

## **ITC and Mass Communication**

### **News Agencies and Global Communication: Development Implications for Third World Nations**

*Nicholas S. Iwokwagh*

Benue State University, Makurdi - Nigeria

and

*Godwin E. Akogwu*

Independent Television, Abuja – Nigeria

#### **Abstract**

This paper is fundamentally, an overview of western news agencies and the roles they play in international communication. It argues that most of these roles have some consequences undesirable to the Third World Nations. Instead of facilitating the development of the poor nations of the world, the study reveals that the major news agencies by their worldwide operations are impeding the development of the under-developed counties. The study therefore, indicts the major news agencies for being a clog in the developmental wheel of Third World Nations, pointing out that they conspire with other impeding factors to render fruitless, the collective developmental efforts of most of the developing countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. It attributes to the news agencies such global issues as: the reduction of the world to a “global village”, cultural imperialism, ethnocentrism, media imperialism, media dependency, global agenda-setting and the imbalance in world information order. It concludes on a crying call with developing nations (including Nigeria) to look inward for their re-birth, re-generation, re-discovery and development.

#### **Introduction**

The whole purpose of this paper is to critically examine the crucial roles that news agencies play in transnational communication, with a view to ascertain the implications of such roles on the developmental efforts of developing nations. News agencies represent fundamentally, a fabulous pattern of today’s news gathering process, techniques and methods. Gage (1999, p.63) defines as a news agency, any “organization that compiles and distributes news stories, locally, nationally or internationally”. Perhaps, a host of reasons could be responsible for the continuing relevance of news agencies in international communication. In the very first place, Mac Bride (1981, p.58) observes that:

The expansion of various sectors of communication, and more particularly of mass media, increases the importance, and stimulates the expansion of agencies which

supply and circulate news to newspapers and broadcasters and to other specialized consumers; the public in general, getting news in an indirect way.

Similarly, technology contributes enormously to the fascinating development of news agencies. Nzekwu and Mgbemena (1985, p.60) aptly confirm that: *as a result of advances in technology, the world has shriveled into one big neighbourhood, a neighbourhood where the lives of the people have become so enmeshed that every nation now forms part of the day-to-day reality of every other nation.*

It remains also, a truism that news agencies are information sources that have indirectly expanded people's visions of the world around them. It follows then that in terms of global communication, news agencies constitute a social force of unparalleled magnitude. In all, the paper will be treated with a practical demonstration of flourishing ideas and copious examples. However, since news agencies have some ancient roots, it would therefore, be pertinent to explore such roots with a view to understanding more about news agencies and their roles. This now leads us to the historical development of news agencies.

### **Historical Development of News Agencies**

The journalistic possibility for the institutionalisation of news gathering and dissemination has a wonderful, pleasant sense of history. This most probably, is so because, by the wake of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the idea of news agency as it is now was completely, unthinkable, but before the middle of that same century, it had already become an inescapable reality.

Vivian (1997,p.270) attributes the beginning of news agencies to a gallant journalist, Sam Gilbert whom he says "became so popular partly because of an extensive collection of the latest European newspapers that he maintained in a reading room". Vivian further reports that in 1911, when it became inevitable for Britain to go into another round of wars, Gilbert thought it wise to catch up with ships amid sea to get the latest news dispatches from within continental Europe.

In no time, this became the firm foundational initiative for what we have today as news agencies, and by 1844, the news agency became an established phenomenon, largely with the arrival of Samuel Morse's telegraphy. Two years later, the Associated Press (AP) was born. At that time, probably, in the summer of 1844, a New York based merchant, David Hale of the Journal of Commerce mobilised his fellow competitors to form a common news pool. And today, AP has burgeoned to become to world's largest news gathering and distributing organisation, with bureaux in over 150 countries of the world.

As the decades went by, more of news agencies emerged thereby taking global communication to a higher and a more sophisticated dimension. The Reuters for instance, was established by Paul Julius Reuters in 1851. Close behind were the United Press International (UPI), Agence France-Presse (AFP), and the Russian TASS which was formed in Sterlin's Soviet Union.

At the material moment, practically, every nation of the world has its own news agency. Among such national agencies are the Iraqi News Agency (INA),

TANJUG, the Yugoslav Agency, TAP, the Tunisian Agency, and MAP, the Moroccan Agency. Others include the South African News Agency (SANA), the Zimbabwean News Agency (ZNA), the Xinhua New Agency of China, our own News Agency of Nigeria, (NAN), The Press Trust of India, Pensa Latin in Cuba, among others, (Mac Bride, 1980).

Besides, there are also regional and continental agencies such as PAN African News Agency (PANA), Third World News Pool, the Caribbean News Agency (CANA), Asian News Agency (ANA), OPEC News Agency and Inter Press Service for Latin America. On the whole, the foregoing represents in a microcosm, the stages of development of what was just an idea some 150 years ago. But now, everyone quite agrees that news agencies are clearly, a force to reckon with.

### **Roles of News Agencies in Perspective**

For some obvious reasons, it is necessary to make some clarification here. In its intellectual consideration, this paper would approach roles as completely different from functions. Definitely, it will amount to stating the obvious, if we just enumerated and discussed just the functions of news agencies. Everyone in mass communications is naturally expected to know that news agencies perform such functions as: News gathering, processing, packaging, translation, dissemination and news exchange. There are other services such as the supply of audio visual materials, electronic photographs, programmes, feature stories, cartoons, comic strips, opinion pieces among others.

Be that as it may, this paper has as its central focus, the various intrinsic roles of news agencies in shaping the course of international communication, and by extension, world movement, widely known as globalization. Far beyond the surface, this paper undertakes to unravel the inherent activities of news agencies with a view to presenting an in-depth analysis of the consequences of their existence not only on human communication, but also on the development of Third World Nations. Specifically, the roles of news agencies to be examined in this paper include:

1. The gate-keeping role
2. The role of propagating American and Anglo-Saxon imperialism
3. The reinforcement of imbalance in world information flow.
4. Ethnocentrism and cultural imperialism through intercultural transmission.
5. Setting agenda on global issues
6. Centralisation of communication
7. The role of reducing the world to a global village
8. The supply of pictures, columns, feature stories, opinion polls or pieces, business and financial news and statistics, as well as other video services.
9. Stylistic innovations in news presentation
10. Specialised reporting
11. The role of promoting global integration and fostering international understanding
12. Enhancing world peace, cohesion and harmony

13. The role of fostering media dependency syndrome
14. The extension of media imperialism.

### **The Big Five**

Among all the news agencies of the world, there are five prominent ones that have overwhelmed other agencies and in fact, the world of mass communication. These five dominant news agencies are; the Associated Press (AP), REUTERS, United Press International (UPI), Agence France-Press (AFP) and TASS. The AP and the UPI are based in the United States of America. REUTERS is in Britain. Agence France-Press belongs to France, and TASS has its headquarters in Mosco, the Russian capital. All the agencies except the AFP are owned by private entrepreneurs. In essence, they are full time business organisations.

According to Mac Bride (1981,p.59), these agencies “have a particularly wide international reach due to the size and technological strength of their systems of collecting news and distributing it in many languages all over the world”. The need to critically examine these five news agencies is probably predicated on their enduring, historical importance and partly on their tremendous potentials to contribute to the future of mass communication.

The former chairman of the UNESCO sponsored commission for the study of global communications' problems; (McBride) equally noted that their massive world-wide operations give them a near monopoly in the international dissemination of news, adding that “the world receives 80 percent of its news through London, Paris and New York”. He further reported that it can be said that the major agencies only devote somewhere between 10 and 30 percent of their news to the total coverage of developing world. Infinitesimal as this statistics might be, the bulk of it is replete with news about, diseases, wars, crises and other short comings in Third World Nations (McBride,1980). In what can be seen as an apparent expression of a deep-seated anger, Opubor and Nwuneli (1985, p.45) lambaste these five news gathering giants, saying that:

What we say about the state of communication in the world today should begin from this basic premise, and should attempt to address the question, how well is our world doing in promoting man's ability to communicate with other men.

Given their unmatched capability in technological and economic apparatuses, these agencies of news gathering and distribution, in a subtle manipulative manner, have continued to propagate slowly but surely, American and European hegemonic influence on the helpless rest of the world. This adequately accounts for why some development scholars, out of sheer remonstrance, always cry out that the current trend which manifests as today's world information order, could be a carefully orchestrated international conspiracy to entangle and interlock the developing countries in a socio-economic quagmire or the agonising matrix of backwardness, poverty and under development.

Regrettably however, going by the way these news agencies operate, they are just impervious to criticisms. Indeed, a critical dilemma is confronting the “have not”

countries today. The more Africans think of the possibility of restoring equality in global information exchange, the more they see their own painful helplessness. This is the miserable situation into which the business of news gathering and dissemination has brought developing countries.

In an article, "Some Reflections on the Dependency Theory", an astute communication researcher, Uka Uche draws attention to this cruel denial and the informational encroachment of the developed world on the developing world. He goes on to say that:

The challenge facing contemporary scholarship in communication and development is that of boldly addressing the issue of the hegemonic structure and control of the world economy and the systematic strangulation of Africa and the rest of the third World by the industrialized world, (Uche, 1994,p.39).

Indeed, the five news agencies are symbols of western hegemony, for they have tremendous impact on transnational communication.

#### **Stylistic Innovations in News Reporting and Presentation**

Outrageous and disgusting as their negative impacts would seem to be, recognising them however, is not the same as condemning news agencies, neither does it amount to a complete denial of their facilitative roles. In fact, news agencies, even those of the developing countries, have an inexhaustible stock of benefits to offer humanity.

More specifically, among all the benefits of news agencies, there is one which has almost monopolised the attention of news editors and media executives. This benefit is the unique stylistic innovations in news writing, presentation and reporting. In order to attract maximum patronage, news agencies have over the years, advanced distinctive styles of writing, and every element of such styles serves a specific purpose.

Rivers (1964, p.45) particularly acknowledges that "UPI's vigour and fresh thinking are illustrated by its development of a distinctive radio news style". This essentially explains why news reports from news agencies, particularly, the big five are completely irresistible to many a news medium.

#### **The Supply of Pictures, Columns, Programmes, Opinion Pools or Pieces, Business and Financial News, Audio-Visual Inserts and other Communication Materials**

News agencies offer a catalogue of services to the mass media ranging from news photographs to programmes. The AP and UPI for instance, also have facilities to transmit news photos electronically. They offer a wide range of services to their clients such as electronic news photos, weather wire, sports wire, financial wire, audio service, video service and so on, (Dominick, 1993,p.348).

It is almost always not unusual for one to think of news agencies as news distributors only in words, but in the actual sense, with the aid of technology, they can flash pictures around the world at a speed that would have amazed even their founders (Rivers, 1964, p.45).

### **Reduction of the World to a Global Village**

A little above four decades ago, a rather controversial communications' writer, Marshall McLuhan predicted that the media would break down many barriers and then reduce the world to a global village. Though he was never a fortune teller, yet his prediction has now become a living reality today.

But for this to have been made possible, the media must have been somewhat assisted, and the available assistance, yet known to the world of communication, is derivable from news agencies. Much in every way, news agencies are indeed, indelible in both impact and magnitude, for if they can reduce this vast world into a "global village" and make it a microcosm of itself, what else can they not do? What needs to be done now is for humanity to work out modalities that could help in maximising the benefits of news agencies. Equally too, efforts should be made to minimise to the barest minimum, their overwhelming excesses and to avoid possible dangers they are capable of posing especially, to those in the developing countries.

### **Setting Agenda on Global Issues**

At various times, the news agencies have aided in initiating global dialogues. The news agencies are the "media of the mass media". A news agency is to a mass medium, what an apex bank is to commercial banks within a nation's financial system. If the media are agenda-setters, then news agencies are super agenda setters.

According to Rivers (1964,p.42), what is perhaps, the best overview of the world press association appeared in an editorial of the London Sunday Telegraph which describes a news agency thus:

...like the air we breathe, it is nowhere, but it is everywhere. It is shapeless but shapes men's thoughts. It has no policy but policy cannot be made without it. It is journalism, at its most self – effacing, yet at its most essential.

News agencies are also part of the process of globalization.

### **The Gate-Keeping Role of News Agencies**

Gate-keeping is a concept in the mass communication parlance, as well as a function of the mass media. As veritable sources of mass information for the media, news agencies are inherently and evidently gatekeepers, for as Nzekwu and Mgbemena (1985,p.68) confirm, "every news agency serves as a major selection screen for the foreign news which is made available to the country's media".

Demonstrating the complex concept of gate keeping in his book; "The Media of Mass Communication", John Vivian explains that:

*News dispatches and photographs are subject to changes at many points in the communication chains. At these points called gates, gate-keepers delete, trim, embellish and otherwise try to improve messages.*

A news agency is even one of the first points in the communication chain. The "agency man" is indeed, a special kind of journalist; he has his own biases, priorities, aims and ambitions. Opubor and Nwuneli (1985, p.16) describe journalists as "prisoners of the system within which they work". Therefore, the news agency's correspondent must have to restrict himself to only news stories that he knows will be patronised by subscribing media. It is probably, in recognition of this fact that Opubor and Nwuneli (1985, p.61) concluded that:

*Because the negative or abnormal rather than the positive-comforting news, reports or achievements and happy events-seems to appeal to audiences. Internal or international crises like shortages, famines, disasters, confrontations have been provided the bulk of the coverage of Africa in the world.*

### **The Propagation of Anglo-Saxon American Imperialism**

Notwithstanding the manifold benefits of news agencies, there are however, several points of grievance among observers of global communications, and one such grief is the demonstrated ability of the news agencies to magnify the superiority of Europe and North America and to broaden the developmental chasm between the developed and the developing countries. For instance, Opubor and Nwuneli (1985, p.46) note that:

The major direction of information flow in the world today is between and among the political and economic capitals of the world; New York, London, Paris, Bonn, Tokyo and Moscow. They are linked by the world's cable and satellite communication system.

As a direct consequence, the developing countries contribute only an infinitesimal percentage to the overall world news output. Almost without exception, the news about developing countries that goes into the "world's information machine" is usually about political upheavals and natural disasters. This is what Hackten (1966) considers as "conflict and catastrophic news".

Although, more than 100 countries now have their own national news agencies, the agencies of the developing countries especially those of African countries, are however, mere shadows of their own selves as they simply dance to the music of their counterparts (news agencies) in the developed countries. They only contribute to the extension and consolidation of the roles of the five most powerful agencies.

### **Ethnocentrism and Cultural Imperialism through Intercultural Transmission**

Another role of news agencies in transnational communication, and which every right thinking communications' scholar should be quick to condemn, is the

transmission of cultures from one cultural community to another, which almost always and inadvertently, leads to ethnocentrism, and by extension, cultural imperialism.

To some extent, western journalists including those working for western news agencies, tend to be ethnocentric, in that they use their cultural value as the yardstick for assessing people's ways of doing things. This ought not to be so since, peoples' ways of life differ from continent to continent, from region to region and from country to country.

Against the issue of cultural imperialism, critics have been many and vocal. But when discussing the propagation of "western acculturation", many shallow minded critics usually point accusing finger on the western media. While this has some element of truth, it is not altogether, the absolute truth. Rather, a larger amount of blame should be heaped on the big five news agencies. This is precisely because they contribute an enormous amount of news items to the entire world's media.

Through the amorphous machination of news agencies, Euro-American ethnocentrism has become prevalent across the length and breadth of this world. According to Mac Bride (1981, p.159), "chauvinist attitudes and ethnocentricity in some professional communicators may harp their selection and interpretation of news from foreign community." And with news agencies all over the place, there are of course, endless possibilities as to rapid transmission of cultural products across cultural boundaries.

In recent times, the major issue on the front burner of discussion in some quarters is the painful struggle of preserving and fostering indigenous cultures in the face of cultural intrusions from the outside world. This is because communication is a part as well as an influence on culture and as a consequence, every country should develop a national communication system that could foster and sustain its national culture.

Today, the Third World countries are being inundated with foreign cultures, indirectly through news agencies. To avoid the infiltration of foreign cultures, Mac Bride (1981, p.159) warns against what he considers as "the indiscriminate opening of doors to new experiences and impressions by the media, for this, he says, could "sometimes, alienate people from their own culture."

Africa for one has been heavily misrepresented and misinterpreted by the western press and news agencies so much so that, her cultural collectivity has since been relegated to the background of irrelevance. Putting this issue of cultural aggression and encroachment in some sort of perspective, Stokke (1971) cited by Nzekwu and Mgbemena (1985,p.66) explains that "the content of communications from one cultural environment to another will be interpreted on the basis of the norms, ideas, attitudes and behavioural patterns prevailing in the cultural environment of the audience". Indeed, this assertion indicates an implication. For Africans and other inhabitants of the developing world, there is usually a



somewhat reticent cultural conflict when they consume communications products from the developed world.

In all, what we are trying to establish here is that, the problem associated with cultural transmission would not have been very profound were it not for the five super news agencies.

### **Reinforcement of Imbalance in World Information Flow**

If the world's information situation is anything to go by, then, one can say with a reasonable degree of certainty that the big five news agencies contribute significantly to the imbalance in information flow today. Opubor (1975) cited in Opubor and Nwuneli (1985, p.47) argues that:

*It is a very dangerous state of affairs indeed that a small group of people, concentrated in four countries can arrogate onto themselves and preempt the management of our image of the world through controlling what is called news.*

In his bitterness about the whole process, this eloquent African scholar polemically asserts that the imbalances in the international free flow of news are highly attributable to the five news agencies.

Besides, there seems not be any end to the international antagonism surrounding the free flow, for according to many analysts, the low level of economic and technological advancement in most African countries today, serves as a paralyzing impediment to the effective generation, utilization and dissemination of information. On the contrary, given their economic and technological advancement, the industrialized countries do not only control the technology of information flow, but also control the content of the media of the developing countries. Perhaps, it is against this background that Opubor and Nwuneli (1985, p.45) make this clarion call:

Some of the most urgent human problems that need to be solved concern the creation of equitable systems of information distribution so that individuals, groups and nations are enabled to communicate, and be communicated with as equals.

Arising from this unfavourable inequality in global communication structures, positive news stories about the "underdog countries" are usually under reported, while negative news events are reported with the most painful prominence. This according to Galtung and Ruge (1965) will promote an image of these countries as being unable to govern themselves and as inherently inferior to the topdog countries.

On the surface, it appears as if it is the media that always engrave blackmarks on the Third World countries, but beneath the façade, are the news agencies that serve as the silent engine of the entire global informational wheel. In other words, it is the news agencies that satisfy much of the voracious appetite of the international media, particularly, the news oriented ones such as the CNN, BBC, DW Radio,

DWTV, VOD, the Chinese CCTV, Radio France International among a host of others.

Indicting news agencies, especially, the "big five", for the current imbalance of information flow, Mac Bride (1980, p.145) points out that:

*The existing infrastructures and the consequent role of those who work in international communication, have as a corollary this imbalance in the circulation of information. The controversy about the imbalance first sharpened over the question of international news flow and the pre-dominance of the major transnational agencies in the collection and dissemination of news.*

Those in the developing world can say with one strong and united voice, that the western news agencies are at least not been fair in treating with contempt, their collective struggles towards the desired developmental "promise land".

### **Centralisation of Communication**

Because the five super news agencies have an unmistakable esteem as a sufficiently capable information power house that could offer world-wide news coverage, with speed of fascinating magnitude, they tend to hijack communication into a common centralised pool.

But going by current trends and of course, the crucial need for national development, what we need now is a complete decentralisation and the total democratisation of communication. This is one other role of news agencies that always provokes the collective anger of several communications' thinkers.

### **Media Dependency Syndrome**

Over the years, it has been observed that the contents of media organisations that subscribe to news agencies are richer in information and quality, than those of media organisations that do not or cannot subscribe to news agencies, or enter into exchange services with other news distributing organisations. Accordingly, media audiences tend to prefer programming that are enriched by "products" from news agencies.

For obvious reasons, and some unspeakable ones, most media organisations in Third World nations, particularly those in Africa cannot afford the luxury that the news agencies offer. At best, such media organisations monitor western media to source for news. Because of this deficiency perpetrated partly by news agencies, the mass media in poor countries have low listenership, reduced readership or very few viewership. Even in many Third World countries, people depend on western media to obtain what they often consider as credible news and comments.

In Nigeria for instance, many Nigerians celebrate western media but tolerate our local media such as the NTA and FRCN. As we continue to watch with silent amazement the driving state of urgency with which these news giants gather, process, package and disseminate news and information, we should also begin to

explore the possibility of re-engineering our own News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), and the Pan African News Agency (PANA), of which Nigeria is a key signatory.

### **Consolidation of Media Imperialism**

Media imperialism by way of definition is the forceful and hegemonic encroachment or imposition of the media content of foreign media upon a country's, media content. When the content of a media organisation is dominated by foreign programmes, such a media organisation is said to be under the yoke of media imperialism.

Virtually all the mass media of communication in Third World countries had been victims of media imperialism. Although the trend is gradually disappearing, some media organisations are still enduring the media hegemonic compulsion. The problem is even more compounded by news agencies, for over 70 percent of the world's mass media derive their raw materials for programming from them, they inadvertently subscribe to media imperialism.

### **Towards a way Forward**

To conclude on this issue is somewhat difficult for it is at the center of the ongoing international contention. It appears that developing countries will always continue to be at the receiving end of the devastating onslaughts of the western news agencies. However, there is a seductive possibility for the eventual emancipation of third world countries from the vicissitudes of western news agencies. This possibility lies in the ability of developing countries (government and the media) to look inward, not outward; for their renaissance will only come from within and not from without.

### **National Communication Policies**

Expectedly, national communication policies become fundamental milestones in re-engineering for self-reliance and re-discovery of cultural identities of the Third World nations. National communication policies become particularly imperative a principle that "only results in wiping out essential parts of national identities of poor countries by seductive ideas, images and behavior models exported from the west" (Ciboh, 2003, p.27). These communication policies should provide the basic framework for communication structures and activities in the Third World. They should, for instance, clearly set legal boundaries that will create barriers, which in turn will temper the cultural domination and dependence fostered by the prevailing information patterns of the advanced countries (Mboho, 1991). Put differently communication policies are canvassed for the Third World with the understanding that they will provide the basic framework for communication structures and activities. This decidedly will limit the overwhelming cultural predatory activities of the western news agencies.

Although, it has been argued that through intercultural transmission, western news agencies have created an interlocking of national and international communication sectors that it is becoming increasingly difficult or impossible to maintain a separation between the international and domestic sectors (Ciboh, 2003), it is,

however, our considered opinion that a purposeful definition of national communication policies in the Third World will assuage the situation, and maintain a line of separation between the two. For instance, Nigeria (a Third World nation) needs a cultural re-orientation which will give it an identity that will halt the present cultural degeneration in favour of cultural assimilation from the west (Okpaga, 2003). This condition no doubt, applies to all Third World nations, and the surest way to achieve cultural re-orientation is to make room for communication structures that will promote the propagation of indigenous values in whatever form (political, economic and socio-cultural).

In the light of the foregoing, it has been suggested that broadcast regulatory bodies and commissions in the Third World should work relentlessly at strengthening the information and entertainment systems of their respective nations. This recommendation is made against the background that the "seeming interest in transmitting foreign programmes is a direct consequence of poor quality and high cost of local programmes" (Ciboh, 2003, p. 33). It is important that this action will not only encourage, but also lead to the production of more indigenous programmes which will have relevance to the socio-cultural milieu of the people, and can impact their social political and economic development more positively. The critical point of this suggestion is that, on the one hand, it will radically cut down the avalanche of foreign entertainment materials which tend to alienate the people, and create culture dependence, and on the other, re-position Third World nations for competitive transnational communication exchanges. Wilson (2005, pp. 175-176) vents this position:

... injection of quality, programming into the global system will undoubtedly bring about a global consciousness that is not necessary in opposition to the village consciousness... our products will be available globally. We would then be able to flood the communication market with consumer information... we would be able to share our cultural values with the rest of the world ...no longer will we be relegated to the backwoods of communication and left there as mere consumers.

#### **Alternative Local and Regional Channels of Communication**

Alternative local and regional channels of communication may be another plausible way of stemming the information hegemony of the western news agencies. This is because these channels of communication will not only insulate, but also foster and sustain the cultural heritage of the Third World nations. Much more, these channels will put in place mechanisms to checkmate the overwhelming excesses and dangers that western news agencies pose to developing countries. Specifically, it has been the poignant contention of Third World communication scholars (Wilson, 1982; 1991, 2005; Ansu-Kyareme, 1998) that indigenous channels of communication be used in the Third World to augment modern mass media in information dissemination. Wilson (2005, p. 177) for instance has observed that:

*It is clear that some of the functions of the town crier may have been taken over by some of our new media, but right there in the village and sub-urban areas, traditional communication (ora media) holds sway. There is no doubt that they can*

*co-exist even in the urban areas, which co-existence has been characterized as trado-modern communication.*

The above position shows the extent to which the local (traditional) channels of communication are relevant in the development process of the Third World, and the degree to which they can be engaged to promote the cultural heritage of the Third World.

It is also imperative to strengthen the capacities of national news agencies for instance, News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), and indeed the expense of regional news agencies (Pan African News Agency PANA) in the Third World. The logic is that, at the national level, these agencies will ward off the spread and influence of western values, as these values tend to demobilise the people toward achievement of national goals and aspirations. At the regional level, they will integrate to project a common front that will weaken the dominance of western news agencies. Much more, this integration will give regional news agencies a leverage of independence which in turn will ensure that they (coalition of regional news agencies) do not simply pander to the dictates of western news agencies in their programming and contents.

### **Re-Construction of Indigenous Technology**

The consensus of opinion among communication scholars in the Third World and development communication experts is that the Third World (government and media) ought to retreat and start articulating their knowledge for the re-construction of their indigenous technology (Okpaga, 2003; Ciboh, 2003; Wilson, 2005). Wilson (2005, p. 175) for instance, has strongly canvassed that:

*...Government(s) must modernise their communication infrastructure to keep pace with facilities in other centers... they must be able to meet the rest of the world at almost equal level of technological use. In other words; for Third World nations to be able to play the role of contributor to global communication, they must have the technological devices that would make this possible.*

Earlier, Okpaga (2003, p. 70) remarked that "modern technology, while it is relevant, can be adapted to the indigenous ones". However, Ciboh (2003, p.33) articulates this point more aggressively. According to the writer "the reason for disparity between domestic production and foreign importation of programmes is lack of technical equipment and the unwillingness of government to finance traditional industrialization for local production of hardware". Going further, he states unequivocally, that "a situation where local media often lack even the most rudimentary equipment needed to supply a nation's information needs is limiting Third World communication capacities, widening the technological gap and aggravating cultural dependency"

True as Wilson, Okpaga and Ciboh have noted, the interplay between deficiencies in communication infrastructures and lack of political will of government of the Third World to finance local production of hardware has undermined transnational

communication, and has perpetually placed the Third World at the receiving end. However, when the Third World beat a retreat, re-examine, and re-construct their traditional technologies as canvassed, they eventually will achieve the objective of getting to share their cultural values with the rest of the world.

### **Re-definition of the Concept of News**

Finally, there is an urgent need for a re-examination and a re-definition of the concept of news as used in western communication parlance in order to accommodate new perspectives from the experiences of the Third World. Wilson (1982, 2000) has strongly advocated this view (2000, p.3):

*There is abundant evidence to show that western practices are sometimes counter productive in Africa (Third World) contexts and a re-definition of news and news values as well as a assessment of current criteria for news selection become inevitable... western news values do not fit exactly into African (Third World) epistemological view even though certain aspects are acceptable and coincide with what we may consider as African (Third World) news perspectives. Thus, a re-definition of news is important now more than ever before. (Emphasis ours ).*

Although Wilson is particular about Africa, we have extended this argument to the rest of the Third (Asia and Latin America), the premise is that they all share similar historical, social, cultural and political experiences.

Specifically, Wilson (2000, p.24) provides the distinguishing features between Western and African news values:

*The west no less classified news as a story out it sees this story as a special kind of story imbued with the magical spirit of speed, conflict and disaster among others. But more critical to the African perspectives are the information needs of education, housing employment health, community development, recreation, financial matters, transportation, religion and spiritual matters, law, politics and government, science and weather reports, security, novelty, ethnic relations among others.*

From the above, the point of departure between the news values of the west and the Third World is the emphasis of the former on conflict and disaster elements, while the latter considers as significant the information needs of the people. The Third World do not see the elements of conflict and disaster as significant enough to warrant their being given pre-eminent status (Wilson 2000). Thus, news in the perspective of the Third World is:

*... a kind of palliative (a cathartic appetizer) meant to reduce tension, conflict, uncertainty and bring about a greater understanding... and with regard to the western world. Their news about the Third world - famine, civil war, coups d'etat, failure of development programmes, flood etc is nothing but a horrific exhibition of verbal violence. (Wilson, 2000, p.24)*

Clearly, the above shows a fundamental schism between the west and the Third World as to what constitutes news. Also evident is the fact that western news values are diametrically opposed to news values in the Third World. This conceptual chasm, has informed Wilson's call for a re-definition of news and news values. The reason is that the difference in news values inadvertently leads to ethnocentrism, a situation in which western news agencies use the news values of their society in determining what should be news in the Third World. This, sadly enough, is what accounts for the negative reportage of the Third World in western news agencies.

Thus, a call for re-definition of news and news values is not only timely, but also of crucial importance, first, as an intervention measure in the cultural imperialism perpetrated against the Third World, and second, as a catalyst to the development process of the Third World. It is crucial that western news agencies should rely on the news values of the Third World for their reports. This will predispose them to respond more positively to the challenges and conditions of the Third World. In other words, when these western news agencies adopt Third World news values in their reports, they undoubtedly, will address constructively, the information needs of people in the Third World, and by implication, contribute favorably to the development of the Third World.

In view of this background, we strongly recommend that African news values, based on the information needs of the people be validated through *professionalising African Journalism Training* (Wilson, 2000, p. 25). This means in other words that correspondents of western news agencies should receive professional training in African, and indeed Third World Journalism, to be able to appreciate and reckon with the socio-cultural and economic realities of the Third World. This will ensure more objective reportage of the Third World in the western media; it will also re-position the media of the Third World to share the cultural values of the Third World with the rest of the world, as a contributor to global communication.

### **Conclusion**

We have extensively examined the roles of western news agencies in international communication in this paper. The paper notes that instead of facilitating the development of the poor nations of the Third World, major news agencies in the west, have rather, by their world wide operations impeded the development of these underdeveloped countries. The paper attributes to these news agencies such global issues as the reduction of the world to a global village, media imperialism, media dependency, global agenda setting, and imbalance in world information order. It proposes a corpus of strategies which developing nations of the Third World, can engage by looking inward. These include; formation of national communication policies, utilisation of alternative local and regional channels of communication, re-construction of indigenous communication technology, and the need to re-examine and re-define the concept of news.

## References

- Ansu-Kyeremeh, K. (1998). *Perspectives on Indigenous Communication in Africa*. Legon: University of Ghana.
- Ciboh, R. (2003). International Information Flow and Cultural Imperialism in the Age of Globalisation. *Journal of Globalisation and International Studies*. 1 (1) 21-36.
- Dominick, J. (1993). *The Dynamics of Mass Communication* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). New York: McGraw Hill Inc.
- Gage, L. (1999). *A Guide to Commercial Radio Journalism*. (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Oxford: Focal Press.
- Galtung, J. & Ruge, M. (1965). The Structure of Foreign News. In *Journal of Peace Research*. 2
- Hachten, W. (1966). *The flow of news and under development: A pilot study of the African Press*. A Paper presented at the AEJ convention at the University of Iowa.
- Mac Bride, S. (1981). *Many Voices, One world*. Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press.
- Mboho, M. (1991). Towards a National Communication Policy for Nigeria. In S. Uboh (ed.) *Topical Issues in Communication Arts* (2) (pp.1-17), Uyo: Modern Business Press.
- Nzekwu, I. & Mgbemena, N. (1985). Africa and the New Information Order: A Nigerian perspective. In O. Nwuneli (ed.) *Mass Communication in Nigeria: A Book of Reading*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Okpaga, O. (2003). The Globalisation of Western Cultural Values: Some Implications and Consequences for National Development in Nigeria. *Journal of Globalisation and International Studies*. 1(1) 60-72.
- Opubor, A. & Nwuneli, O. (1985). Political Culture and Information Flow in Nigeria. In O. Nwuneli (ed.) *Mass Communication in Nigeria: A Book of Reading*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co Ltd.
- Rivers, W. (1964). *The Mass Media: Reporting, Writing, Editing*. New York: Harper and Row, Publishers.
- Uche, L. (1994). Some reflections on the Dependency Theory. In *Africa Media Review* 8 (8).
- Vivian, J. (1997). *The Media of Mass Communication*. (4<sup>th</sup> Ed.). Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Wilson, D. (1982). *Traditional Mass Communication: Towards a Redefinition of Concepts*. A paper presented at the Inauguration Conference of the Nigerian Mass Communication, University of Lagos, Akoka.
- Wilson, D. (2000). African News Perspectives. In D. Wilson (ed.) *Introduction to Print Media Readings in Nigerian Journalism*, (pp.17-32). Ibadan: Stirling-Horden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd.
- Wilson, D. (2005). *New Perspectives in Applied Communication*. Ibadan: Stirling-Holden Publishers (Nig.) Ltd.