

African Research Review

An International Multi-Disciplinary Journal, Ethiopia

Vol. 4 (3b) July, 2010

ISSN 1994-9057 (Print)

ISSN 2070-0083 (Online)

Tradomodern Media Imperatives for Checking Modern Slavery in Africa: A Critical Appraisal

(Pp. 212-222)

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Abstract

Slavery exists in modern forms in the contemporary society. Such activities as human trafficking for prostitution or forced labour are rampant in the society today. Communication is crucial to the creation of awareness against any form of vice in the society, including modern slavery. This paper examines the critical role of trado-modern communication media in achieving communication objectives targeted at modern slavery in contemporary society. It adopts the analytical approach in discussing how the interface between traditional and modern communication channels could be harnessed to check the alarming trend of modern slavery in contemporary society. It recommends among others, that change agents and anti-slavery crusaders should acquaint themselves with the workings/operations of the trado-modern media with a view of successfully adopting this multi-media approach in achieving set objectives.

Key words: Slavery, Modern slavery, Trado-modern media

Introduction

Slavery refers to a state of servitude where a human being purchased like an object by another individual or entity displays unconditional loyalty to the master. It is the outcome of a marketing activity after ownership of a human commodity (the slave) has been transferred for a fee from a seller to a buyer (slave master). The slave works without being paid, or is paid peanuts in return. The slave could be legally or illegally 'acquired', as the case may be. No matter the way the slave is recruited, the basic feature of slavery is that the slave has no choice, no freedom, and expects no rewards or 'meaningful reward' in return for his labour.

However, what comes to mind once slavery is mentioned is the transatlantic slave trade which featured the shipment of people purchased in various slave markets, from one continent to another in the early 1800s. The African continent suffered a great deal when this 'ancient' form of slavery was in vogue. After its abolition by nations across the world, this 'ancient' form of slavery became fossilized in the history of mankind, making many people believe or think that no such thing as slavery could be witnessed among mankind any more.

As Archbishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa observed; "Generally people would not believe that it (slavery) is possible under modern conditions. They would say 'No, I think you are making it all up' because it's just too incredible..." (Anti-slavery, 2008).

Unfortunately, slavery still exists in modern forms today. Not just that it exists today but its magnitude of existence is worrisome. The various forms of trafficking in women, girls and children, forced labour of all kinds, bonded labour, forced marriage etc. are among modern day display of slavery in contemporary society. African nations today are grappling with the problem of human trafficking and how to check its alarming trend in the continent. Child trafficking for cheap labour and women trafficking for commercial sex work are among the most common forms of modern slavery in the African continent with west and central Africa experiencing the worst cases. An estimated 10,000 to 15,000 Malian children most of whom are victims of trafficking, work on plantations in Cote d' Ivoire; Nigeria reported that in 1996, about 4,000 children were trafficked between 1995 and 1999 (ILO, 2001). Furthermore, over 10,000 Nigerian women and girls (most of whom are victims of human trafficking) are engaged in prostitution in Italy, constituting 60 percent at all prostitutes in the commercial sex trade in that

country (Olateru-Olagbegi, 2004). There are alarming facts which characterize the nature of modern slavery bedeviling the African continent.

Communication is crucial to the achievement of policy objectives and behaviour change campaigns targeted at vices in the society. The tradomodern media constitute a major channel through which policies and campaigns targeting modern slavery in the African continent could be achieved. The tradomodern media refer to a fusion between the traditional and modern mass media in actualizing communication goals. While the traditional media refer to indigenous communication channels typical to a people in any society, the modern media are modern channels of communication such as radio, television, newspapers, magazines, films, including such Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet and various computer-mediated communication channels. This paper examines the critical role of tradomodern communication channels in creating persuasive awareness against modern slavery. It explains the key concepts in the work, appraising the pertinence of adopting the tradomodern multi-media approach in checking modern forms of slavery in the contemporary society.

Slavery: An Overview

Slavery refers to servitude of an inhuman nature. According to the definition of slavery provided in 1880 by the High Court of Allahabad in India, a person is treated as a slave or is reduced to a condition of slavery if another person exercises power or control over that person: (1) to restrain the person's personal liberty; and (2) to dispose of the person's labour against his will without lawful authority (anti-slavery society, 2009). This definition of slavery, however, seems to restrict the concept of slavery to the ancient form of slavery characterized by the transatlantic slave trade of the 1800s. This is because modern slaves could be lawfully employed or engaged but the condition of service epitomizes slavery.

A more all encompassing definition of slavery is provided by conservapedia (2008:1); "Slavery is involuntary servitude to another person or persons, such that the person(s) held in bondage is/are considered to be property". Conservapedia further states that the master exercises control and command over the slave either through property-like ownership of the slave or by right to command the slave. The slaves image or status is diminished to the point where he is treated as a thing or an object. Slavery is an inhuman state of existence which no legal system in the world recognizes by way of approving

the buying and selling of humans as slaves or the enforcement of the right to control and command human beings such that they will be subjected to the state of servitude that characterizes slavery.

Slavery existed in ancient Greece and ancient Egypt before it was popularized in the early 1880s through the transatlantic slave trade. Slaves also existed in the Bible, particularly when Hebrews existed as slaves in Egypt. During the Roman empire, prisoners of war were converted to slaves. Slavery existed in Europe and America in various degrees in the ancient times up until the 20th century when serious efforts were made to ban this activity by individual countries. African nations experienced slavery a great deal particularly during the transatlantic trade and even up till the 20th century. Most of them worked in plantations in Europe and America.

Despite the fact that slavery particularly the ancient form, has become very unpopular, some countries in Africa still have enslaved population. In Mauritania for instance, it is estimated that up to 600,000 men, women and children, about 20% of the population, are currently enslaved, many of them used as bonded labour (conservapedia, 2008). In Niger, about 8% of the population are slaves, although government of that nation has stated on several occasions that no form of slavery exists in the country. Slavery is said to exist today in China, Sudan, Islamic countries, parts of Africa and some Latin American countries (conservapedia, 2008). These countries still practice slavery in its ancient form. However, a worrisome form of slavery exists today in its modern form. The alarming nature of modern form of slavery has yet to be given the degree or magnitude of attention and commitment required to stop the trend. The modern forms of slavery will be explained next.

Appraising Modern Form of Slavery

Slavery is prohibited by the 1948 universal Declaration of Human Rights and the 1956 UN Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and practices similar to slavery. However, slavery still exists in modern forms in contemporary society. Anti-slavery international (2008) lists the following as forms of slavery that exist today;

- i) Bonded labour – where people take or tricked into taking a loan for as little as the cost of medicine for a sick child and are made to repay the debt by being forced to work long hours, only receiving basic food and shelter as ‘payment’ for their.

- ii) Early and forced marriage – which affects women and girls who are married without choice and are forced into lives of servitude often accompanied by physical violence.
- iii) Forced labour – where people are illegally recruited by individuals, governments or political parties and forced to work, usually under threat of violence or other penalties.
- iv) Slavery by descent – where people are either born into a slave class or are from a ‘group’ that society views as suited to being used as slave labour. (This could be a form of mental slavery as is the case with caste system in some Igbo-speaking areas in Nigeria).
- v) Trafficking - Which consists of the transport and or trade of people – women, children and men - from one area to another for the purpose of forcing them into slavery conditions.
- vi) Worst forms of child labour – where children are made to engage in work that is harmful to their health and welfare or work that exposes them to danger.

These are categories of modern slavery widely practiced today in both the developed and developing nations. Cases of children being used as slaves or in labour camps has also been reported in China. Various forms of modern slavery take the shape of early child or girl-child marriage which still exists in the Northern part of Nigeria and some Islamic countries, trafficking in girls for prostitution, use of house helps or house girls are still rampant in Africa and beyond.

People become victims of trafficking for slavery today largely because they are tricked into thinking that they are being taken to where they will find greener pasture. Human trafficking is an illegal business of buying and selling of human beings for various purposes, particularly exploitative labour. Human trafficking has been described as a contemporary form of slavery (ILO, 2001). Trafficked persons often do not know their fate until they arrive their destination or transit points where they are either sold to their new ‘master’ or enslaved with various forms of labour. Trafficking continues to grow as a result of poverty, rivalry between spouses in polygamous families, greed factor, illiterate families with high fertility rate, among other factors. No matter the cause of trafficking for slavery, the fact remains that slavery is inhuman and illegal. It is a vice that should be wiped out from the society.

This leads to an appraisal of communication approaches that could be adopted in successfully creating anti-slavery awareness targeted at checking this vice.

Trado-Modern Media

Trado-modern media refers to the fusion between the traditional and modern communication systems in an effort to achieve communication objectives. It is an interface between these two broad media where the traditional modes are applied in modern media environment or vice versa. It provides a multi-media approach to implementation of communication-based objectives.

Traditional Media: The traditional media are customized communication channels typical to a specific people in any given community. They are often culture specific, largely interpersonal channels which have remained valid channels of communication despite incursions by civilization. Wilson (1990) categorizes the traditional communication system into six modes using the following descriptive labels; (i) the instrumental modes – which consist of gongs, talking drums, flutes, etc. (ii) the demonstrative modes – which consist of the use of music and signals to communicate; (iii) the iconographic modes which consist of objects and floral media which express meaning or are used to express meaning e.g. presentation of a bowl of kola nut, charcoal, white pigeon and selected plants such as raffia leaves etc. (iv) the extra mundane modes – which consist of communication between the living and the dead or living and the supernatural e.g. incantation, chant, prayer, invocation, vision, witchcraft etc. v) the visual modes – which consist of the use of colours, dressing and general appearances to communicate feelings or emotions and attitudes (vi) the institutional modes – which consist of such traditional institutions as marriage, chieftaincy, secret societies, shrines, masquerades etc. The traditional media also include the use of town crier and opinion leaders to reach target audience.

Wilson (2006) further notes that indigenous communication channels include political interest groups, vocational and professional groups, educational institutions, cultural groups, social clubs, spiritual groups, voluntary organizations, and family meetings.

Modern Media: Modern communication systems consist of the modern mass media such as the broadcast media – radio, television, film etc; print media - newspapers, magazines, books; Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) such as the Internet and computer-mediated communication facilities eg. The projector, G.S.M phones teleconference

facility etc. These media are credible and effective in their own way. The radio, for instance, is a valid medium for reaching the hinterlands and passing across messages to audience in both urban and rural areas, across various classes. The credibility and validity of the modern media is not in doubt. But as MacBride, et al (1981:82) observe:

The main challenge both to policy makers and communication practitioners, is to find a formula to preserve the relationship between traditional and modern forms of communication without damaging the traditional ways nor obstructing the necessary march towards modernity.

The concept of tradomodern media does not just suggest the use of both traditional and modern media in the separately disseminating information or one message theme to the audience but also suggests the combination of the two in message communication process. The leadership of the various interest groups mentioned as indigenous communication channels, opinion leaders in a community could be invited to participate in radio or television programmes using their local languages, targeted at people from communities or interest groups whose leaders are in the programmes. Such ways the credibility of the traditional modes is combined with the reach of the modern media to provide a powerful and viable multi-media approach for achieving communication objectives.

Furthermore, programmes in broadcast media should take cognizance of local settings and interests, so that urban and rural audience are considered in programme production. Wilson (2006: 15) makes this observation about the trado-modern communication:

In the trado-modern communication system..., the message process can originate from the village communication center and conveyed by the traditional channel through the agency of the town crier or gongman. The message could also originate from the modern media and then conveyed through the village communication centre to the receivers. An integration of all the elements of both systems will enhance interaction and effective message dissemination, which is sure to reach the target audience.

Trado-modern media format also includes the blending of traditional and ICT-driven media in amplifying message understanding for audience

consumption. Nwabueze (2007:146) refers to this format as the *tradotronic* media i.e. a fusion or interface of the traditional and ICT-mediated communication channels. Here, the use of projector facility to support message dissemination in a village square, the use of teleconference facility to discuss issues with enlightened opinion leaders, or the use of chat facility to reach opinion leaders who will then get the message across to others, fall within this category. The trado-modern media approach provides a multi-channel strategy for achieving communication objectives in contemporary society.

Checking Modern Slavery: the Trado-Modern Media Approach

Members of the group-channels which make up indigenous communication channels as identified by Wilson (2006) exist in the society. Such group channel information system proves to be more dependable and reliable for disseminating development messages than the mass media (Wilson, *supra*). The economic interest groups include cooperatives and self-help groups, the political interest groups include political parties and associations, the spiritual groups include churches, mosques, secret societies and settings such as pilgrimages, crusades etc., family meetings include town union meetings, unclear and extended family meetings etc., the voluntary organizations include rotary club, lions club, inner wheel clubs etc., among other interest groups. Members of these groups could be sensitized on the ills of slavery in the society. They should be made aware of the risks of allowing themselves or their relations to be tricked by traffickers who claim to have access to greener pastures only to lead people into the inhuman world of slavery. When members of these interest groups are sensitized, they will pass the message to others they come across thereby ensuring gradual sensitization of the masses against trafficking, forced labour or slavery of any sort.

Leaders of the various interest groups that make up the indigenous communication channels, traditional rulers, town union leaders and other enlightened opinion leaders could be invited to radio or television programmes, or included in the production of radio or television documentary on the dangers and inhuman nature of modern slavery in contemporary society. Some opinion leaders, especially traditional rulers and Islamic leaders in the Northern part of Nigeria, are respected by their people. What they say is regarded and respected by people in their communities. Such people should be used in creating awareness against modern slavery as is being done in the area of HIV/AIDS. Their credibility as traditional

sources will be combined with the reach and accessibility of the modern media in achieving objectives in this respect.

The use of ICTs is also suggested here. Projector facilities could be used in the village square, churches, mosques, during town union meetings or during meetings of various interest groups, to show the audience actuality documentary on the harmful effects of slavery in the society. It could be trafficking in children, girls or boys for forced labour or prostitution. Such techniques could arouse emotions which could enrage the audience against modern slavery.

Local minstrels and traditional music groups could produce songs creating awareness against modern slavery. This techniques are being adopted in the area of HIV/AIDS campaign with tangible results being achieved. But it seems the issue of modern slavery has yet to be viewed as a vice that requires the high level of commitment in its eradication. Otherwise these trado-modern media techniques being suggested here are apt in checking the trend of slavery in contemporary society. Minstrels command a great deal of followership among their people. Music themes could be woven around anti-slavery issues. Such songs would be played on radio and television with a view to reaching a wider audience.

Community Viewing Centres (CVCs) are still veritable channels for achieving desired media mix in rural areas. As Wilson (2006:15) avers: "Such an interface would ensure sustainable development as the learning process goes on rather than a situation where the information is forgotten after one broadcast slot". This postulation further underscores the pertinence of the trado-modern communication approach to checking the trend of modern slavery in contemporary African society.

Conclusion

Communication is central to every awareness campaign. The quest to check the alarming trend of modern slavery in contemporary society requires viable communication strategies for sensitizing the masses to that effect. This calls for a multi-media, multi-channel approach such as the trado-modern media approach in providing the live-wire that would effectively link change agents and policy makers with the public. The trado-modern media blend the reach, credibility, accessibility and such other characteristic of the traditional and modern media to provide a strong force for achieving the anti-slavery objectives.

Government at every level, change agents and policy makers need to appraise and appreciate the menace of modern slavery in the African society with a view to giving its eradication the attention it deserves. Various Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) seem to be at the forefront of the anti human trafficking and modern slavery campaign. Governments need to lend their support to anti-slavery campaigns by doing more to check the menace of this vice especially human trafficking in the society. Among the suggestions made towards eradicating human trafficking are stimulation of public awareness of and action against human trafficking and forced prostitution, enforcement of international conventions against human trafficking, taking appropriate measures to address the root cause of trafficking in women and girls for commercial sex legislation and other measures to suppress all forms of trafficking in women and other persons (UNICEF, 1998). Policy makers should consider these suggestions and put machinery in place towards actualizing them.

Development or change communication agents should also study and understand the workings of the trade-modern media in order to effectively apply them in sensitizing people against modern slavery. An understanding of how these two broad media operate is necessary for implementation of communication programmes through them.

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