



Improving the Effectiveness of Media Coverage of Public Policies in Nigeria

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***Public Policy is the
heartbeat of governance.***

***Public policies
are critical
tools for:***

Addressing
societal needs
/problems

Allocating
scarce resources

Translating
government
priorities
into actions

Shaping
social
outcomes

Public Policy Process

STAGE 1

Agenda-setting

STAGE 2

Adoption/design

STAGE 3

Implementation

STAGE 4

Sustenance

STAGE 5

Evaluation

Challenges of Policy Making

Lack of clarity

**Based on whims
and fancies**

**Limited
Consultation**

**Capacity and
implementation gaps**

**Lack of regular
reviews**

**Captured by
vested interested**

**Policy contradictions
and discontinuities**



Influence of the media on public policies

- Widely known as 4th Estate of the Realm
- Serves as bridge between policy actors and citizens
- Shapes policy priorities, design, implementation and perception

Theoretical Foundation



**Agenda-
setting
theory**

**Social
responsibility
theory**

**Structural
transformation
of public
sphere**



Two popular quotes

"Were it left to me to decide whether we should have a government without newspapers, or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate to prefer the later." – Thomas Jefferson

"The press may not be successful most of the time in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in telling them what to think about." – Bernard Cohen

Constitutional Obligation



● **Section 22 of 1999 Constitution of Nigeria:**

"The press, radio, television and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this chapter and uphold the responsibility and accountability of the government to the people."

A stocktake of the performance of the press



Press wields enormous power/influence and saddled with enormous responsibilities.



Has done very well given constraints



But more effective in fighting colonialism/military dictatorship, uncovering corruption and reporting politics/elections than in covering governance/public policy issues



Policy coverage sometimes one-off, sensational, and superficial



Some of these due to historical and structural issues

Tips for Improved Press Coverage of Policy Issues 1

**Deepen
Knowledge
Base**



**Media expected to serve
as interpreters, educators**

**But you can't give what
you don't have**

**Deeper understanding of
numbers, economics,
politics and technical
areas needed**

Tips for Improved Press Coverage of Policy Issues 2

**Be open-
minded
and evidence-
driven**

**● Rely less on ideologies/
received wisdom**

● Be obsessed with evidence

***Tips for Improved
Press Coverage
of Policy Issues 3***

**Stay the
course**

● **Public policy more of a
marathon than a sprint**

● **Focus on all stages of
the policy process**

Tips for Improved Press Coverage of Policy Issues 4

**Ask
questions**

Go beyond official lines or fixation on conflicts

Ask tough questions about intended goals, target beneficiaries, trade-offs, unintended consequences, costs/funding etc

Scrutinise claims by officials and opposition, not just parrot them

Tips for Improved Press Coverage of Policy Issues 5

**Expand the
conversation**

- Give voice to the voiceless**
- Provide context/background**
- Simplify technical, complex terms**
- Expand policy options:
policy makers don't have all
the answers**
- Focus more on impact**

***Tips for Improved
Press Coverage
of Policy Issues 6***

**Tell
stories**

Think like experts, but don't write/report to impress experts

Make policies relatable: policy is boring, policy stories don't have to be.

Put a human face, tell compelling and engaging stories.



In summary:

Do more of great journalism on an oft-neglected but most critical aspect of democracy, governance and human development.



THANK YOU