

## **THE NIGERIAN PRESS, THE PUBLIC SPHERE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: ENGAGING THE POST AMNESTY DEAL IN THE NIGER DELTA**

Uzoечи Nwagbara

### **ABSTRACT**

The coalescence of effective media and the public sphere is a synergy that brings about democracy, sustainable development and good governance. Irrespective of its shortcomings, the Nigerian media has been described as a bastion of people's agitation, which impacts on the public sphere, a realm where private individuals meet to address societal questions with the state. This is the case with the Nigerian press, whose duties and ideals have been called to action in the wake of the amnesty deal in the Niger delta. In order to achieve peace and good governance in the region, serious grassroots and national information dissemination so as to guarantee objectivity and fairness in news reporting thereby impacting on the regime's mode of governance is required. Therefore, the partnership between the public sphere and media is essential in the post amnesty era for increased democratic experimentation and conflict resolution because it is a platform that can be used to inform and sensitise the people, as well as to influence the activities of government in the light of legitimate leadership in the public space.

**Keywords:** The Nigerian press; the public sphere; Habermas; sustainable development; good governance

### **INTRODUCTION**

“There can be no liberty for a community which lacks the means to detect lies.”

--- Walter Lippmann.

“Without information there is no accountability. Information is power and the more people who possess it, the more power is distributed. The degree to which a media is independent is the degree to which it can perform an effective public watchdog function over the conduct of public affairs”.

--- Pope Jeremy.

The contemporary Nigerian press is a child midwived by two significant events in the history of Nigeria's journalism and media enterprise. These epoch-making journalistic events are the evangelical church project of 1847 in Calabar that gave birth to the first printing press in Nigeria pioneered by the famed missionary Hope Waddell and Reverend Townsend's *Iwe Irohin fun Awon Ara Egba Ati Yoruba* which was established in Abeokuta in 1859. A flowering of the press began 17 years later on the heels of socio-political, cultural and economic activities characteristic of Nigeria's emergent nation-state. This experience saw the emergence of *The Lagos Times* in 1880, which was edited by Andrew Thomas; *The Lagos Observer* followed in 1882, edited by Blackwell Benjamin; and *The Mirror* in 1887, which was started by Adolphous Mark. After the establishment of these projects came what could be described as indigenous journalistic efforts that were galvanised by nationalistic consciousness. Nationalistic sentiment and struggle for decolonisation found resonance in the establishment of some newspapers. The first one was *The Nigerian Chronicle*, which was set up by Johnson Brothers in 1908, while Kukoyi Ajasa inaugurated *The Nigerian Pioneer* that was bedevilled with Lugardist influence. Subsequently, in 1926, the Nigerian Printing and Publishing Company floated *Nigerian Daily Times* with its first editor as Ernest Ikoli; and in 1937, *The West African Pilot* was established by Nnamdi Azikiwe, among other similar journalistic (or media) projects that followed in the footsteps of this process.

The Nigerian press is a concept that predates colonial state and has been characterised by diverse twists and chequered evolution that find expression in proscription of media outfits; incarceration, imprisonment and killing of pressmen; draconian media laws and act; politico-ideological oriented news reporting; and stringent legal requirement for establishing media outfits. The present media outlook in contemporary Nigeria is forged by the above antecedents. But irrespective of the chequered nature of the media in Nigeria, it is undoubtedly a palladium for contesting the public space with the ruling class that marginalises as well as oppresses the people. This pattern is instantiated in the way the media has been vibrant in Nigeria's democratisation project, as well as its participation in moulding people's thought, impacting public opinion and sensitisation of the populace (Omu, 1978: 204). It is on this score that the major hypothesis of this paper is predicated: trying to locate the contributions the partnership between the media and the public sphere makes regarding good governance and sustainable development in the post amnesty deal in the Niger delta. At the moment, the realities unfolding in the region call for scholarly investigation. This paper is part of that exercise.

In the struggle for democracy and expansion of the public sphere in Nigeria, the media has been immensely active in bringing these to fruition. In spite of the challenges and convulsions that beleaguer the Nigerian media, it has been a veritable platform for the dissemination of information, education of the citizenry, moulding of people's thought and criticism of the state. It is in this light that it has been argued that

The media being described as a watchdog is in recognition of its watchful and critical role against the bad practices of the government and private individuals... The media have been irrepressible in holding the citizenry, particularly the political leaders accountable in Nigeria. (Omoera, 2010: 35-6)

It is under the same rubric that Matthew Hassan Kukah in his *Democracy and Civil Society in Nigeria* (1999) noted that there is no contention that Nigerian media is a serious participant in the overall struggle to sustain democratic culture in Nigeria (1999: 287), as well as an instrument in ensuring the movement of people from the private to the public sphere. As evinced by Denis McQuail, which technically summarises the role of the media in sustaining and strengthening the fabric of the public space, the media have an obligation to the wider society in making sure news is truthful, objective, accurate, fair and relevant (2000: 150); it also has the capacity to broaden the confines of the public sphere. The public sphere is a space that serves as a counterpoise to the excesses of the state and the political class, whose stock in trade is to perennially marginalise and repress the people particularly in the Niger Delta, where the activities of the state and the multinationals have kept the inhabitants of this region of Nigeria in misery.

Since the media is a major organ of the civil society, which espouses “an ethical ideal of the social order ... that harmonises the conflicting demands of individual interests and social good” (Seligman, 1992: 10), it goes therefore to mean that the media is undeniably in a soulful union with the public sphere that helps to shape public perception, public opinion and the process of dialogue in a society. Thus, Habermas’s theory of the public sphere ultimately calls for a recovery of increased public opinion as well as renaissance of rational-critical debate, which is a bastion of the media. As a consequence,

The public sphere is dependent on the quantity of involvement and the quality (merits) of the discourse for its democratic relevance. It needs institutional bases such as the media... that enable people to be informed (Lunat, 2008: 3).

Here lies the fact that Habermas’ (1962) contention in his seminal work, *Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is steeped in the Kantian formulation, which articulates the use of reason and criticism in public debate. The characterisation of the media as a conduit for critical rationality, objectivity, informed opinion and widened space, as well as an apparatus for governmental checks and balances make it the fourth estate of the realm as intimated by Edmund Burke.

The activities of the media in the public sphere are very essential in the contemporary world of democracy, this is particularly so in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, which has been described as

an enclave of youth militancy, and unmitigated violence on a large scale... The region has been the epicentre of conflicts between oil bearing/host communities and oil companies (mainly over land rights or compensation for ecological damage); between oil producing communities and the government (over increased access to oil wealth); and between and among ethnic groups (over claims to land ownership and sharing of amenities (Ojaborotu, 2006: 230).

With the above in mind, the place of the media regarding the protracted crises and conflicts in the Niger delta is cardinal; it is even more in this era of post amnesty deal. In the era of post amnesty deal, the media could help in widening the frontiers of the public sphere for good governance and development. The media can do this by legitimising, criticising and questioning the legitimacy as well as the operations of the parties (that is the federal government and the communities) involved in the peace process or amnesty deal.

As one of the institutions of democracy and the public sphere, the media could aid in shaping the public sphere, a major source of public opinion needed to “legitimate authority in any functioning democracy” (Rutherford, 2000: 18). Consequent upon this,

Among the institutions that contribute to the make-up of a (sic) public sphere in society, the media perhaps perform the most critical function. In the transaction in the public sphere, the media are not a neutral participant or an impassioned chronicler. Instead, they are either a legitimiser of the status quo or an innovator of the existing social equilibrium. The conflict or collaboration of the media with forces that attempt to colonise the public sphere materialise in this context (Panikkar, 2004: 1).

Particularly, in the Niger delta, the media has enormous role to play in the wake of the demands of the amnesty deal. The place of the media in this regard has been captured clearly in a piece by Chigozi Ijeomah Eti titled “Objectivity and Balance in Conflict Reporting: Imperatives for the Niger Delta Press”. As he argues,

The press has been found to play a significant role in managing conflict situations in the society... and building confidence, hope and a sense of community and communality especially during or after conflict event, with particular reference to the Niger delta (Eti, 2009: 91).

The remit of this study will not permit an exhaustive analysis of the Niger delta’s “resource curse thesis” and political impasse, rather it will be exploring the ways and manner the dyadic relationship of the public sphere and the media can help in galvanising methods and approaches for dealing with conflicts amongst the Nigerian states, the multinationals and their host community as well as resolving communal violence so as to bring sustainable development in the region.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The theoretical framework of this study is based on Jurgen Habermas’s theory of the public sphere, a realm “made up of private people gathered together as a public and articulating the needs of society with the state” (Habermas 1991: 176). Jurgen Habermas’ avant-garde work, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (1962) has attracted extensive attention in debates regarding the correlation between the public and the private spheres and the public good. In the line of thought of the cultural theorist, Habermas, the book questions the status of public opinion in the exercise of representative democracy and good governance. Although, originally used to gauge the heartbeat of broadened

public opinion as it affected the public sphere in Western Europe, the concept, the public sphere, has been appropriated by societies the world over to deal with their disparate situations regarding expanding debates that bring about democratic changes.

For Hauser, the public sphere is “a discursive space in which individuals and groups congregate to discuss matters of mutual interest and, where possible, to reach a common judgement” (1999:117). In the thinking of Nancy Fraser, it is basically “a site for the production and circulation of discourses that can in principle be critical of the state” (Fraser, 1990: 57). In addition, Asen in his “Toward a Normative Conception of Difference in Public Deliberation”, considers it as “a realm of social life in which public opinion can be formed” (1999: 125).

Habermas’ theorising made a foray into using the public sphere, a correlate of mass media to engage with state’s excesses in the light of good governance and development. The Habermasian public sphere is correlative of the media. It needs the media, one of the agencies of the civil society to flourish and to impact on democracy in the final analysis. This is because the media and the public sphere are in an internecine interface (Gillward, 1993). So, in view of the critical, informative and sensitising nature of the media to contribute to public discourse as well as to further educate the citizenry on how to offer reasoned opinions about the society and governance, it is a veritable tool for the widening of the public sphere.

The “watchdog” function of the media makes it widely regarded as the fourth estate of the realm – one of the key organs of government in a democracy for free and fair society. This fact has been corroborated by J. B Thompson in his *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media* (1995) as he avers that one of the fulcrums of Habermas’s theorising of the public sphere, is the way he “treats the development of the media as an integral part in the formation of modern society” (Thompson, 1995: 7). This is crucial for the Niger delta sustainable development since the amnesty deal is a major step towards consolidating the ideals of democracy project in the Niger delta and Nigeria by extension. It is also worthy of note that the media was instrumental to Nigeria’s current status as a democratic society (even though more needs to be done in that light). For example, the expansion of the discursive realm, the public sphere, through the instrumentality of a virile media was instrumental in the emergence of Nigeria’s fourth republic, which saw the coming of Obasanjo administration – a march from militarism to democracy. In this connection therefore,

The press, it has been argued, was in the forefront of the struggle for enthronement of democracy or better still, the return to civil rule (because not a few Nigerians believe we do have a democracy yet). Many in this group will point out that the press was also in the vanguard of the independence struggle. To them while other countries in Africa fought for their independence on the battlefield, that of Nigeria was fought for, and won on the pages of newspapers expending millions of words, instead of ammunitions, in the process (Kalejaiye, 2009: 75).

### **The Nigerian Press and the Public Sphere: Towards Conflict Resolution**

The press (or the media) – which include print, broadcast and Internet media are channels for the dissemination of information, sensitisation and conscientisation of the people concerning equipping them with insights into the goings-on in their environment and around the world. This function is essentially the bedrock of media criticism. However, particularly in the wake of partisan journalism, sponsored news programmes, commercialised media enterprise, political reporting, and propagandistic reportage in operation in Nigeria, the press has taken a grotesque toga in the way and manner that it disseminates information. This has impacted considerably on the question of objectivity, truth and fairness regarding news content. This ethical aberration has posed serious contradiction to the pristine configuration of media or journalistic business. In instantiating this position, Omenugha and Oji assert that regarding

News commercialisation practice in Nigeria, media industries adds to this contradiction and deception, creating a continuous dilemma for ethics and objectivity in journalism practice in Nigeria (Omenugha and Oji, 2008:13).

It is in the light of the above statement that Abimbola Adesoji in his piece titled “Globalisation of the Media and the challenges of Democracy in Nigeria” remarked that “the response of the Nigerian press to the challenges of democratisation has not been adequate” (Adesoji, 2006: 49). And interestingly, the expansion of the public sphere through the instrumentality of the media is cardinal in effecting good governance and democracy in the Niger delta and Nigeria by extension.

Having said that, the place of the media in supporting structures for increased debate and widened public sphere, which guarantees the actualisation of democratisation project in contemporary Nigeria, as well as serves as a bridge to re-enforce conflict resolution in the war-torn and violence-prone Niger delta is crucial. In sync with this position, “the media is naturally attracted to conflict” (Owens-Ibie 2002: 32). Therefore an “understanding of the mass media’s role in shaping beliefs and behaviours, especially prejudiced beliefs and behaviours” (Paluck, 2009: 574) is central in conflict resolution and management.

In 1935, Gordon Allport, the father of modern psychological prejudice research published a treatise entitled *The Psychology of Radio*. This piece of research unveiled among other issues how people respond to prejudice, stereotype, and propaganda while listening to the radio – and other mediums. In contemporary Nigeria, media slant, conflict, prejudice and propaganda are major staples in her media practice. This is the case with the Niger delta. An understanding of conflict resolution/management as a corollary of media engagement or mediation is fundamental in peace and rebuilding process in the region. This is because the mass media is an instrument that could be utilised to shape belief, attitude, and perception among others. It is also a veritable instrument that could be used to advance objectivity and fairness. In order to bring good governance in the Niger delta, the

Nigerian media should be in the vanguard of promoting the enabling environment that will translate the federal government's promises regarding the amnesty deal, which was brokered by President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua with the warring militants in the region. The ability of the media to engender conflict resolution has been lauded:

This cannot be less true of conflict in the Niger delta. In fact, the establishment of the regional press in the Niger delta maybe part of society's response to the nagging and protracted crises in the oil-rich area. ... There is an emerging press system in the Niger delta that is domiciled in the area or elsewhere in the country, but is established to articulate the agitations of the Niger delta people (Eti, 2009: 92).

Ostensibly, conflict management and resolution has become a contentious topic in the re-making of modern Nigeria, particularly in the Niger delta. The media could be a tool for change, a transformation that could be expressed in the modified way the people and the major actors in the politics of the Niger delta crises see the issue of governance through the media's involvement and expanded the public sphere.

Modern wars and conflicts are fought as well as initiated on the screen, battlefield and the pages of newspapers. Media coverage of events in the Niger delta drew the attention of the world to the magnitude of injustice and oppression in the area. This is exemplified in the media's internationalisation of the unjust execution of the Nigerian eco-activist and writer, Ken Saro-Wiwa including other Ogoni eight, which caused national and global frenzy. So in the post amnesty dispensation in the Niger delta, the role of the media in guaranteeing as well as sustaining developmental and restructuring programmes in this region is vital. This is because as the defunct militants, movement for the emancipation of the Niger delta (MEND) and other outfits surrendered their arms and ammunition following the amnesty deal, they are largely depending on institutions such as the media to sensitise the Nigerian government to the plights of the people regarding conforming to the demands of the deal. Therefore given the limitations of the efficacy of previous conflict resolution measures in Nigeria, the media should be adequately involved in the emancipation and renaissance of the Niger delta in this very instance. Put simply the active, virile presence of unbiased media coverage of the conjunctures in this region will drive home the core objectives behind the amnesty deal which are enshrined in "disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration" – DDR.

It is the duty of the media to objectively disseminate information concerning the operations of the federal government and the multinationals in the region including how the erstwhile warring communities have kept faith with the emerging developments and rehabilitation programmes in the region. The ability of the media and widened public sphere to bring to the knowledge of the people and the multinationals concerning the impact of oil exploration on the environment of this region and its inhabitants as well as the letting the various actors keep faith with the amnesty deal process makes the various corporations concerned to live up to its billings. This

action by the media will in the final analysis engender sense of corporate social responsibility, which has been defined as

Intelligent and objective concern for the welfare of the Society that restrains individuals and corporate behaviour from ultimately destructive activities, no matter how immediately profitable, and leads in the direction of positive contributions to human betterment... (Andrews, 1991: 199).

The activities of the media and public sphere in the above light will ultimately register a sense of transition from frontier mercantilism to restrained, sensitive mode of operation in the multinationals in the Niger delta, whose operations are the *raison d'être* for the conflicts in the region.

Furthermore, the presence of a virile, responsible media practice is correlate of media social responsibility. Thus, a social responsible media galvanises actions towards corporate social responsibility. This practice is tantamount to ‘journalistic activism in challenging and changing oppressive structures’ (Shah, 1996: 145). A gagged media does not foster democracy, a harbinger of expanded public sphere, which brings about inputs from the people regarding how they want the society to move. As Chris Ogbondah observed, ‘a free press is an indispensable institution of a democratic society’ (1997: 291), meaning that a society that allows free flow of information and ideas from the people that usually stem from expanded public sphere is democratic and developmental. It is in this direction that it has been noted that

In modern practice, the concept of social responsibility informs us that the media should be responsible to the people in order to advance the cause of good governance. This technically means that the media should be a platform to advance the cause of humanity. It calls for socially relevant information to be disseminated and shared, thereby making available the stimulation of public dialogue on issues of concern to a democratic, populist Society (Nwagbara, 2008: 246).

As the media indulges in *res publica* or matters of legitimate public concern, it is engaging in conflict resolution as well as redefining the concept of politics and compelling the state in the Niger delta to justify its actions, which ideally should be in tandem with the amnesty deal blueprint.

Another way the media and the public sphere could bring a wave of change characterised by less tension and peace in the Niger delta is by deflecting false information, slant and propaganda, a term which the media legend, Walter Lippmann calls the ‘picture in our heads’ (1997: 95), an enemy of a conflict-free society. Propaganda is a hotbed of conflict, crisis and the like. Hence, a misinformed people will naturally get the wrong signal and thereby act in that light. The media could help foster that the right information and news are being filtered for public consumption in the region. The presence of a weak media in the region rather being a platform for healthy change and conflict resolution will be an avenue for sedation, a process the cements the



pictures in our head as Lippmann indicates, thereby fuelling multilayered conflict and violence in the erstwhile combustible Niger delta environment.

It has been noted that Africa (Nigeria or the Niger delta) is a theatre of war. And part of the conflicts in Nigeria is as a result of the hype, sensationalism, propaganda and skewed reportage that the media in this part of the world carries out. In consonance with this,

consistently, the news pages of virtually all Nigerian newspapers are daily littered with necrophilous, if not apocalyptic, fear-inducing, anxiety-promoting phrases which draw attention to the transitional nature of the Nigerian state and society (Kehinde, 2009: 126).

So, in order to reverse this obnoxious trend, the media, a correlate of the public sphere should be in vanguard. This is what the case should be in the post amnesty era in the Niger delta. In this age marked by increasingly desire for conflict resolution and peace sustainability, media practice should be in sync with the strategies to bring this to fruition. It has been asserted that “the media has become a crucial battlefield” (Shpiro, 2002: 76) in man’s quest to triumph over conflict and its aftermath.

### **The (Niger Delta) Media and the “Essentially Contested Concepts”: Sustaining Development in the Post Amnesty Deal Era**

In his piece, “The Nigerian Media: An Assessment of Its Role in Achieving Transparent and Accountable Government in the Fourth Republic”, Mvendaga Jibo harps on the nature of the media to propel sustainable development:

This development is consistent with the established position that the media helps to cause attitude change and, by so doing, ensures socio-economic transformation... In short the nature and the character of the media greatly impacts on the performance of the democratic/governance process and vice versa (Jibo, 2003: 181-2).

The nature of this sustainable development has been identified as gross behavioural change in a country’s mode of governance to take cognisance of the welfare of its populace, which is behind the philosophy of the amnesty deal. Thus, “sustainable development is the concept presently coined to describe the totality of the good life and overall welfare of the people in contradiction to mere economic growth, hitherto erroneously considered (sic) as development” (Owolabi and Olu-Owolabi, 2009: 219).

The phrase “essentially contested concepts” was first used by the British social theorist and philosopher Walter Bryce Gallie in 1956 to designate

[...] a concept that not only expresses a normative standard and whose conceptions differ from one person to other, but whose correct application is to create disagreement over its correct Application or, in other words, over what the concept itself is... (Besson, 2004: 3).

This concept has been adopted in contemporary political theory in studies of institutions, such as democracy, freedom, justice, good governance, development and among other semantically contested terms in relation to human advancement in society. What makes such concepts indeterminate, problematic or imprecise is what Gallie himself identified as "... the puzzles and conflicts that frustrate much of our critical discussion" (Gallie, 1956: 1). In unravelling this "puzzle" that is humanity's "yearning for more amplification and illumination" (Omotola, 2007: 249) so as to unpack the ambivalence and problematic surrounding their relationship with nation-building and sustainable development, the media and expanded public sphere have a duty to uphold. Their duty is that of impacting the major apparatuses of government and the masses through criticism, dialogue and increased public opinion contribution in the act of government, which naturally brings about healthy governance and development.

Also, the puzzle and conflict that characterise concepts, such as development, democracy and good governance, among others find resonance in what Shola Omotola has identified as "conceptual ambivalence" (Omotola, 2007: 249), which makes finding solution to the issue of "embattled trinity" (Omotola, 2007: 249) – good governance, democracy and development (Omotola, 2007: 247) with particular reference to Nigeria's nation-building project and national re-engineering more complex. The term democracy is contemporarily enmeshed in definitional complexity. It essentially means different things to different societies. But no matter the confusion or ambivalence or "contest" (as Gallie opined) that bedevil it, democracy is encapsulated in this Lincolnian cliché: "the government of the people, by the people and for the people". In addition, part of the ambivalence adjoining democracy is what the famed Nigerian political economist, Claude Ake considers here:

Democracy has been defined with a profusion of meaning that verge on anarchy; libraries of controversy exist on the concept, theory and meaning of the practice of democracy. And the confusion continuous to grow with the very attempt to bring clarity (Nwabueze, 1993: 10).

From the foregoing, the opinion by Omotola that the triumvirate: democracy, development and good governance are implicated in "embattled trinity", which Gallie adumbrated as "essentially contested concepts" can now be appreciated.

The media have been variously described as agents for consolidation of democracies as well as conduits for ensuring integrative and developmental objectives in Nigeria. This is in view of the capacity of the media (essentially in democratic dispensations) to form a coalition with the masses in bringing the attention of the political class to developmental issues that impact on good governance and democracy. Accordingly, the mass

media are participant in the overall efforts and strategies to evolve developmental and democratic blueprint in the political culture of Nigeria. This tendency has found expression in the nationalist temper of pre-independence Nigerian journalism, which largely culminated in Nigeria's "flag independence" in 1960, pro-democracy movements that translated into the de-militarisation of Nigerian space and the present experimentation with democracy. It is under this rubric that

The Nigerian press has lived up to expectation in spreading useful and developmental information to society. This accounts for the tons of news stories, editorials, commentaries, interviews and other information giving activities of the media in both the print and electronic media. The media have helped the Nigeria people to keep abreast of the developments in the political space of the country (Omoera, 2010: 34).

In contextualising the post amnesty deal, which took effect on the 4<sup>th</sup> of October 2009 between the federal government of Nigeria and the Niger delta warring militants that warranted them to surrender their arms and ammunition after the protracted, fierce debates about resource control, environmental sustainability and socio-economic justice, the critical functions of the media are relevant. This is because communication is grossly crucial in maintaining people's group formation, community and nationhood.

The media reports the actions of the government as well as the activities of those who speak in favour of the government. It also criticises the policies and performance of the government by suggesting alternative courses of action. By so doing, the media impacts on the state of development in a society. As the media contributes in making the people make informed political decisions that relate to good governance and development, it thus makes the ideals of democracy feasible. This quality of the media is integral in changing the lives of the people towards desirable ideals as well as serving as the mouthpiece of the people on the issues that will transform their lives for the better. Thus,

It is clear that, taken together, mass media technologies, institutions, professionals, norms and practices constitute one of the fundamental forces now shaping the lives of individuals and the fate of peoples and nations. To be sure, media influence ... is significant, and increasingly so, and as a result the media constitute a major human resource whose potential to help prevent and moderate social violence begs to be discussed, evaluated, and, where appropriate, mobilised (Manoff, 1997: 2).

As the media brings the issues that shape human existence to the front burner, it will be contributing to sustainable human development and lasting peace in the Niger delta (Eti, 2009: 100).

In this vein, the media helps in galvanising sense of solidarity in times of conflict; it helps reciprocally hostile and incongruent entities find a common ground. In the post amnesty era, this duty is doubly relevant, hence, the media in this instance should serve as a platform for cohesion and trust in making sure the ideals of the amnesty

is achieved. This can be achieved by dissemination of truth and politics-free information that will enhance good governance and development in the region. It is to this end that the role of media will be contributory to Nigeria's national peace and security as well as causative to ending sectional and ideologically oriented agenda in her body politic. This pattern is what Sydney Head calls "national pride and sense of communal identity" (Head, 1985: 301). This is what has been described as the media being able to create "... a sense of community ... a sense of shared identity (especially in suffering), a sense of shared purpose and shared identity" (Eti, 2009: 100) in the Niger delta.

As the Niger delta media and other media outfits in Nigeria engage in journalism that will bring lasting peace, sustainability, democracy and good governance in the Niger delta, they will be enhancing the core philosophy underpinning the amnesty deal that was brokered by President Yar'Adua. The Nigerian media's effort in this perspective is encapsulated here:

Peace journalism ... has the characteristics and capabilities of encouraging constructive communication... Peace journalism, with its keen eye for causes and stimuli and with its commitment to a broader and fairer depiction can and should bring such unattended human needs to the fore and alleviates intractable conflicts (Peleg, 2006: 2).

Consequently, the combination of effective media and the public sphere will usher in peace journalism, a precondition for sustainability, development, democracy and wholesome governance in the Niger delta.

## **CONCLUSION**

It has been demonstrated in this paper that lasting peace, security, democracy, sustainable development and good governance are verged on robust combination of virile media and public sphere. This is rather redoubled in the post amnesty period in the Niger delta region of Nigeria, which before now was characterised by high level of restiveness, militancy, marginalisation, agitation and inept governance, all stemming from oil exploration by the multinationals in cahoots with the political operators in the region and Nigeria by extension. In a world brimming with ideology, events, incidents, spin doctoring, politics and cultural disparities, determination of issues, opinions and editorials that will make it to the headlines is very complex. A form of media practice steeped in reconciling the contradictions in this region for the benefit of its inhabitants and Nigerians in general as well as the expansion of its public sphere by so doing is needed. An effective media framework plus widened public sphere will spawn the needed energy to effect change in the region in the wake of the amnesty deal, which needs this reality to flourish.

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**AUTHOR:**

Uzoechi Nwagbara,  
Greenwich School of Management, London, United Kingdom.