African Journalists and the Challenges of Good Governance: Using the Media to Bridge the Economic Divide in Africa

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Abstract
This paper makes the case that the widening economic divide in many African nations, despite significant progress in economic growth, political reforms and new communication technologies, is not only a telling index of the dismal level of good governance in the continent, but also a challenge that journalists should help to stem. It argues that given the gradual development of a sustainable democratic culture in the continent, as well as rapid revolutions in new communication technologies, African journalists are, more than ever before, better equipped to uphold the responsibility and accountability of governments and corporations to the people. To this end, it discusses four core areas in which journalistic skills can be applied by media houses and practitioners to initiate, support or sustain changes that have the potential of actualizing the yearnings of the masses for equitable access to resources as well as inclusion and participation in political decision-making and the development process.

Key words: New Media, governance, economic divide, empowerment, capability deprivation

Introduction
Due largely to a blend of internal and external influences, the African continent is going through a period of remarkable political and economic transformations. From individual frustration expressed in the form of self immolation to street occupation and sustained military insurgency by masses of disenchanted groups, a whirlwind of protests has led to the toppling of long-sitting autocrats in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt in what has been dubbed The Arab Spring. And for the first time in almost half a century, citizens in some of these nations have, among other novelties, had the luxury of freely exercising the right to vote or to be voted for in a politically pluralistic dispensation. Without experiencing such drastic confrontations, Ghana, Zambia, Senegal, Mali and Nigeria have, not too long ago, successfully held free elections in which the incumbent ceded power to the winning challenger in line with the will of the people.

Due also to profound technological advancements, there is a rapid emergence of communication facilities and gadgets that can avail ordinary people of the opportunity to take part in discussing, if not shaping, their own destiny. As the internet marks its 27th anniversary in 2016, it is projected to have more than 3 billion users, a fair proportion of who are in Africa (CNN News Analysis, 12 March 2014), and as Google and Face book reportedly plan to launch networks that are cheaper and less dependent on electric power, it can be safely assumed that even more people from developing nations will have easy access to the world-wide-web. Unsurprisingly, therefore, not only were social media gainfully utilized in the previously mentioned revolutions and uprisings, but they will also continue to shape public opinion on matters such as political representation, women's rights, national legislation and policy-making, as well as economic and social issues.

On the economic front, even in an era in which some of the world's developed economies seem to be teetering at the brink of collapse, some African economies have been adjudged to be doing relatively well. Citing World Bank statistics, for example, a BBC program stated that ten of the world's fastest growing economies are in Sub-Saharan Africa (BBC Hard Talk, July 2012). Before that programme was aired, Mengistu (2012, p. 10) had noted that "International opinions about Africa's economic future have gradually thawed from chilly doom and gloom prognostications to a warming optimism." He believes that this positive outlook has been fueled by high commodity prices and a projected 6% Pan-African GDP growth rate for 2012. Based on other indices such as increase in gross domestic
products, volume of trade and physical development projects, it is not hard to find proof for such upbeat economic representations.

Nevertheless, beyond the mere events of transition of political power, and the cavalcade of claims to economic well being and the accompanying strings of impressive statistics, there is a swelter of concern regarding their real impact on the masses: the teenage vendor who skips school, as a matter of survival, to sell bread or brooms either on a rail track in Lubumbashi or on a busy highway in Lagos; the farmer in Lilongwe whose only belonging in the world is the maize garden upon which his family depends for almost every aspect of subsistence; the resident of Korogocho slum who has no idea what decent housing or a hygienic environment means; the Maseru mother suffering from HIV but unable to afford retroviral medication, or a Soweto granny laden with a bunch of orphaned grandchildren, bereft of any idea where the next meal would come from; or the refugee long displaced from his home in Darfur.

The reality of the desperation that ordinary people have to live with can be gleaned from an advert posted on the wall of a university staff club somewhere in West Africa in January 2012. After giving his name and contact number, the advertiser declared his capabilities as: "Car washing, house cleaning, ready to do everything." In an even more precarious depiction of desperation, there were media reports of over 100 villagers in Rivers State of Nigeria who were roasted in a blaze on 12 July 2012 as they reportedly tried to scoop fuel from a petrol tanker that had tumbled and burst its fuel-laden stomach (ThisDay, 2012, July 13, p.1). And that was not the first or second occurrence of such a ghastly incident.

Perhaps, influenced by the stark realities depicted by these scenarios, Africa consistently ranks high as a reference point when it comes to demoralizing demographics such as the following:

• 11 million people in Sub Saharan Africa need emergency food aid to avert starvation
• About 40% of people in the region are undernourished
• 36 of Africa’s 53 nations need help to feed their people
• At least 40 million out of Africa's entire population are desperately in need of help. (Grilly, 2006)

**Statement of theses**

Without necessarily subscribing to the extreme gloom represented by such stereotypical depiction of Africa, this paper takes the view that whatever progress that is taking place in various walks of life in Africa does not seem to have the potency of diminishing the economic divide in its nations. Most pertinently, the paper makes the case that the widening economic divide in many African nations is not only a telling index of the dismal level of good governance in the continent, but also a challenge that journalists should help to stem. It argues that with the gradual development of a sustainable democratic culture in the continent, as well as rapid revolutions in new communication technologies, African journalists are, more than ever before, better equipped to uphold the responsibility and accountability of governments and corporations to the people, in addition to several other measures that can help to minimize the economic divide between the minority who control the majority of resources, wealth and power on the one hand, and the mass of people who are burdened with the yoke of poverty, powerlessness and even hopelessness.

We shall now turn to the central question of what the mass media can do to help bridge the economic divide in the African continent.

**Strengthening civil society and empowering minorities**

As many development experts (Sharma, 2013; Khor, 2003) have pointed out, the reality of economic divide is often seen mainly in sociological or fiscal terms such as class stratification, financial means, or more explicitly, the contrast between the rich and the poor. While it may be one of the factors that are likely to result in making individuals poor, low income or the blatant lack of financial means is not an intrinsic attribute of poverty. A more fundamental malady fuelling poverty and the concomitant economic divide in Africa is the paralysis stemming from capability deprivation. It is a condition that describes the reality of the millions of people who have no voice in matters that impinge on their lives;
those who are relegated to the periphery as passive, if not totally disenchanted, receivers of rules, policies, programs and episodic aid; men and women who are neither consulted nor considered worthy of participating in decision-making, nor in the planning and implementation of public issues and projects. Thus, in Sen's (2001) terse definition, capability deprivation translates to the inability of a person or group of people to pursue a meaningful life. And there is a profundity of demography which presents the profile of such people. For example, according to SIDA, across the world, but most especially in Africa and other developing regions, poverty most frequently correlates with gender. The report goes ahead to remark that the sheer happenstance of being a woman gives one a 50% chance of being poor, regardless of the glaring majority of females in many communities, not to talk of invaluable roles that women play in society (SIDA http://www.sida.sc).

The UNDP further estimates that in the world's 49 least developed countries, illiteracy among women averages 56% (UNDP Thematic Trust Fund, 2001). Other identities that are likely to be blighted with such disadvantages would include age, ethnic background, physical disability, and more recently the controversial issue of sex orientation. In each case, capability deprivation is not only the intrinsic factor feeding the divide between the rich and poor, the powerful and the weak, the elites and the gullible, the opinion leaders and the underdogs of society, but it is also responsible for the lack of sustainable development, peace and stability in our nations and communities.

In one of its conclusions, the Bellagio Symposium on "Media, Freedom and Poverty" (2003) aptly explained the adverse effects of capability deprivation thus: "When people do not have a voice in the public arena, or access to information on issues that affect their lives, and where their concerns are not reasonably reflected in the media, development tends to be undermined, and catastrophes such as famines are less likely to be averted. Lack of access to communication undermines the capacity of the poor to participate in the democratic process. Frustration and alienation over the lack of means of expression lead to disaffection with the political process, resulting in apathy or violence." According to an Al Jazeera TV English (People and Power, January 2014), the clamor by the Tuaregs for Azawad as a separate State from Mali is linked with the frustration and hopelessness of exclusion from political representation and resource allocation.

In another pungent warning about the dire consequences of the continued exclusion of disadvantaged people and minority groups from the general scheme of things, Deane (2006, p.11) unequivocally stated that, "Unless the media are able to play the role of guardian of the public interest, unless that public is seen as the whole population of developing countries, and not just those who can constitute a market for advertisers, and unless those who have most to win or lose from development debates - close to half of mankind - are given their due recognition, unless these things happen, people will die, they will die as they are dying now, not in their hundreds or thousands, but in their hundreds of millions."

Due largely to their capacity to enlighten the society as well as draw attention to issues that are salient to a variety of audiences, or shape public opinion, the mass media can play a vital role in lessening or eliminating capability deprivation. On a general note, they can do so by strengthening civil society through the promotion and strengthening of basic human rights, as well as ensuring that a plurality of opinions enters the public marketplace of ideas. Such basic freedoms would include not only the right to expression of ideas and opinions, but more importantly access to channels and platforms for people to exercise such rights. When the full spectrum of variety of voices is represented, the media create opportunities to turn people, who would have been passive recipients, into central actors in development efforts. Once again, Sen (2001) gives a very apt explanation of why the recognition and strengthening of basic rights matter when it comes to tackling the problem of capability deprivation. He states that when people feel that they have the rights to information and freedom of speech, they feel emboldened to demand that these rights be respected. He then concludes that such empowered people are able to press for the resources and opportunities that they need.

Relative to empowerment, there are three basic roles that the media can play towards uplifting the mass of disadvantaged individuals and groups, especially rural people, women, youths, people facing economic hardship, and displaced or oppressed persons.
The first role centres on providing citizens in general, and different stakeholders and levels of society, with the information they need to be aware of the nature and implications of developments that affect their lives, as well as knowledge of what they can do to bring about or sustain development, especially efforts aimed at poverty reduction. Referring specifically to poverty alleviation, Gregoire (2005) writes that whether it emanates from self help, government or aid organizations, any poverty alleviation strategy must rely on fluent and meaningful communication between aid organizers and recipients. He, however, observes that several studies show that targeted populations, even in the most information saturated regions, are largely unaware of what government is doing and what specific aim they seek to achieve in their areas.

The announcement of the removal of oil subsidy in Nigeria on 1 January 2012 exemplifies this sort of information gap. The announcement was met with stiff opposition among the majority of the Nigerian populace, and several observers have argued that other than the ill-timing of the measure, the lack of sufficient information and persuasion was a very critical factor in the adverse public opinion that crystallized on the issue (Emenyeonu, 2012). Such observers are of the view that rather than the firefighting mode of public relations in which government spokespersons tried effusively, in the wake of mass resentment and protests, to explain the rationale for the decision and the list of public infrastructure that the financial gains from the subsidy withdrawal would help put in place, the government would probably have earned public goodwill and support had efforts been made to hold due discussions and consultations with different levels of the Nigerian populace prior to the implementation of the decision.

According to a UNESCO presentation paper (2006), the news and views that the mass media, as information conduits, can provide toward the success and sustainability of economic development flow in three directions: (a) from local populations to government and aid agencies; (b) from these agencies back to local populations; and (c) from local and regional communities to the international communities and back. The organization was however quick to note a persistent media culture that hinders these flows when it commented that, “One criticism of the media since the 1970s is that the press does not devote sufficient resources to covering poor people's issues and circumstances. In a market-responsive industry, those who can afford media consumption drive the substance of that media to some degree while the poor and globally remote do not see the issues most critical to their lives reflected in much mainstream media coverage.” (p.5).

This indictment then leads to the second aspect of empowerment, namely, giving voice to the mass of obscure, disadvantaged and often overlooked people. Simply put, giving a voice to the marginalized minorities entails ensuring that their ideas, opinions, desires and needs are not only expressed but also taken seriously by government or society at large. It involves enabling the poor to take initiatives that are essential to solving their own problems rather than being perpetual recipients of occasional tokens. It also means increasing the economic and political opportunities available to them to pursue a more meaningful life. An imperative of all these ideals is the necessity of the mass media to press for decision-making in matters that affect local people to be brought to the local level. In addition to strengthening local initiatives, giving the people a voice enables governments, development agencies and aid organizations to obtain a more accurate understanding of the real problems facing the individuals, groups or communities that their efforts are designed to assist, and therefore a better chance to find the most effective ways of planning programmes that work. There is an agreement among international organizations and development agencies that the most successful recipe for sustainable economic development is to provide those services that the targets themselves identify as most necessary, and in a manner in which the recipients participate and direct the aid that they receive.

Going beyond the enabling of initiatives, Gregoire (2005) sees the role the media can play in giving a voice to minorities from the perspective of providing the social and political platforms necessary to change social norms about women, minority groups and the poor. The media campaign against the 2012 outlawing of the use of mobile phones by women by a community in Assam State, India, as well as the gradual building of public opinion in favour of granting women the freedom to drive cars in Saudi Arabia are illustrative of media role in discouraging decadent biases and deprivation directed at women and other marginalized people all over the world.
The third prong of empowerment which emerges as an amalgam of information possession, access to the expression of views, and inclusiveness is the feeling of belonging or what most development experts term *local ownership* by people of events and currents that shape their lives. It is a feeling of inclusiveness that spurs support, involvement and direct participation among segments of society hitherto existing as indifferent on-lookers or passive recipients. The Better Life for Rural Women Project introduced in September 1986 by Mrs. Maryam Babangida, wife of the then military ruler of Nigeria, had the following ambitious objectives:

- To raise the social consciousness of women about their right and roles, as well as their social, political and economic responsibilities.
- To sensitize, motivate and mobilize women for a more positive and fulfilling life.
- To encourage women to work together for better understanding and the resolution of their problems.
- To give basic education and train women in various skills and techniques to enable them to understand and participate more effectively in programs and activities in their communities.
- To encourage, solicit, and strongly support programs and public policies and government action on matters of gender equity and equality, women empowerment, political participation in governance, human rights and health issues.
- To seek, encourage, and support, credible and qualified women civil society organization for avid participation in the design, implementation and monitoring/evaluation of macro-economic reforms and politics and development administration;
- To collaborate with government, donor and international non-governmental organizations to organize conferences, workshops and seminars and generate knowledge products that will facilitate knowledge on current best practices and lessons of experience in gender mainstreaming in government and budgetary procedures (Civil Society, 2009).

Nevertheless, the program was not only harshly derided by the Nigerian media, but it was also a mega failure, mostly because the drivers of the programme were elites who hardly ever had an idea of who the rural woman was and what her needs were. Instead, the program focused on conferences and other publicity stunts that were held mainly in urban cities and in which wives of governors, and other high ranking female officials, occupied the centre of attention. Even where some community projects were implemented, they lacked sustainability as they were imposed on the inhabitants from on high. Furthermore, the program was shelved as soon as the Babangida administration came to an end.

**Education and Enlightenment**

At its inception during the era of nationalism, one of Nigeria’s pioneer newspapers declared that its mission was to show the light so that the people can find their way. Today, as the average African gropes in the dark tunnels of poverty and insecurity, the need for the media to bring about enlightenment becomes pertinent more than ever before. Whether it is for changing attitudes, capacity building or increasing opportunities, education is very essential to sustaining development and poverty reduction, and the mass media have both the responsibility and capacity of promoting educational opportunities that lead to increased local civic involvement in economic, political and other spheres of influence that shape people's lives. Taking it further, development experts have stressed that this kind of education must entail specialized and focused training that is designed to enable people to participate in a market economy rather than persisting in subsistence enterprises (Khor, 2003).

Apart from values such as democracy, good governance, peaceful coexistence, mutual tolerance and economic emancipation, there is a wide range of other issues about which the public needs education and guidance. Of these, the most pressing would appear to be pandemics such as AIDS and Ebola. There has been a tendency to look toward the Indian sub-continent or the Southern African region relative to the dangers posed by AIDS. However, in a world with little or no boundaries, the pandemic can overwhelm any nation unless sustainable measures are put in place to prevent or control the disease. According to Dr. Ali Ba Omar, head of AIDS Prevention Programme in the Sultanate of Oman, the AIDS virus had hit 40 million people world-wide as far back as 2005, a figure that underlines the rapidity at which the disease is spreading today. Considering the myths and
embarrassments surrounding AIDS in Africa, the magnitude of the scourge in the continent may be hard to estimate. The media must lead the way in providing continuous awareness on the ramifications of the disease, its prevention and control as well as stripping it of the social taboos that prevent infected people from seeking treatment early.

**Conflict prevention and resolution**

Without a doubt, one of the greatest threats to sustained development and the pandemic of wretchedness in Africa is violent conflict. As UNESCO has rightly observed, "Poverty and conflict coexist in a terrible cycle; poverty can lead to violent conflict and violent conflict always leads to poverty, destroying economic and social networks (facilities, institutions, values) even as it takes lives." (UNESCO, 2006, p. 6). The devastation, displacement and the climate of fear brought about by the prolonged war in Sudan, the genocides that took place in Rwanda and Burundi, the constant rumbles of rebellion in the Democratic Republic of Congo, the current crises in Central Africa Republic, and South Sudan, as well as the increasing frequency of terror attacks by Al Shabab in Somalia and Kenya, and Boko Haram in Nigeria are all pointers to how conflict deepens regression and despondency among those who continue to languish in squalid refugee camps; those threatened by food insecurity and diseases; as well as communities ridden with unassailable violent crimes, especially rape and recruitment of child soldiers. They also stifle local and foreign investment opportunities that might have created gainful employment and wealth.

The mass media can prevent violent conflict by creating platforms for non-violent discussion and issue resolution. By giving individuals and groups a voice, the media can considerably dispel the sense of marginalization and frustration that often finds an outlet in violence. The media can also serve to warn governments of issues of discontent among populations that have the potential of triggering violent conflict in order to direct efforts and resources towards effecting measures to douse the feeling of dissatisfaction that might lead to turmoil.

Quite on the contrary, the mass media have been linked with most of the political violence, coups and full blown wars that have taken place or are currently happening in Africa. For reasons including ideological affiliations, ethnic loyalty and the flair for conflict as a dominant news value, the mass media have been accused of stoking the fires, if not directly making the clarion call for conflict situations in Africa (Al-Zadjali, 2004).

For example, with reference to Nigeria’s past history of military coups and recurring ethnic and sectional clashes, there is a widespread contention that the mass media had, in most cases, fanned the embers of ethnic or sectional rivalry by framing issues in a way that tended to ignite undue ethnic loyalties (Oyewole, 1991; Abdullahi, 1990).

In refuting these accusations, journalists often argue that their role is that of merely mirroring the social and political realities of different periods in the unsteady course of Nigeria’s political development. Moreover, they point to the culture of criticizing government in the independent press as an enduring characteristic which stemmed from the evolution of the press in Nigeria. Prior to independence, the pioneer press, mostly political party organs, were unrelenting in presenting robust political commentaries and criticism of colonial rule. From independence, that role metamorphosed into the scrutinizing of government.

Since they are mainly purveyors of information obtained mostly from established sources, journalists must always bear in mind that while their ultimate aim in presenting news and opinions may be far from initiating unrest or conflict, they could possibly become susceptible to manipulations by news sources or interest groups seeking to foment political instability for their own personal gains. Traditional news sources who usually feed the independent press with scoops and details of wrong doings in government are often disgruntled members of parties, dismissed office holders, opposition parties and other interest groups that are desirous of wresting office from the incumbent. These dissatisfied groups, as well as the establishment, know that information control and manipulation through the mass media is a form of power control. They are willing to do anything to disseminate ideas that will benefit their own causes and will take every chance that the media offer them to promote their agenda, which may not exclude national destabilization. During the wave of relentless
riots in Northern Nigeria in the 1990s, a former Chief of Army Staff and Minister of Defence, Lt-Gen T Y Danjuma, confirmed the existence of such trouble mongers whom he said not only used ethnic or religious differences as a means of achieving political solidarity but also for polarizing the people, thereby disturbing the peace and stability of the country.

Editors and reporters must therefore always ensure that sound institutional factors and social controls which are known to guide news production prevail over personal beliefs and perceptions of writers and reporters. They should be more sensitive and discerning in framing controversial political issues, especially where sources have hidden agendas and the ideas they peddle are likely to heighten ethnic, communal or religious rivalry and precipitate political disorder, especially during general elections. They must make it a point of duty to downplay inflammatory and divisive sentiments likely to foment crisis, while promoting ideas, events and activities that enhance national unity and integration.

People of different cultures, languages, political and religious beliefs, as we have in Nigeria and other African nations, must be galvanized to realize common interests and the benefits of working together toward achieving common goals. Also pertinent in this regard is the need for journalists to take up the challenge of being spokespersons for the deprived, exploited and economically weak, especially by campaigning against acts of rights denial, domination, marginalization, discrimination and neglect, which often spark sectional conflicts and deepen the ethnic divide. It is also the duty of the journalist to enlighten rural populations on matters of national interest and to redirect their consciousness from parochial to national concerns.

**Intensifying the campaign for transparency, accountability and non-corrupt governance.**

The saga of staggering corruption in Africa must be seen as one sure reason why the media watchdog role must be stressed and strengthened. In a deeply graphic reconstruction of the endemicism of corruption in Africa, Ayittey (2006) lamented that “Over the post-colonial period, the African state has evolved into a predatory monster or a gangster state that uses a convoluted system of regulations and controls to pillage and rob the productive class,” adding that the chief bandits are in the higher echelons of government. In a similar indictment, Lynda Chalker, former British Secretary of State for International Development, once stated that about 40% of Africa’s wealth is tucked away in foreign banks. Nigeria’s former president, Olusegun Obasanjo, confirmed these worrying reports when he told a meeting of the African Civic Groups in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in June 2002, that “Corrupt African leaders have stolen at least $140 billion from their people in the decades since independence.” This must be an understatement, considering an African Union (AU) report in 2004 which claimed that Africa loses about $148 billion (about one-quarter of the entire continents’ GDP) annually to corrupt practices.

Again, Nigeria exemplifies African states whose development has suffered tremendously from the impacts of corruption. It is estimated that between the inception of oil boom in the 1970s and the present, Nigeria had earned more than $500 billion oil revenue, but various audits have reported that more than half of this sum has been stashed away in private pockets through over-invoicing, kickbacks from hyper-inflated contracts and illegal deals with foreign oil customers (Al Jazeera, 2013). The cabal of army generals and their accomplices who ran the nation over three decades of military rule, from the 1960s till the tail end of the 1990s, have been identified as the key actors in the raiding of the national treasury. According to a national audit, $12.4 billion was stolen from the treasury by military rulers between 1988 and 1994 (Pius Okigbo Report, 1994).

But even so long after that era of military dictatorship, the lack of transparency has continued to fuel unbridled corruption in Nigeria as was shown in the mounting theft uncovered by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) during the Obasanjo administration from 1999 - 2007. More recently, the controversy associated with the suspension of the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria in February 2014 was the disclosure he made regarding a whopping 20 billion US dollars that had disappeared from the account of the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC).

Similar reports of missing millions of dollars, which marked the one year anniversary of South Sudan in 2012 and those that triggered the current purge in Malawi are also indicative of how endemic the scourge is in Africa.
Relative to the subject of this paper, it is pertinent to point out that the curse of corruption covers every single fiber of society, but its impact on poverty can be extremely excruciating. It is probably for this reason that UNESCO describes corruption as a social ill that inflicts irreparable damage on poor people. The organization identifies its consequences as "inefficient allocation of scarce resources, the destruction of predictability and hope for the future, and the hindrance to development." (UNESCO, 2006, p.7). This is the paradox of Nigeria, Africa's giant, the majority of whose citizens continue to suffer in the midst of the plenitude of oil wealth.

Prescribing how the media can intervene, the Dakar Declaration (2005) held, among other things, that "Free media and good governance that it encourages are central to poverty reduction strategies." This thesis was clearly elucidated as follows: "Where a free media exists, threatening social conditions are more likely to become topics of political conversation and attention, and the actions of political officials are more likely to be known and followed by the population that they are elected to serve." (UNESCO, 2006, p.6).

Undoubtedly, the terrain in which journalists, especially those who undertake investigative journalism, operate in the continent is fraught with risks, repression and reprisals. However, as it was stated in the framing of the thesis of this paper, the preponderance of new media and blooming of citizen journalism has created a new climate in which the media can surreptitiously act as a watchdog against government or corporate malfeasance while at the same time directing government responses towards problem areas. With You tube, twitter and other social networking sites, gone are the times when results of investigative journalism were left at the mercy of media owners' whims, fear of journalistic harassment or pressure from powerbrokers.

As individual initiatives by independent or freelance African investigators such as Ghana's pseudonymous Anas or Sierra Leone's Soriuous Samura have proved in exposing corruption in high and low places in Africa, the mass media, as UNESCO rightly noted, offer the greatest challenge to both acts of corruption as well as the social norms, such as ethnic loyalty, excessive materialism, and social recognition on the basis of affluence, which tolerate or accept corruption in African societies. Transparency should also extend to the establishment of an enduring tradition of a free and fair electoral process, starting from grass roots voter education to exposing of electoral fraud in all its ramifications. The media must assist electoral bodies to assert their independence and neutrality as much as possible. However, it has to be noted here that elections in Africa must not be seen as fair only when incumbent power holders are defeated. In the same vein, the mass media must encourage and support elected officials who are doing well rather than pander to the agenda of individuals and groups who try to use the media to whip up unrest and even violence just because their ambition to win political contests at all cost did not succeed.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the number of citizens of several African nations who have minimal or no access to a dignified standard of living or the political clout to effect desired changes continues to grow exponentially despite the strides being recorded in scientific, technological, economic and political spheres. Buttressing the reality of the widening divide, even in bigger economies, during the World Economic Forum on Africa in Ethiopia in 2102, the president of China's multi-billion dollar Investment Corporation, affirmed that while China's economic model had generated growth, it had also created challenges that included inequality and environmental degradation. He therefore warned African leaders to be wary of copying the Chinese or any other foreign economic model. Some of the issues that need to be critically examined in order to have a true picture of who benefits from the dividends of political and economic gains in Africa include the following:

- Do the existing democratic structures and processes heal or heighten the rifts of economic and social inequality?
- Does the proliferation of NCT shrink or widen the knowledge gap between the rich and the poor?
- Does the democratic process build bridges of fraternity or deepen sectarianism?
- What are the imperatives of democratic reforms on mass empowerment?
• To what extent have elections brought about better living for citizens of nations with fledgling economies?

The goal of this paper was to outline in practical terms the roles that the mass media in Africa can play towards bridging the obvious economic divide within the nations of the continent. Such roles were discussed within the purview of traditional media functions such as information dissemination, public enlightenment, agenda setting and acting as the government watchdog. In all, the central target is to enable the mass of deprived, marginalized, and impoverished people to make or have the changes that they need to pursue a more meaningful life with particular regard to economic enterprise and political participation.

Specifically, the roles discussed here include:

- Strengthening civil society and empowering minorities
- Offering educational opportunities that lead to increased local civic involvement in economic, political and other spheres of influence that shape people's lives as well as leading a healthy and productive life.
- Conflict prevention and resolution
- Upholding transparency, accountability and non-corrupt governance

Without diminishing the potency of mainstream media, this paper pays particular attention to the added impact of social media. The power of social media lies in their ability to avail millions of people of the opportunity to make their voices known through increasingly subscribed outlets such as Twitter, Youtube, whistle-blowing sites such as WikiLeaks and other alternative platforms of public discourse. They are also increasingly becoming an indispensable part of mainstream media news construction. Credibility might constitute an issue here but it ought to be noted that although major television networks such as the BBC, CNN and Al Jazeera often float the caveat about "unconfirmed amateur footage", they have found the products of these new media very useful, especially when they are barred from entering places like Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan, and Syria.

Finally, it may be pertinent to end by referring to a commentary which stressed that while lauding the progress being made in Africa's economic fronts, the report on the state of Africa by the African Progress Panel warned that "Without critical issues such as education, healthcare and unemployment being addressed, the economic growth of recent years will not lead to the hoped for transformation" (Selamta, 2012, p.50).

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