



## War Against Illicit Drugs in Nigeria: the Need for Effective Media/Security Agencies Collaboration

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### ABSTRACT

*The war against drug has become more worrisome in the face of reverberating socio-economic consequences. This therefore necessitated the resting of a scholarly premise on the fact that the image of Nigeria in contemporary times has suffered from the menace of hard drugs than from anything else. The study objectives among others focused on the need to mainstream the mass media role of informing and educating the public with a view to complementing the efforts of security agencies in the fight against drug. The method of study dovetailed within the frame of documentary/ library research. Findings however revealed a strong evidence of causality between media campaigns and behavior change as preconceived in the war against drug production, trafficking and use. By inference, the determination to win the war requires collaborative efforts so as to make Nigeria a drug free nation. The mass media role in this collaboration was posited to educate the public on the dangers of drug use, help shape the idiosyncratic public relations posture of security agencies while advocating a robust policy that will proactively curb the menace of illicit drugs.*

**Keywords : Advocacy, Collaboration, Drug, Mass Media, Security Agencies**

### Preamble

This paper derives its thrust from the fact that Nigeria till this very day is not only being perceived by the West as a major transit country for illicit drugs but also as an intensive consumer of hard drugs. Lending credence to this Uwaigbo (2007) notes that, at present, the image of Nigeria has suffered for the menace of hard drugs than from anything else.

The complexity of it all is further manifested by the fact that despite the framework to curb the menace, there seems to be an overt lack of political will to stem the negative drug trend. This when viewed against the backdrop of our harsh socio-economic realities makes it a hydra headed problem since many youths see drug business as a sure means of leveling up with several years of non accomplishments in a country that cares less about the welfare of its citizenry particularly the youths. In other words, the drug business holds the strongest appeal for the youths whose expectations of making it in life have become truncated by political greed and failed government policies.

The Nigeria Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA) which was set up to fight the drug war has been saddled with the responsibility of controlling, interdicting and intercepting the trafficking and usage of hard drugs in and out of the country. Its responsibility also includes educating the public on the effects of hard drugs on the nation and on the people. It is no doubt the responsibility of NDLEA to arrest both barons and couriers and help to rehabilitate addicts.

The NDLEA however has suffered and is still suffering an image problem. Right from the days of Fidelis Oyakhilome to this very day, there have been incidences of disappearance of already seized drugs, disappearance of arrested drug suspects from custody, suppression of evidence by NDLEA officials, bribery and corruption acts by agency officials and lots more.

Unfortunately, Nigeria has acquired the toga of a country whose anti-drug campaign is next to nothing. With this comes the credibility question with attendant consequences on foreign aid. The imputation however is that the country is losing the drug war with an abysmal show of political seriousness.

However, situation analysis by UNRISD reveals that people engage in drug production largely in response to economic incentives which legal sanctions have been unable to counteract effectively. Peasant growers of drug crops can make 10 to 50 times more in supplying the illegal drug market than they can in any other agricultural pursuit.

The report further revealed that drug traffickers have used the opportunities presented by changing global economic environment to enlarge their activities and expand their markets. The consequences of drug production, trafficking and use are deleterious. Descriptively, they include:

- ❖ Unproductivity among the workforce (youths) with reverberating effects on the GDP.
- ❖ Physiological impediments associated with drug use.
- ❖ Image problems for a nation with a concomitant reduction in FDI's.
- ❖ Unemployment
- ❖ High mortality rate
- ❖ Reduction in socio-economic aid.
- ❖ Social disintegration and disorganization
- ❖ Systemic violence occasioned by whatever means necessary

Deductively, the prevalence of illicit drug production, trafficking and use is inimical to socio-economic growth, political stability and physiological sagacity.

### The drug war in Nigeria: A bird's eye view

Contemporary events bearing international dimensions position Nigeria as having moved from being a transit nation to a consumer nation. This no doubt raises much concern.

According to Obi (2012), an NDLEA State Commander, the incidence of drug use in Nigeria is high with cocaine at the top of the list. Drug war in Nigeria assumes only a pro-active approach occasioned by raids and the dismantling of smoking joints through routine surveillance. The worrisome trend in the context of trafficking is the use of the physically challenged, minors and the elderly. According to Obi (2012), "it is pathetic that when we raid joints, we keep coming across the

same kind of persons; that is the destitute and physically challenged. Their excuse always is that they do not have anything to do and most of them do not have formal training and even those that have will tell you that they do not have the capital to start a genuine business.”

Even more disturbing, according to PM NEWS is the fact that drug convicts in Nigeria are given very light sentences and fines. It makes the whole drug law seem like a child's play. Daily, Nigerians are inundated with news of arrests of drug traffickers by NDLEA but the story almost stops there as most suspects are either released or jailed for a few months.

Worse still, at our airports, aides of VIPs such as governors, ministers and foremost traditional rulers are not searched. There are no scanners at the presidential wings of any Nigerian airports – this may be a potential point of trafficking.

In view of the foregoing, NDLEA has therefore warned that “we must not wait until we are like Mexico with a horde of drug related deaths recorded on a daily basis before we get serious about fighting illicit drug traffickers and barons”. According to the report, “the time to act is now”

By inference, therefore, the present efforts at fighting the drug war are not yielding much dividends and the NDLEA can not win the war alone. The determination to win the war requires collaborative efforts so as to make our country a drug free nation. The premise of this paper is therefore preconceived in the foregoing.

#### **The mass media potentials and the drug war**

The mass media naturally lend themselves to the war against drug bearing in mind the fact that the NDLEA statute unambiguously outlines educating the public on the effects of hard drugs on the nation and the people as a strategy in the war against drugs.

In this regard, McCaffry (1999) notes that the media can play an ameliorative role in the war against drug by educating the youth (the target group) and providing them with the knowledge to reject drugs, by preventing them from initiating use of drugs especially marijuana and by convincing the occasional user to stop using drug altogether.

Lending credence to the ability of the mass media to combat crime, an official of the National Narcotics Control Commission in China opined that;

the Chinese government has decided to launch a peoples' war against drugs aimed at checking the sources of drugs, curbing the harmful influence of drugs and keeping the number of drug addicts from growing.

Based on the above, the Chinese official notes that “it is crucial to increase the public's awareness of drug prevention during the war against drugs through the use of local mainstream media as major fields to publicize the drug information”.

According to the Encyclopedia on public health, the mass media are capable of facilitating short term, intermediate term and long term influences on audience members. In the context of drug war, the mass media can perform three key functions- educating, shaping public relations and advocating a particular policy or point of view. As education tools, the mass media do not only impart knowledge but can be a part of efforts to promote actions having social utility. As public relations tools, the mass media assist organizations in achieving credibility and respect among public health opinion leaders, stakeholders and gate keepers. As advocacy tools, the mass media assist leaders in setting a policy agenda, shaping debates about controversial issues and gaining support for particular view points.

The power of the mass media to reduce the prevalence of drug trafficking and use is embellished in the fact that we

spend much of our waking life consuming media content.

In a study by Baran (2002), it was found that television sets are in over 70% of homes, VCRS in over 55%. According to the study, the television set is on for more than 7 1/2 hours a day in a typical household. Two-thirds of the population listens to radio for some part of everyday. The average person spends 3,522 hours a year consuming media content.

Bearing in mind the fact that perception is constructed and maintained through the mass media, it is in communication that meaning resides and because the mass media are such a significant part of the modern world, more and more attention needs to be paid to the interaction between the mass media and society.

The great promise of mass media campaigns lies in their ability to disseminate well defined behaviorally focused messages to large audiences repeatedly overtime in an incidental manner and at low cost per head.

Drawing from the above there is no doubt a strong evidence of causality between media campaigns and behavior change as preconceived in the war against drug production, trafficking and use.

In other words, the mass media can serve to complement the efforts of security agencies in the fight against drug trafficking with overt efficacy, effectiveness and efficiency. This no doubt serves as the premise for agency/ media collaborations.

#### **Frame work for security agencies/media collaboration**

There is need to outline the frame work for collaboration with a view to defining the ground rules while streamlining factors that precipitate operational synergy. This however is to ensure harmony while whittling down possible and probable areas of friction. The framework among others should focus on the following:-

- **Professional empathy** - operational parameters show security agencies as coming from a different professional background compared to their media counterparts. This framework for collaboration tries to secure a marriage of strange bed fellows because security agencies operate in secrecy while the media thrive on openness. To this end operational empathy demands an understanding of one another's peculiarities with a view to accommodating them. In other words media operators must be patient to report stories after thorough investigations have been concluded. On the other hand, security agencies must remember to freely give out stories to media houses rather than suppress them.

- **Platform for advocacy** - The media must be able to complement the efforts of security agencies by highlighting their quests, needs and aspirations by way of advocacy. There are in different quarters, complaints of under funding and obsolete equipment that hamper the operations of security agencies in the face of organized and sophisticated narcotics business. Advocacy efforts should focus on funding, aid, equipment; etc targeted at government through advocacy kits.

- **Fairness and equity** - Security agencies must treat the various media organs with fairness and equity and must not be seen favouring some with stories and scoops while allowing others to wallow in unending circles. This no doubt will polarize the media and reduce campaign bursts to a mere wimple. What we need is a concerted and focused campaign against drug use and trafficking rather than discordant campaigns.

- **Needs and solutions**-The media through their surveillance role should be able to bring to bear trends and fads in the drug war as carried out in the developed world with a view to reorienting our security officials on new ways of doing things. Media reports in this regard should be solution driven rather than sensational cynicism.

- **Building virtues-** The media are a two-way street capable of serving both evil and good. Television portrayals engender attitudinal conditioning with speed and ease. To this end, therefore, television portrayals should not be seen to glamorize drug trafficking or consumption bearing in mind the fact that many audience members have been found to have infant minds. Media portrayals should show drug business as bad and a sure way to ruin rather than show the society as according honour to drug traffickers while celebrating drug barons.

**Post script**

This study throws insight into a new era in the fight against drug trafficking and use in Nigeria. With the dawn of security agencies / media collaborations, massive enlightenment and sensitization will surely pave way for behavioural change occasioned by wholesome determination to turn things around for the better. This is the beauty of collaboration in the face of media blitz

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