Exploring the Panacea and Perfidy of Modern Media and Other Indigenous Forms of Communication in Gender Empowerment and Advancement in Selected African Countries

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ABSTRACT The role of media in driving gender empowerment and the fulfilment of Millennium Development Goal number three that envisages seeing a world of gender equality, equity cannot be overemphasized in 21st century. The aim of this paper, through a literature review methodology, is to debate the role of media and other communication avenues as vessels of informing gender empowerments. Media and other avenues of communication achieve the following aspects of gender empowerments (i) public awareness on gender dynamics (ii) forums of public education (iii) cultural forums for information dissemination (iv) using traditional sounding instruments for information dissemination and relay; and (v) media playing an invaluable role of gender liberation and emancipation. On the other hand, media presents the following perfidious dynamics: (i) Achieves its empowerment impacts only slowly because the concept gender is poorly conceptualized, (ii) it portrays men as aggressive, strong, independent and violent, (iii) it demeans women and portrays them as tools of beauty, (iv) reinforces the myth of an idealised women, and (v) it promotes the culture of gender inequality and inequity. The paper recommends that the government in collaboration with NGOs as well as private bodies work to undertake the improvement and development of media infrastructure to make it both effective and efficient in information dissemination process.

INTRODUCTION

Media, whether traditional or indigenous, print, electronic or otherwise remains a central communication tool to local, national, regional and international awareness; as well as a message diffusion apparatus that informs change imperatives at all levels, globally, regionally, nationally and locally. Inarguably, gender issues and the imperative to achieve gender equality and equity can significantly benefit from the role of media and other communication avenues. This is important because many developing countries largely because of patriarchy have scored significantly low in the pursuit of women and the girl children empowerment paradigms (Kang'ethe 2009). This has had the result of men having advantage over their female counterparts in terms of access to resources. Equally, women have continued to receive lower wages compared to men in some developing countries, suffer various forms of discriminations and have been subjected to various gender based atrocities (Kang'ethe 2009, 2014a). Another surprising violation of the rights of the girl children is their unequal access to the institutions of learning.

This is largely due to community perceptions of the value of the female children compared to the male children. This researcher believes that these gender based imbalances can be corrected through various communication channels, whether in print or electronic media, or through the use of indigenous forms of message relay and communication (Kang'ethe 2014b). Since the impact of global campaign on gender empowerment appears to move at a snail's pace, it has become critically important to look and relook at various tools of communication at the people's disposal and possibly come up with the gaps and possibly work towards filling them up, or identify positive aspects of the media that needs to be scaled up in order to add the momentum of gender based message dissemination

Discussing media and the role it plays in gender dynamics forms the core pillar of this paper. It is therefore central that the concepts communication and gender are succinctly understood from as many dimensions as possible. This is because the discussion entails identifying types of media and evaluating different vantage points of them, with each vantage point forming a possible channel and lens to influence gender empowerment process and advancement.

Problem Statement

While some significant sources view media as a very important developmental infrastructure especially in this era of globalization and increased modernization, some other quarters view it as a tool of confusion and bringing undesirable effects of development. However, it is important that the positive and negative aspects of media are debated with the hope of pinning down the negative aspects and promoting the positive aspects. In equal terms, exploring the indigenous forms of communication, and equally weighing their positive and negative aspects is critical more so in these era when societies are being called to look back at their backgrounds and rediscover resources that they can use for the sake of development

METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on literature review and has sought eclectic data sources from different African countries to help appreciate the niche and level of gender development and empowerment in selected countries from Africa. This has helped to form a platform discussing and debating the role of media in gender empowerment process viz. exploring the nature of media use, freedom accruing from its use, its impacts, and the policy environment pertaining to its operationalization in different countries from Africa.

Operational Definitions

Panacea

The word panacea which means an answer or solution for all problems or difficulties is operationally taken to mean a phenomenon which is satisfactory and desirable;

Perfidy

The word perfidy that refers to the state of deception, disloyalty or treachery has been operationalised to mean an undesirable state of affairs.

What is Media and Gender Empowerment Process?

Media refers to various means of communication. For example, television, radio, and different types of Newspapers form different catego-ries of media (Makombe 2009). The term can also be used as a collective noun for the press or news reporting agencies. Generally, when we talk about media, we point to the avenues or vessels through which messages travel from one point to some other targeted and desirable points, and of course the impact such message may make. It is these avenues and vessels that we need to unearth and assess whether they are adequately known or utilized to change the status of gender dynamics in selected countries from the African continent. It would also be critical that other than the modern communication channels, this paper explores other traditional or indigenous communication channels, interrogate their weaknesses, or disuse, and possibly offer some new insights as to how they can be strengthened or resuscitated. This will, optimistically usher in new insights on how to drive gender equality and equity between men and women of the world.

Gender and Gender Empowerment Process

To possibly ensure a succinct understanding of the concept gender empowerment process, this paper considers it central to make the readers understand the concept gender. This is because many individuals understand gender as issues of women and fail to understand other underlying dynamics that if taken or not taken into consideration may influence the state of gender empowerment process (Kang'ethe 2009; UNDP 2008). However, the concept gender refers to the roles and assignments that the society assigns to either men or women; the thinking, the attitudes, the values and the norms that the society associates with either men or women (Kang'ethe 2009; Kimball 1995; UNAIDS 2000). It is good to note that as modernization, westernization, civilization, eurocentrism and globalization take toll, the rigid gender demarcation borders are being weakened, with possible gender swaps and the erstwhile professional differentiation becoming less and less differentiated (Kang'ethe 2009; UNAIDS 2000).

The Panacea of Media in Effectuating Gender Empowerment Process

Exposing Gender Based Violence

Media is doing a very good job of bringing to the fore how men in particular are abusing

their women counterparts. Cases of battering, spanking, causing bodily harm day in day out have continued to be highlighted by the media. For example, the Kenyan case of a woman from the former Kirinyaga District (now Kirinyaga County), Piah Njoki whose eyes were gorged out in 1983 struck the whole world (Daily Nation 1983). These aspects when they attract international, regional, national and local attention are making serious awareness on the human rights violations meted against women and the need to strengthen gender based policies and programmes (UNDP 2008). This is why the United Nations and its member countries put the need for gender equality and women empowerment as the Millennium Development Goal number three (UNAIDS 2001; UNDP 2004, 2007).

A Forum of Education

Media, whether indigenous or modern, serves the critical role of an education dissemination process. It is through the media tools such as television and radio that education to the people takes place. While use of international media channels such as British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) serves to inform people about what is happening in different countries, serves as strong forums of gender based education. Most of the global education is increasingly being made easier through effective print and electronic dissemination (Makombe 2009).

Cultural Forums Forming Indigenous Media for Gender Empowerment in Botswana

Media can be indigenous. This is where cultural platforms offer an opportunity of information dissemination. To this end, Batswana have used the Chief's Adminstrative Office (*kgotla*) as a forum of relaying important information. With increased need to share global and national concerns, Botswana *dikgotla's* roles have changed. Today, important information such as that of HIV/AIDS and gender is increasingly being relayed to the communities from the *dikgotla* (the chiefs administrative offices). When the Presidents and Ministers want to relay important messages to the communities, they first release such bulletin at the *kgotla*. A proverb that says "*mafoko a kgotla a mantle otlhe*" (that translates that messages relayed from the chiefs' office are all very important) testifies how information dissemination through the *kgotla* can play an invaluable role for relaying and disseminating gender empowerment messages (Kang'ethe 2014b).

Use of Information Sounding Instruments to Relay Gender Messages

For decades and possibly centuries, many traditional societies have used indigenously sounding instruments usually made from animal horns like those of cows. The sounding was culturally ordained as it relayed very crucial information to the communities. Such sounding was made when a war was declared. It meant that the warriors needed to be on their heels. It was also sounded when it was realised that an enemy was attacking the people. It was generally heralding the state of emergency that needed emergency response (Kang'ethe and Rhakudu 2010; Afolayan 2004). Although today, the use of these apparatus is decreasing as modern ones take their place, we still have many traditional contexts and set ups where these modern facilities are not there. It is this author's thinking that these indigenous media apparatus should continue to be used; or have them integrated with the modern ones. The use of these indigenous media tools should be reconsidered in disseminating gender empowerment messages. Just as the dawning of people that cultural artefacts can be instrumental in passing HIV/AIDS messages; the same approach should used to effectuate and mainstream gender empowerment messages (Kang'ethe 2014b).

Media as a Tool of Gender Liberation, Democratization and Transformation

Human rights bodies have taken the advantage of media to advocate for the rights of the vulnerable populations especially the victims of gender based violence. It is to this end that BONELA, an NGO in Botswana takes any slightest opportunity to advocate for the rights of women, individuals of different sexual orientations, the rights of the homosexuals, transgender, etc. This has been winning as many homosexuals become confident that they will soon win the battle against stigma and discrimination meted against their body, LEGABIBO (lesbians, Gays and bisexuals of Botswana) (Barret-Grant

et al. 2001; IGLHRC 2008). Of late, the media has been covering the issue of same sex marriage with a lot of interest and vigour. This has been an opportunity for this third gender to establish its niche. To this end, there has been a wave, supported by media and human rights bodies in many countries demanding that countries' constitution embrace the rights of these minorities (Diswanelo 2005; Barret-Grant et al. 2001). It is perhaps due to immense media based campaign that in recent decades we have seen a rise in the acceptance of people displaying various sexual orientation rights, such as-homosexuals, same-sex marriage couples, and transgendered couples. The role of media may also bring in some pressure for countries to adjust their services such as reproductive sexual health services for the homosexuals. This is because in many countries such as Botswana, the health services do not have tools such as anal dams that are used by gays (Ditswanelo 2005)

OBSERVATIONS AND DISCUSSION

The Perfidy of Media

The Gender Niche Only Poorly Grounded and Conceptualized

From this researcher's subjective lenses, although the concept gender is as old as history, it is not succinctly understood in many contexts and therefore appears like a new discipline or item in many fields. Perhaps, among other factors, the imperative and criticality to integrate the concept into their curricula and agenda has brought this revelation. This researcher contends that the issue of gender and gender empowerment, is as a result of western countries orchestrating serious campaign advocating and lobbying countries to relook, understand, reposition, rejuvenate, integrate and mainstream the concept into various development agenda of their countries' development (UNAIDS 2001; UNDP 2007). This imperative, in this researcher's lenses, grew significant momentum and impetus after the launch of the Millennium Development Goals in the year 2001 (UNAIDS 2001; UNDP 2004, 2007, 2008). However, it should be noted that its level of conceptualization and operationalization is at different levels in developed world compared to the developing world. In an African context, it is just beginning to be

understood, different countries also being at different levels. In some African countries, gender issues are either not well conceptualized and represented as other issues such as youth issues. To some, gender issues are women issues without deeply viewing it as the relationship between men and women (UNDP 2008). Infact, many countries such as Botswana do not have a Ministry of gender. This has had the effect of having gender issues being handled by women Affairs Department under the Ministry of Labour and Home Affairs (Women Affairs Department (WAD) 1999, 2001). Notably and regrettably, the department lacks adequate representation at district and other local levels (Government of Botswana (GOB) 1998). In the same vein, in South Africa, the provincial gender office is skeletal and inadequately known to the public. This has prompted those who need some gender based service or information being referred to national gender office in Pretoria. This does not only inform the paucity of infrastructure and level of human resource at the disposal to move and operationalize issues of gender, but also the level of commitment to execute gender dynamics.

Media Portraying Men as Aggressive, Strong, Independent and Violent

Inarguably, media is a very powerful tool whose contents are attractive, easily appealing to a larger population and its content are expeditiously internalised. When it portrays men as violent and aggressive, the same message has a reinforcing effect to men to embrace or own the culture. The effect has made women to retract to a culture of feeling vulnerable and powerless in the hands of men. This has made them weak in negotiating for their rights in relations and in economic circles. This positions the role of media in disempowering women and their gender advancement path (UNDP 2008). To say the least, media has had an impact of perpetuating violence and abuse to women generally (Makombe 2009).

Media Portraying Women as Tools of Beauty

It is generally acknowledged that media depicts women as tools of beauty, sex and passivity. Since issues of sex are strongly appealing to many people, this has had an impact on wom-

en's perception of themselves as passive and dependent beings compared to men. This is a drawback to gender empowerment process. This leads to the idea of a woman as an equally competitive stakeholder as a man obscured. This has a critical role in perceptions of the place and role of a woman in both women's and men's perceptions as well as mental internalization of the phenomenon (Website Toolkit for Preventing Violence Against Women 2001) and Media Education Foundation (2003), both quoted by Kgwatalala (2009)

Media Today Reinforces the Myth of Idealised Beauty

Every day that passes, most media tools such as magazines, TVs indicate the qualities of an idealised woman as one with some particular characteristics such as being slender, long-legged, and one with a particular kind of a walking style, one with an attractive voice, speech etc. Due to this advertisement, pressure on women to acquire these requisite characteristics, more and more females are going to health clubs, changing their diets, and doing literally anything they can to fight off any weight. Therefore, media is playing a critical role in shaping the thinking of women (Makombe 2009). This researcher believes that some energy that women spend to satisfy the myth of media to pursue beauty can be utilised elsewhere and productively to benefit the same. In the same vein but not in equal measure, men are faced with the same kind of media pressure. Like women, men are also striving to shape their bodies according to the media standards of a strong man, for example going to gym to build muscles like the idols seen in the TVs doing advertisements. These are aspects that are reinforcing male gender characteristics.

Media as a Forum of Gender Inequality and Inequity

While the world through Millennium Development Goals endeavours to achieve gender equality and equity (UNDP 2004, 2008), media continue to jeopardize the same as it continues to represent men in advertisements in an unequal capacity with their women counterparts. This has had an impact of making societies respect and represent men more than women in every aspect of their daily lives. Further, women more than men are covered and portrayed as domestic practitioners and servers and more men are portrayed as successful businesspersons. This has negative repercussions in the development of women. For example, women continue to be paid less at certain jobs, and experience more discrimination than men. The fact that men are more present in television commercials than women has an impact in gender construction in shaping the minds of both men and women.

CONCLUSION

The role of media, whether modern or indigenous cannot be overemphasized in information and message dissemination. Since immense literature has found that gender inequality, inequity are factors causing undesirable spinoffs such as feminization of poverty and feminization of HIV/AIDS, the use of different cadres of media is topical and critical in this era of HIV/AIDS and gender based violence and atrocities. Governments and NGOs as well as private bodies are urged to improve media infrastructure to make it both effective and efficient in information dissemination process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The gender empowerment paradigms need to be mainstreamed to various social institutions especially to children when they are young so that they can succinctly understand what is gender and its dynamics. Since professionals such as teachers are instrumental in relaying messages, they should be empowered to understand gender and its dynamics so that they can easily pass the message.
- The societies need to respect and recognize the traditional institutions and its capacity to relay gender based as well as other development based messages. Alternatively, a combination of both modern and indigenous forms of communicating gender based messages needs to be appreciated.
- It is important that gender messaging and mainstreaming respect the socio-cultural institutions and ideologies of each country. This is because the western world campaign does not appear to respect that socio-cultural terrain of developing countries.

· The government of the day should censor some media because of their destructive nature of messaging. The countries should have strong laws and guidelines to ensure that the media pass messages professionally and without much bias.

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