

## Decongesting the Dodgy Hub: The Role of Mass Media in Curtailing Illicit Drug Trafficking and Use in Nigeria

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**ABSTRACT** Trafficking and use of illicit drugs have become a deadly plague unleashing social and health hazards on the human race. The problem is more prevalent in the developing nations, while Nigeria is one of the most affected African countries. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has acknowledged this fact. Despite efforts by the Nigerian anti-drug abuse agencies, the rate of drug-related crimes in the country seems to persist. This paper, after presenting some statistics on the prevalence of drug problems in Nigeria, suggests that the nation's mass media should be more aggressively involved in fighting trafficking and use of illicit drugs in the country. With the Agenda-Setting theory as the theoretical framework, the paper discusses different social change strategies that the Nigerian mass media could adopt to fight drug-related vices. However, the researchers recommend that these media campaigns should be effectively complemented with other communication approaches.

### INTRODUCTION

As reported by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), globally, trafficking and use of illicit drugs—apart from terrorism—have remained probably the most daunting contemporary social challenges (UNODC 2015). The surge in all forms of heinous crimes, the rapid rates of juvenile violence, complicated health conditions, and premature deaths all over the world have been largely attributed to uncontrolled interchange (trafficking) and use of illicit drugs (drug abuse) especially by youths. Antonio Maria, the Executive Director of UNODC has observed that ‘East Africa is witnessing increased heroin use, while cocaine is on the rise in West Africa and synthetic drugs in the Middle East and South-East Asia...and ‘failure to harness drugs could unleash a “health disaster” in the developing world’ (Psychonaut 2010). Approximately ten percent of male African-American early adolescents report having engaged in

drug trafficking, with a higher percentage of youths reporting having been asked to sell drugs or expected to become involved in drug trafficking (Stanton and Galbraith 1994).

These challenges, because of their social, political and economic implications, have attracted attention and concerted efforts by various world agencies, leaders, governments of many nations, and health communication scholars (for example, Schwartz and Wills 2009; Ward, 2011; Lawhon and Herrick 2013; Okon 2013). For instance, The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), an Agency of the United Nations (UN), has invested millions of dollars on research and campaigns to stem the ugly tide of drug abuse and trafficking. In 2012, UNODC published comprehensive reports on drugs. The document (*World Drug Report 2012*) is a result of coordinated research efforts designed to improve understanding of those issues bearing on trafficking and use of illicit drugs, and to reduce illicit drug supply, demand and use, which have become global phenomena. World leaders too are not silent on the issues. On December 19, 2013, Members of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) met, drafted and adopted an 11-point resolution, urging Asian Parliaments “to coordinate among member parliaments to review the relevant legislations to address different aspects of combating drug trafficking”, and stress-

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ing “the need to exchange information and best practices within APA Member Parliaments on combating drug trafficking, among others” (*APA Resolution 2013: 76-77*).

As suggested by APA, effective exchange of information is an imperative factor in the efforts to eradicate drug abuse and trafficking. Yet, studies on history of drug education have suggested that the traditional strategies such as moral objectives, fear approaches, and affective approaches have been less successful probably because the approaches did not emphasize the objective facts about the physical properties of the drugs and adverse effects of using the drugs, they were not sustained, or they failed to address the primary determinants of adolescent drug use (Flay and Sobel 1986). This failure of the traditional strategies calls for a new, comprehensive and integrated approach in the campaigns against trafficking and use of illicit drugs in Nigeria, and central to this new approach is the mass media. The failure or success of the government agencies to combat the problems of illicit drugs depends largely on how the mass media are engaged. Therefore, this paper examines the role that mass media can play or are supposed to play, and the relevant mass media campaign strategies that can be used to curtail the menace of drug abuse and trafficking in Nigeria. In addition, the paper examines the relevance of media access and literacy in a successful media campaign against drug abuse and trafficking, and finally suggests some ethical obligations expected of the mass media professionals while using the news media to fight the problem of illicit drug use and trafficking in Nigeria.

Ban Ki-Moon, the UN Secretary-General acknowledged the enormousness of the challenges posed by drug trafficking and abuse. In one of his addresses to mark the World Drugs Day, he passionately explained the efforts of the United Nations to combat the menace. He noted that given the seriousness of the threat posed by illicit drugs and organized crimes, he had established a Task Force to come with a United Nations global strategy to coordinate and strengthen response to the problems in such a way that they are recognized as part of UN’s peacekeeping, peace-building, security, development and disarmament agenda. He, however, explained that the war against illicit drug problems is a double-edged sword as the fight to tame the monster cannot be successful unless there is

drastic fall in demand. He acknowledged the need for collaboration with the youths and other international institutions. He further explained that the efforts by UN to promote development and fight drugs and crime would be more effective if such efforts are rooted in partnerships with the young, civil society, governments and the international community (UN 2012). The West African sub-region has been identified by the UN as one of the most vulnerable points in the world in respect of illicit drugs and crimes. Consequently in May 2014, donor representatives and high-level officials, including UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon and UNODC Executive Director Yury Fedotov converged in New York to renew their strategic support for the West African region (UNODC 2014). In his address at the gathering, Mr. Yury Fedotov stressed the exigency of sustained and strategic efforts at decongesting the West African sub-region given the enormousness of security threat the region posed to the world peace if the problems of illicit drugs and crimes were left to thrive. He explained: “We simply cannot afford to stand by while drugs, crime, corruption and terrorism devastate this already vulnerable region, and threaten international peace and security” (UNODC 2014).

In the global war against illicit drugs, human trafficking and crimes, Nigeria cannot be left out given her status and strategic position in the West African sub-region. The country is one of the African nations that lie in the hub of drug trafficking routes to Europe. According to the International Narcotics Control Strategy report (INCSR) by the U.S. Department of State’s Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (2013), Nigeria is a transit country for heroin and cocaine being taken to Europe, and sometimes to the United States, while pervasive corruption in the country encourages criminal activities. Besides, the report adds, that Nigeria’s central location along major trafficking routes enables criminal groups to flourish and make the country a strategic trafficking hub. The United States of America accused Nigerian drug gangs of supplying much of the cocaine and heroin imported into the US, South America, Saudi Arabia and Europe (British Broadcasting Corporation [BBC], June 6, 2000).

Apart from growing waves of crimes and insurgence in Nigeria, another horrid manifestation of proliferation, abuse and trafficking of il-

licit drugs is the alarming rate at which young Nigerians are being arrested, prosecuted, jailed and even executed for various drug offenses both in Nigeria and overseas. For instance, in 2007, just before pilgrims started arriving in the kingdom for that year's Hajj, Saudi Arabia beheaded four Nigerians who were arrested in possession of cocaine and heroin at the King Abdul Azziz International Airport (*Nairaland*, January 14, 2008). In March 2010 in Dongguan Guangdong Province, China, one Osonwa Okey, a 37-year-old Nigerian received a death penalty after being convicted of drug trafficking. He was found trading nearly 6 kg drugs to some Chinese dealers at his rented apartment (*China Daily*, March 11, 2010). Another Nigerian, John Amaechi Eze, 23, a student of a private college in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, was sentenced to death by the High Court on January 22, 2013 for trafficking in 16,936 g of cannabis (*New Straits Times*, March 22, 2013). In fact, many Nigerian drug couriers are either serving prison terms abroad or at home or have been publicly beheaded in Saudi Arabia, Malaysia and other countries with stiffer anti-drug laws.

On November 22, 2014, the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) arrested seven drug traffickers—all men—when they were about to board an Ethiopian Air flight from Abuja, Nigeria to Tel Aviv, Israel. The suspects, aged between 20 and 51 years, were eventually made to excrete a total of 8.7 kg substance suspected to be cocaine (*The Punch*, 29 November, 2014). Obi Okonkwo, from Onitsha in Southern Nigeria, was only 14 years when he learnt about the drug art. He started the business with marijuana but eventually graduated to harder drugs through a woman who got him into heroin and cocaine trafficking to Africa and other parts of the world. He was caught and jailed in Madrid, Spain and was later deported to Nigeria to spend nine more years in jail. He was already 45 when left prison (BBC, June 6, 2000). The stories of the seven drug traffickers and Obi Okonkwo paint the pictures of the desperation of Nigerian drug barons and how numerous Nigerian youth have had their promising futures destroyed by the world of illicit drugs.

The implication of this trend is that if Nigeria is left to be a free route for illicit drug trafficking and friendly home for drug cartels and abusers, not only Africa but also the whole of the world would be endangered. Because of this reality

and the surge of drug-related social problems facing the country, the Federal government has established some anti-drug abuse agencies like the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) and the National Agency for Food and Drugs Administration and Control (NAFDAC). These agencies, coupled with the efforts of the National Orientation Agency (NOA), have embarked on various campaigns to reduce the rate of trafficking and use of illicit drugs in Nigeria. In April 2014, the Federal Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Abuja, organized nation-wide sensitization programs on dangers of illicit drugs and human trafficking in the country. In November 2014, commanders of the agency held a summit aimed at repositioning the agency (*The Punch*, 29 November, 2014). However, statistical evidences suggest that Nigeria still remains one of the nations with highest prevalence of drug-related problems (UNODC 2012), and is yet to record a significant success at reducing the rate of drug abuse and trafficking in the most populous black nation (Atkins 2007; *ICYE, Nigeria* 2010), while the anti-drug agencies are believed to have lost credibility in their bids to change public perception about drug abuse in the country (Okon 2013). To curb this trend calls for integrated approaches, and the mass media should occupy the central stage.

### **Nigeria as a Dodgy Hub of Illicit Drugs in Africa: Some Statistical Evidence**

Nigeria has been described as one of the most affected African countries in terms of illicit drug abuse and trafficking (UNODC 2012). In order to appreciate the trend of illicit drug trafficking and use in Nigeria, here are some statistics. According to NDLEA, 10 drug barons were arrested in 1994, but the figure increased to 27, including four women, in 1995. In the first three months of 1996, the agency arrested 159 drug traffickers (BBC, June 6, 2000). That period seemed to be the beginning of the rising trend of illicit drug deals in the country. According to the figures released by *The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes* (UNODC 2012), illicit drug users number about 27 million. This is zero point six percent of the world adult population. Between 2004 and 2007, at least two major transshipment hubs surfaced in the West Africa Region: one of the hubs centered on Guinea-Bissau and Guinea, and another one centered in the

Bight of Benin, which stretches from Ghana to Nigeria (UNODC 2014). Annual prevalence of cocaine use in Africa in 2009 ranged between 0.2 percent and 0.8 percent; Nigeria, with a prevalence rate of 0.7 percent, is among the top consumers in the African region.

Also, Nigeria has the highest prevalence of cannabis abuse in Africa, with an estimate of more than fourteen percent. In Nigeria the opiate prevalence rate was estimated to have increased from approximately 0.6 to 0.7 percent in 2009. The implication is that Nigeria would host roughly 500,000 heroin users. The prevalence rate for amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS) in Africa was put at between 0.2 and 1.4 percent while the prevalence rate in Nigeria is estimated at 1.4 percent, which is the highest in Africa (UNODC 2012). Kano has the country's highest drug abuse rate based on the number of seizures, arrests of addicts and convictions of arrested dealers, according to the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (*The Vanguard*, January 7, 4014). On December 6, the NDLEA destroyed more than 10 metric tons of drugs, including cannabis, cocaine and methamphetamine, with an estimated street value of some USD1.4 million (1.02 million Euros) (*The Vanguard*, January 7, 4014). National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) report of 2010 also shows that over eleven percent of people in the Northwest zone use illicit drugs. Thirty-seven percent (37%) of the population in Kano State are drug abusers according to official figures from the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (*Aljazeera*, December 9, 2013).

Recently, NDLEA informed the media that in 2014 alone, a total of 8,826 suspected drug traffickers, including 8,332 males and 494 females, were arrested. Out of these suspects, 2,054 were convicted. The agency further explained that in 2014, Kano State had the highest conviction rate with 182, followed by Kaduna, 151, and then Lagos, 125. Also, illicit drugs seized in the same year stood at 166,697.18 kg including Cannabis sativa, 158,852 kg, cocaine, 226.041 kg, heroin, 56.449 kg, methamphetamine, 119.2 kg, amphetamine, 0.05 grams, ephedrine, 35.8 kg, and psychotropic substances 7,407.44 kg (*Premium Times*, 11 March 2015). The foregoing statistics justify the need for aggressive media campaigns to create awareness about danger of the trend

and curtail the menace of illicit drug use problem among Nigerians.

### Theoretical Framework

The discussion is guided primarily by the Agenda-Setting theory of the media, which explains the power of mass media to raise the significance of an event or issue in the public's mind, through editorial emphasis and sustained coverage of such an event. This means that when the mass media, in their daily reportage, give priority to an issue, they cause such an issue to assume some level of significance and receive continued attention of the mass audience. In summary, the theory describes how the mass media shape information output in such a manner that certain issues are raised in significance to the public at the expense of some other events; and influence the public to be aware of the issues, and eventually form an opinion on them (Cohen 1963; Severin and Tankard 2001; Watson 2003; McCombs 2004; Sibii 2006; Kiouis and Wu 2008; Lasorsa 2008; Nesbitt-Larkinc 2008). This theory is, therefore, relevant to the focus of this paper, whose objective is to articulate the roles of the mass media as the societal watchdog, through different strategies, in curbing the menace of illicit drug use and trafficking in Nigeria.

### The Mass Media and Illicit Drug Challenges: Roles and Social Change Strategies

The mass media, being a powerful platform for disseminating public information among the citizens, have immense roles to play in this respect. The mass media are a powerful communication platform that can be used to take development messages to the mass audience. They set public agenda and influence public opinions on crucial public matters. The media perform this agenda-setting function when they assign a significant degree of prominence to the issues by repeatedly reporting them and sometimes giving them editorial emphasis (Severin and Tankard 2001; McCombs 2004; Kiouis and Wu 2008). As submitted by Gonzenbach (1994), changing and sustained media interpretations of certain social issue culturally defines and drives the issue through time. Similarly, Armstrong et al. as cited by Lawhon and Herrick (2013: 988) posit that "the mass media play an

influential role in the process of agenda setting by providing one of the primary attention arenas in the public domain, by calling attention to certain problems and by framing what are seen as the causes of and solutions to those problems". Carroll, cited by Nicholas (2002: 4), also noted that, 'mass media campaigns have their primary effects on agenda setting, on influencing the salience of particular drug issues, on stimulating public debate and facilitating structural change.'

The foregoing trend of arguments suggests that if the media continually report issues relating to illicit drugs, such issues would occupy the public discourse sphere and assume prominence. This may shape how the mass audience perceives and interprets the drug-related issues. Through their agenda-setting role and other conventional functions, the media, therefore, can be effectively used to change behaviors, or social orientation of the public, and to control or subdue sociocultural challenges, such as drug abuse and trafficking, child labor and trafficking, corruption and other forms of social vices. As Lancaster et al. (2011: 398) explain, "The agenda setting function of the news media defines salient issues, captures the attention of the public and shapes public opinion."

Apart from the three fundamental functions of *information*, *education* and *entertainment*, the mass media still perform other crucial functions such as surveillance, correlation, status conferral, enforcement of social norms, and cultural transmission functions (Watson 2003; Sambé 2005; McQuail 2007). All these functions are crucial and if effectively deployed, they can help the various anti-drug agencies in Nigeria to fight the problem of drug abuse and trafficking. While performing the surveillance functions, the mass media watch the environment and inform the people of events or issues that impact or affect the society. The mass media serve as the societal guards and watchdogs, which explore the environment to identify and alert the public to what is referred to as a SWOT analysis (Strength, Weakness, Opportunities and Threats) as they affect the masses.

The surveillance function comes in two forms. The first form is *Warning Surveillance*, which happens when the mass media gather information and informs the public about *threats* or *dangers* in society. These threats may include impending disasters, economic depression, en-

vironmental pollution or hazards, growing unemployment, current trends of crime perpetration (for example, ATM Scam, Internet-based fraud, illicit drug trafficking and use, ritual killings), and impending industrial crises. The media warn the people of these threats so that the appropriate bodies, individuals or authorities take proper precautions or proactive measures. The second is the *Instrumental Surveillance*, which has to do with transmission of information about events, or issues that are helpful to the people. News about new cures for malaria/cancer/HIV/AIDS, employment opportunities, admissions, current market prices, and new products/services are instances of instrumental surveillance. By performing these surveillance functions, the media serve as the 'eyes' and the 'ears' of the public and they are seen as modern town crier and agents of social reality construction (Eun-Ho et al. 2007). The mass media, through the surveillance functions (Clarke 2014), can help curtail the menace of illicit drug trafficking, and in Nigeria, by monitoring activities of drug traffickers and users and bringing such acts to the public glare. When crimes are exposed, criminals will be scared of perpetrating their heinous acts. The mass media can help the nation watch the environment and alert citizens to dangers of illicit drug trafficking and use.

Another function of mass media that is relevant to the fight against hard drug problems is the *Enforcement of Social Norms Function*. Every society has norms, which prescribe the standard of conduct. Norms are established standards of behavior maintained, widely understood and shared by members of a social group—society (Schaefer and Lamb 1983). Norms spell out the *dos* and *don'ts* in a society. The *dos* have their rewards and the *don'ts* have their punishments. Trafficking and use of illicit drugs are examples of the *don'ts* in Nigeria and other societies. The mass media should consistently help enforce this standard by reporting punishments for violation of norms, or reward for upholding such norms. Apart from one-off interpretive reports, matters relating to drug trafficking and use should receive constant and intensive editorial emphases by the media. It is not enough that mass media inform the public of arrest of a group of drug traffickers, the media, through unswerving investigative reporting and persistent editorial attention, should also help the nation set public agenda and assist government

and its relevant agencies to expose and break the rings of the crimes. This is part of the public service and social responsibilities of the media. To effectively perform the forgoing functions in ensuring a positive behavior change towards drug-related crimes, the news media can adopt the following campaign strategies.

**Spot Announcement and Catch Phrases:**

These are short public messages by the broadcast media. They come strategically at intervals. They are short and precise. They are used to create awareness about some social issues. They always come in between or at the end of a newscast. They may come as these:

- ♦ *Stop drug trafficking, it is a menace to our society*
- ♦ *Your future is bright, don't ruin it with drugs*
- ♦ *Protect your future, don't use illicit drugs*
- ♦ *Never use drugs unless your doctor prescribes*
- ♦ *Drug trafficking aids terrorism, join government to stamp it out from our society*
- ♦ *Drug traffickers are social threats, report them to the law enforcement agent*
- ♦ *Say no to drugs,*
- ♦ *Drink Responsibly*
- ♦ *Smokers Are Liable to Die Young*

These are also parts of the public services and agenda-setting functions of the mass media.

**Fear Appeal/Scare Tactics:** When other strategies seem to have produced little or no effect, anti-drug campaigns by the mass media can come in the form of fear appall or scare tactics. This is a strategy that is used to cause fear arousal in the audience purposely to discourage the target audience from engaging in a particular negative or anti-social act or practice. Empirical studies have shown that fear appeal could be effective in discouraging adolescents from using illicit drugs, especially when such drugs are new. For instance, Flay and Sobel, (1986) while reporting Smart and Fejer's (1974) study on the effects of high and low fear appeals about drug abuse say that individuals who received the high threat appeal were less likely to attempt to use the drug and more likely to believe that possession of the drug was not lawful.

Scare messages may come in these forms:

- ♦ *Don't use cocaine, it will snuff out your life*
- ♦ *Use hard drugs and ruin your future*
- ♦ *Heroin has destroyed millions of young heroes, don't use it*

- ♦ *Illicit drugs are deadly and poisonous*
- ♦ *Hard drugs will kill you!!*

While using the fear appeal strategy, the mass media editors must consider some factors. One, the focus must not be only on arousing fear in the audience; the message must be used in a manner that reduces the associated threat and makes the target audience change their negative behavior. Two, other social and psychological factors, such as the primary determinants of adolescent drug use, must be considered (Flay and Sobel 1986). Three, the fear appeal strategy must be combined with other strategies; it must not be used alone or overused. Nicholas (2002: 3) warns that fear tactics must be used with a high degree of "caution and credibility"; otherwise, the messages may have counter-productive effects.

**Edutainment:** This is a media strategy whereby development messages are packaged with some entertainment. It is the process of purposely designing and implementing a message to educate and entertain. It is any communication strategy that employs popular culture to educate and challenge people. Edutainment is not a theory but a strategy employed to bring about individual and social change or to tackle serious social problems through the use of popular entertainment formats (Japhet 2013). It is *entertainment education*. This is so because the strategy combines the traditional media of education with the traditional media of entertainment to harness the advantages of the two media forms (Singhal and Rogers 1999). Edutainment, therefore, is meant to entertain and educate simultaneously.

*The Soul City Model of edutainment* is a good model the Nigerian mass media could adopt. This model is considered ideal as one of the communication strategies that the Nigeria mass media can employ to address the problem of illicit drug-use and trafficking in the country. It is a model for behavioral change (Japhet 2013; *Soul City Institute for Health and Development Communication, n.d*). The model prescribes two phases—the *input phase* and the *output phase*. At the opening phase, the change agent (mass media experts in this context) must conduct an audience analysis and research. This would enable the content developers to be familiar with the demographic and psychographic peculiarities of the target audience and develop the media messages that accommodate these peculiar-

ities. While doing audience research, the media experts must also forge and sustain partnerships with the relevant stakeholders such as social groups and community leaders, who are believed to have an influence on the community people. Also, the change agent must promote and market the messages in order to make them acceptable to the people. At the output phase are (1) impact of the messages on social change, and (2) potential opportunities. The messages must be capable of evoking the desired behavior change that discourages illicit drug use and trafficking. This change must happen at the three major layers—sociopolitical environment, community, and individual. The message must show potential opportunities by being capable of entertaining the target audience and simultaneously educating them about the danger of illicit drug use and benefits of abstaining from the drugs. Central to the two phases is the edutainment vehicle or media. In all, the media personnel as the change agents must evaluate at regular intervals the social change campaigns through edutainment in order to determine the effectiveness of the message.

Short plays, drama, pantomime, songs, and role acting are examples of edutainment, and these have been successfully used in different countries. For instance, as reported by Romer (1994: 1077), *the Partnership for a Drug-Free America*, after starting an “Inner-City Initiative” aimed at reaching out to poor communities in the central cities of America, created a 10-minute film titled “Busted”. The film could be shown in cinemas with capacities for attracting young audiences. The central message of the film is outright condemnation of illicit drug trade and adolescent involvement with traders. This film is an example of edutainment, which is basically a behavioral modeling strategy through which an audience member is encouraged to imbibe or reject the actions of a media character. Nigerian mass media can adopt this strategy to discourage trafficking and use of illicit drugs. This may come in the form of drama series on television and radio, or serialized stories in newspapers. The Nigerian mass media must develop dramas, stories and other forms of edutainment projects from the cultural context of the audience, and make sure that the projects address contemporary social realities especially those concerning illicit drug issues, and preferably employ the lo-

cal languages of the people, who are the potential targets of the messages.

### CONCLUSION

This paper has highlighted the prevalence of illicit drug use and trafficking in Nigeria, Africa’s most populous country. Nigeria is one of the African countries with the highest index of drug-related crimes. Apart from being one of the hubs for transporting cocaine across the Atlantic into Europe, she has the highest prevalence of cannabis abuse and amphetamine-type stimulants in Africa, and these rates were estimated to have increased in the past years. This situation suggests that Nigeria would continue to be host to a large number of illicit drug traffickers and users unless the problems are addressed through concerted efforts. Therefore, as part of the efforts, there is the urgent need to use the mass media, through different social change strategies, to address the social menace. No doubt, the mass media are powerful social tools for public information and behavioral change. They have the power to reach the mass audience with massive information within a short time. When they are effectively used, the mass media, through their agenda-setting role have the power to help society to combat social vices such as illicit drugs trafficking and use.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Caution must be exercised when one uses the mass media to fight the menace of illicit drug trafficking and use. In order to achieve the sought results, the media campaign planners and journalists must ensure that they, as much as possible, avoid some bobby traps. For instance, the message must be true, verifiable and reliable, and should be devoid of exaggerations of any form. Reporters and editors should not rush to the media to report issues relating to illicit drugs until in-depth investigations must have been carried out. When issues of arrests arise, the media must exercise caution in giving tags or labels to the characters involved. Until the people involved are declared guilty or innocent by a competent law court, they remain suspects. It is not proper to write rejoinders in issues relating to crimes. Once the damage is done, the consequence is grave and massive, and this may be considered as libel and put the media organiza-

tion is a serious legal problem. It is not enough to give one-off media coverage to an issue relating to illicit drugs; further thorough investigations and follow-up reports are necessary. In essence, there is the need for continual and sustained campaigns. Besides, names, dates, places, figures and other important items of information must be quoted accurately. Reporters must always provide an adequate and clear background to cases relating to illicit drugs trafficking and use. Clear background information makes the reports interesting, credible and educative. Also, there must be clear attributions. That is, the person that made a statement or the character that performed an action must be mentioned in connection to what he said or did. Attribution would always give the story some human face and shift the responsibility from the reporter. Finally, journalists should not assume that the mass media take the message to everybody. Audiences have segments. Therefore, Nigerian media professionals must always conduct audience audits and research in order to identify the characteristics and peculiar needs of the various segments of the mass audience, and give the message that is suitable to each category of the audience.

In summary, if Nigerian journalists properly plan and implement mass media campaigns, these campaigns can play significant roles in the prevention of the uptake of illicit drug use in the country. However, media campaign planners should have realistic expectations about what can be achieved through the media messages. They should also note that the primary area of effectiveness of mass media is in creating awareness and setting agendas, but they may have limited effects in causing people to stop the acts. Therefore, in order to maximize the potentials of mass media campaigns, there is the need for constant and effective syntheses between mass media campaigns and more localized initiatives such as direct interpersonal communication. This is because mass media campaigns have the natural power to bestow prestige and increase the tempo of awareness among the target audience whereas interpersonal communication is more effective in establishing confidence and causing behavioral change, which is the real objective sought. The argument here is that Nigerian mass media alone cannot provide the magic wand to stop illicit drug use and trafficking in the country. The mass media strategies and campaigns

must be combined with other direct and interpersonal communication strategies and traditional media in order to achieve good results in the campaigns against trafficking and use of illicit drugs in Nigeria and other neighboring African nations.

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