two reporters who covered the conflict in

each newspaper were interviewed through a questionnaire to ascertain the rationale behind the coverage given to the conflict by each of the newspapers. For editors, this added up to eight and the same number was used for the reporters. In all, sixteen (16) journalists were interviewed.

In this study, the units of analysis were straight News, Features, Letters to the editor, Editorials, Cartoons, Photographs, Opinions/Commentaries, Advertorials and Columns on the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. The units of analysis indicated above were coded using the following content categories: Litigation (reports on court proceedings and related issues), Compliance with the ICJ verdict, Rejection of the ICJ verdict, Plebiscite on the opinion of the Bakassi residents, Political Solution aside of the court judgement, Common historical Traits shared between the two countries, and Impact of the conflict on the two countries and the Bakassi residents.

DATA PRESENTATION/DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Table 1 Distribution of all items covered in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict (2002-2006)

Item	Content Category							
Unit of analysis	Litigation	Compliance	Rejection	Political solution	Plebiscite	Common Traits	Impact of conflict	Total
News	35 38.47%	49 59.76%	45 50%	30 53.58%	10 26.32%	-	35 50%	204 46.36%
Features	08 8.79%	02 2.44%	09 10%	03 5.36%	05 13.15%	01 7.69%	05 7.14%	33 7.5%
Editorials	01 1.09%	02 2.44%	-	02 3.57%	02 5.26%	02 15.39%	03 4.28%	12 2.73%
Opinion/com-mentary	26 28.59%	11 13.41%	16 17.78%	08 14.28%	05 13.15%	06 46.16%	16 22.86%	88 20%
Letters	02 2.19%	06 7.32%	04 4.44%	05 8.92%	02 5.26%	02 15.38%	04 5.71%	25 5.68%
Photographs	-	01 1.22%	-	-	09 23.69%	-	-	10 2.27%
Cartoons	03 3.29%	-	06 6.67%	02 3.57%	04 10.53%	-	01 1.43%	16 3.64%
Columns	03 3.29%	-	02 2.22%	-	-	-	-	05 1.14%
Interviews	13 14.29%	11 13.41%	07 7.77%	04 7.15%	01 2.64%	01 7.69%	06 8.58%	43 9.77%
Advertorials	-	-	01 1.12%	02 3.57%	-	01 7.69%	-	04 0.91%
Total	91 20.68%	82 18.64%	90 20.46%	56 12.72%	38 8.64%	13 2.95%	70 15.91%	440 100%

Concerning the objective of the study on the strategies adopted by the Nigerian press in its pursuit of a peaceful resolution of the conflict, it is clear that the press opposed the war option in resolving the conflict in line with the pacifist posture of the Nigerian government. The following newspaper quotes attributed to the Nigerian government as comments/official reaction to the ICJ judgement would suffice. *The Guardian* editorial 4 November, 2002 writes that "Happily, President Olusegun Obasanjo has indicated his readiness to approach the Bakassi and other issues relating to the ICJ ruling from the diplomatic and political angles of vision. This is the best course of action". The same newspaper ran another editorial in which it

unequivocally condemned war option to the resolution of the conflict thus, "In the passion of the moment, it will be foolhardy to succumb to the battle cry of war-mongers in our midst. A war is no picnic; it is expensive and destructive (*The Guardian* Editorial, 22 October, 2002, p.22). Evidently, the Nigerian government's position on the conflict was on how to find a peaceful solution to it. Part of this strategy was that Nigeria had agreed to cede the Peninsula to Cameroun.

It is interesting to note that the newspapers evidently keyed into this resolve as more of their headlines attest as follows: "Bakassi: FG's stand is to embrace peace" (*New Nigerian*, 26/06/06); "Nig will quit Bakassi as scheduled", *The Guardian* (08/08/06), "Obasanjo says peaceful solution imminent on Bakassi", *The Guardian*, (18/11/02), "Nigerians react to judgement, urge caution, peace", *The Guardian (*11/10/02), "Nigerians seek diplomatic option over Bakassi", "I would ask Nig not to go to war", *The Guardian* (13/10/02), "Why we should obey the ruling", "…Don't go to war with Cameroun" (*Punch*, 23/10/02); *Punch* 29/10/02 "Bakassi: An alternative to war", among others. Therefore, the first strategy adopted by the Nigerian press towards a no-violent resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was to align with the Nigerian government non-violent approach to the issue.

Another strategy used by the Nigerian press was to enlighten the audience on topical issues of interest in the conflict. In this context, enlightenment has to do with how much the newspapers educated the public on issues concerning the conflict. A newspaper generally educates the public on any given issue through editorials where the newspaper takes a stand on the given issue, as well as in features, commentary/opinion writings, photographs, and cartoons, among others. In particular, features, editorials and commentaries are used by newspapers to interpret issues to the public.

As shown in Table 1, data coded on the basis of content categories and units of analysis indicate that news stories topped the list with 204 items (46.36%) far above opinion/commentary (88 items, 20%), interviews (43 items, 9.77%), features (33 items, 7.5%) and letters to the editor (25 items, 5.68%). All other categories as shown in the table (editorials, photographs, cartoons, advertorials and columns) each scored below 25 items. The newspapers certainly paid more attention to reporting the conflict as news. However, the fact that opinion/commentary rank next in the coverage was a good attempt at interpreting the conflict to the public only that such efforts should have been complemented with a dose of features, columns and editorials to create more impact.

Equally, the journalists surveyed demonstrated that they were conscious of their ethical social responsibility of maintaining societal stability. A good number of the respondents believed in the mediating power of the press in conflict situations. Ten (62.5%) respondents agreed that the editorial boards of their newspapers were honestly convinced that press coverage could facilitate a non-violent resolution of the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. Eleven (68.75%) respondents had indicated that the editorial boards of their newspapers did not change the guidelines for reporting the conflict in spite of Nigeria's loss at the ICJ. Quite interesting, over half of the respondents (nine respondents, 56.25%) had indicated that they did not feel constrained by patriotic fervour to report the Bakassi Peninsula conflict in favour of Nigeria even though they were Nigerians working with Nigerian newspapers. This is a demonstration of professionalism. It could, therefore, be concluded that newspaper editorial policy positively influenced the coverage of the conflict.

Test of Hypothesis: Newspaper coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was geared towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in line with the press social responsibility role of maintaining societal stability.

Table 2 presents data for testing the above hypothesis using *ANOVA*.

Name of newspaper	Issues in the coverage							
	Litigation	Compliance	Rejection	Pol. solution	Plebiscite	Common traits	Impact of conflict	Total
The Guardian	32	32	18	03	06	07	35	133
Punch	22	20	40	33	08	03	07	133
New Nigerian	12	20	11	08	05	-	14	70
Vanguard	25	10	21	12	19	03	14	104
Total	91	82	90	56	38	13	70	440

Table 3 below gives a summary of the ANOVA calculations.

Total sum of squares (TSS)	Sum of squares Between (SSB)	Sum of squares within (SSW)	Mean squares for SSB	Mean squares for SSW	F-ratio	Df	Sig. level	Critical value
3298	1274	2024	212	96	2.20	6/21	.05	3.24

Data from the table above indicate that @.05 level of significance with 6 degree of freedom for the numerator mean square and 21 degree of freedom for the denominator mean square, the calculated F value of 2.20 is lesser than the critical value of 3.24. Therefore, we reject the null hypothesis that newspaper coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict was not geared towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict. The research hypothesis that newspaper coverage of issues in the Bakassi Peninsula was geared towards a peaceful resolution of the conflict in line with the press social responsibility role of maintaining societal stability is upheld.

The newspapers' call for non-violence in the conflict was predicated on the following points which they articulated in all their editorials on the conflict:

a) Nigeria is the arrow-head of African diplomatic relationship with the rest of the world; going to war with Cameroun would have seriously dented this enviable leading position as the "Giant of Africa".

b) Nigeria was absolutely committed to peace-keeping missions in the African continent as at the time of the conflict through ECOMOG in such countries like Liberia, and Sierra-Leone. It would have amounted to a contradiction for her to start another war in the continent against Cameroun.

c) The historical ties between Nigeria and Cameroun would make nonsense of any thought of hostilities between the duo.

d) There was no point giving vent to foreign interest in the conflict to destabilize the African continent further through instigating a fratricidal war between the two contiguous countries.

CONCLUSION

The select Nigerian newspapers used in this study did not endorse war as a preferred option to settle the Bakassi Peninsula conflict which indicates that they were socially responsible in building up the peace agenda set by Nigeria and Cameroun in the Bakassi Peninsula conflict. By so doing, the newspapers had helped to avert what would have been another bloodbath in the African continent.

The likely cost and consequences of a war between Nigeria and Cameroun are too enormous to quantify. Peaceful diplomatic relations is sine qua non to sustainable development. This is why the report of the United Nations Secretary---General on the "Prevention of Armed Conflict" referred to earlier in this article commends the efforts of organizations such as The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF, www.gyv.org.tr) which co---organized a panel with Peace Islands Institute (www.peaceislands.org) on February 7, 2014 at the United Nations (UN) on the relationship between peace and sustainable development. The report states that the panelists "discussed how peace is essential for sustainable development and how economic, social and environmental development is necessary for durable peace". "Because these two concepts are interconnected", the report recommends a synergy between the "UN agencies and member states… to closely work on both concepts simultaneously and discuss how international or regional organizations can enforce peace agreements which is the first step in implementing policies to achieve sustainable development goals".
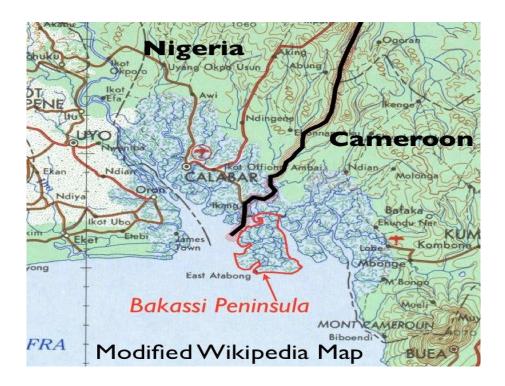
RECOMMENDATIONS

Newspapers should be peace-oriented when reporting conflict especially those of cross-border nature. Particularly where the home government embraces a non-violent disposition in conflict resolution, the media should back up such approach without sentiments. Newspapers can do this by providing a forum for a critical analysis of issues in a conflict through incisive, informed and critical comments from editorialists, columnists, opinion and feature writers among others so as to open up the space for discussion from all fronts which would enlighten the reading public and possibly, the official negotiators in a conflict. By so doing, press coverage of conflicts could provide a pedestal and guide to the government of any country on the direction to face especially in interstate conflicts as a collaborative strategy of sustainable development.

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LOCATION OF THE BAKASSI PENINSULA ON THE MODIFIED MAP OF NIGERIA AND CAMEROON

Source: Wikipedia Encyclopedia

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