

Media advocacy and the actualization of “vision 2020: the right to sight” in Nigeria: a review

Media advocacy y la actualización de “Visión 2020: el derecho a la visión” en Nigeria: una revisión

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Revisión

Abstract

Introduction: Nigeria is one of the developing countries that have the highest challenge of Onchocerciasis and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Africa. **Objectives:** This study aims at ascertaining the potency, gap and deficiencies of the media in regards to discharging their social responsibility of creating awareness on river blindness and the media's efforts in the actualization of Vision 2020. **Methodology:** This research study adopts a documentary research method where the researchers used the Google Scholar to retrieve relevant research journal articles, books, seminar papers and other relevant publications. In order to retrieve relevant materials the following steps were followed identification of keywords, Database Search, Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria, Screening and Selection and lastly Data Extraction and Synthesis. **Results:** the study found that river blindness (Onchocerciasis) has avalanche of adverse socio-economic effects on the populace of Nigeria. Furthermore, it was also found that media advocacy on Onchocerciasis is dormant and this has the potency to impede the actualization of the World Health Organization's Vision: 2020 in the country. **Conclusion:** Communicating information on river blindness using only the conventional media is not enough in a society like Nigeria; hence there is the need for a combination of the conventional and other interpersonal channels of communication like the church/mosque, market, traditional institutions, etc.

Keywords: Onchocerciasis; media advocacy; vision 2020; Nigeria.

Resumen

Introducción: Nigeria es uno de los países en vías de desarrollo del África subsahariana con mayor incidencia de oncocercosis y otras enfermedades tropicales desatendidas (ETD). Sin embargo, la promoción mediática, la concienciación pública y la participación de los nigerianos en el control de la oncocercosis son inciertas. **Objetivos:** Este estudio pretende determinar la potencia, las lagunas y las deficiencias de los medios de comunicación en lo que respecta al cumplimiento de su responsabilidad social de concienciar sobre la oncocercosis y los esfuerzos de los medios de comunicación en la actualización de Visión 2020. **Metodología:** Este estudio adopta un método de investigación documental en el que el investigador utilizó Google Scholar para recuperar artículos de investigación pertinentes. **Resultados:** el estudio reveló que la oncocercosis tiene una avalancha de efectos socioeconómicos adversos en la población de Nigeria. Además, también se descubrió que media advocacy relacionada a la oncocercosis es latente, lo que puede impedir la realización de la Visión 2020 de la Organización Mundial de la Salud en el país. **Conclusión:** informar sobre la oncocercosis a través de los medios de comunicación convencionales no es suficiente en una sociedad como la nigeriana, por lo que es necesario combinar los canales de comunicación convencionales con otros interpersonales, como la iglesia/mezquita, el mercado, las instituciones tradicionales, etc.

Palabras clave: Oncocercosis; promoción mediática; visión 2020; Nigeria.

Introduction

Globally, diseases are ubiquitous phenomena that affect the human existence adversely, irrespective of race, geographical location or age. One of these diseases is visual impairment. According to World Health Organization (WHO, 1997):

Blindness is a major health problem that has received relatively little attention in worldwide efforts to promote health. The vast majority of World's blind live in developing countries where infections, malnutrition and lack of eye care give rise to a high proportion of blindness, particularly in rural populations in contrast to industrialized countries, where blindness is due mainly to degenerative and metabolic disorders related to ageing (WHO, p.101).

According to Olatunji, Adepoju, & Owoeye (2015), there are 285 million people who are visually impaired worldwide, 39 million of whom are blind. Approximately 80% of visually impaired people live in underdeveloped nations in Asia and Africa. (Foster & Johnson, 1993). This implies that the socio-economic and educational height of a country is tantamount to the rate of health challenges it battles with.

In Africa, Onchocerciasis is one of the chronic diseases that caused visual impairment to the populace of the continent. According to Nwoke, Shiwaku & Takahashi (1991), Onchocerciasis is a chronic parasitic infection caused by the filarial nematode, (*Onchocerca volvulus*). The disease is said to have been the major cause of blindness in Africa (World Health Organization, 1995). According to Oduntan (2016) out of the world's total 285 million people that are visually impaired, Nigeria has about 4.25 million visually impaired people of which about one million in the age bracket of 40 years and above are blind. Olatunji, Adepoju, and Owoeye (2015) noted that numerous studies from various parts of Nigeria show that eye diseases and blindness are a major source of health issues. In other words, there are extant empirical evidences that prove the existence of river blindness in Nigeria. Suffice it to say that the above assertions are the rationale behind World Health Organization (WHO) initiation of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight in 1999 (Muhammad & Adamu, 2014). According to Babalola (2011), the core objective of WHO's Vision 2020 is "to create a world where unnecessary blindness is eliminated and those who are born with a visual impairment can reach their best potential by the year 2020." This objective can be achieved if the mass media via advocacy extend a helping hand through consistent campaigns.

The importance of the mass media in public health communication cannot be overemphasized. This is because the utilization of communication channels remains veritable tools for the effectiveness of public health communication in the society (Olubunmi, Ofurum & Tob, 2016). Hence, in order to actualize the WHO's "vision 2020", the media has an immeasurable role to play since it is one of the reliable channel of reaching out to a large and heterogeneous people within a short period of time. Olubunmi, Ofurum & Tob (2016) corroborate that Public health communication (especially through the media) is intended to enhance the wellbeing and health of a society or population. Therefore, media advocacy has a veritable role to play in the actualization of WHO's "Vision 2020: the right to sight."

Media advocacy has to do with the strategic use of the mass media to bring about a positive change in an environment (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2003). Advocacy campaign, according to Nwosu (2008, p.10) usually uses multi-media and varied communication and persuasion strategies in order to achieve the set objectives.

This current research study basically seeks to probe the place of media advocacy in the actualization of the WHO's "Vision 2020: the right to sight" which basically seeks to eradicate blindness in children due to cataract, trachoma, onchocerciasis, refractive error, vitamin A deficiency, and other causes by the year 2020. (WHO, 2007).

The core purpose of this study is to explore the theme "Media advocacy and the actualization of vision 2020: the right to sight" with particular reference to river blindness in Nigeria. In tandem with the above core purpose, this study aims at achieving the following:

1. Find out the socio-economic effect of Onchocerciasis, (river blindness) in Nigeria;
2. To know the extent of media coverage of Onchocerciasis, (river blindness) in Nigeria;
3. To know the level of public awareness on Onchocerciasis in Nigeria;
4. To evaluate the level of success of Vision: 2020 on total elimination of onchocerciasis in Nigeria.

Theoretical underpinning

This study is anchored on two theories - the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis and the social responsibility theory. These two theories were selected as result of their nexus with this current research study.

Knowledge Gap Hypothesis

The Knowledge Hypothesis was developed by Tichenor, Donohue, and Olien in the 1970s. The Knowledge Gap Theory of Communication is mainly concerned with the unequal access to knowledge across socioeconomic groups and the distribution of information in society as a whole. (Birch, 2013).

The core premise of the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis asserts that the media are the custodians/repositories of all knowledge. According to Ijwo (2012), the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis assumes that proximity to the media will to a large extent determine response. It postulates that the farther away we are from the media, the wider the knowledge gap and therefore the more ignorant we become. It also states that the nearer we are to the media, the narrower the gap and the more knowledgeable we become (Ijwo, 2012).

The proponents of the Knowledge Gap Theory were of the opinion that “not every member of society has equal access to information.” (University of Twente, 2010). Tichenor, Donohue and Olien (1970) were confident that people with a higher socioeconomic status tend to be more capable of obtaining knowledge than people with a lower socioeconomic status. This process evolves into a negative spiral, because people will retreat from intellectual knowledge more and more when they receive confirmations about their lack of knowledge in some fields. Tichenor, Donohue and Olien were convinced that mass media only increased the Knowledge Gap, because it is obviously directed at people with a higher socioeconomic status, thus making it harder to reach for the others with low socio-economic status. The above population has an implication on media advocacy on river blindness in Nigeria because there is a likelihood that the campaign messages on the diseases might not reach those that are vulnerable which are mostly people with low socio-economic status and are usually inhabitant of rural areas.

From foregoing, it is apposite to infer that the Knowledge Gap Hypothesis has an implication on media advocacy for River Blindness in Nigeria. The veracity of the above claim is linked to the fact that there are certain media outfits that poor Nigerians wouldn't have access to. For instance, reportage, programmes or campaigns on river blindness on Satellite televisions or internet which requires monthly or weekly subscription can only be accessed by Nigerians with higher socio-economic status. In other words, a poor farmer who is struggling with basic needs such as food and shelter may not be able to have access to messages via the aforementioned channels and these may hamper with the actualization of the WHO's Vision 2020. Furthermore, most of the health related campaigns in the local media that the poor may have access to are urban oriented. In other words, the campaign messages are organized and disseminated by most media outfits without them talking into consideration the felt need of the rural dwellers. For instance, despite the prevalence of river blindness in some rural areas in Nigeria, most of the health related media campaigns are centred on health issues in the urban areas in which river blindness is not common in the urban cities in Nigeria. The above scenario automatically makes media advocacy for river blindness to be relegated to the background.

Social Responsibility Theory

This study is also anchored on the social responsibility. The theory according to Chiakaan and Ahmad (2014, p110) is “an extension and improvement of the libertarian theory.” The authors also avow that, the social responsibility theory came to existence as a result of the shortcoming associated with the free press theory. According to Suntai and Shem (2017), the social responsibility theory relies on the idea that media outfits and journalists are expected to embrace and perform certain obligations to society within which they function. According to Sadiq (nd), the social responsibility theory allows:

1. Everyone should speak up and share their thoughts on the media.
2. Public sentiment, consumer behavior, and professional standards.
3. Serious interference with fundamental societal values and acknowledged private rights.
4. Media under private control may offer greater public service, unless the government must step in to guarantee the public of better media service.
5. If the media doesn't handle societal duty, the government or another organization will.

Based on the above core tenets of social responsibility theory, it is axiomatic to state that there is a link between the theory and this current study because river blindness is the bane of social growth and social responsibility theory imposes on a crusading journalist the task of informing, educating, and enlightening the public on issues, particularly health-related subjects like Onchocerciasis. (river blindness). In other words, suffice it to say that it is the responsibility of the Nigerian mass media to educate the people (Nigerians) on the causes, symptoms and effect of river blindness. Doing that would not only bring about the actualization of World Health Organization's Vision: 2020 but would also help in the socio-economic growth of Nigeria as a nation since Onchocerciasis has numerous adverse socio-economic effect as identified and discussed in the main content of this paper. Therefore, the question this paper seeks to answer is how effective is the mass media discharging its social responsibility function in tandem with the World Health Organization's Vision: 2020?

Methodology

In order to aptly probe the place of media advocacy in the actualization of "vision 2020: the right to sight" in Nigeria, the secondary data analysis was used because the study aims at ascertaining the potency, gap and deficiencies of the media in regards to discharging their social responsibility of creating awareness on river blindness. In other words, this research study adopts a documentary research method. The use of documentary research method requires careful and systematic study and analysis of documented sources based on written texts, visuals, and pictorial data which may be based on secondary data (Agbo, Lenshie, & Boye, 2018). According to Bailey (1994), as quoted in Ahmed (2010), the documentary research technique involves the analysis of papers that hold information about the phenomenon being studied.

In light of the above, the researchers adhered to the following procedures to retrieve relevant data for this study:

Data Sources: The primary data sources for this paper include reputable academic journals, government reports, books, and official health related publications on Onchocerciasis and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Nigeria.

Documentary Review Process: The literature review is a crucial aspect of this research, as it forms the foundation for understanding Onchocerciasis and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Nigeria. The following steps are involved in the literature review process:

- a. **Identification of Keywords:** A comprehensive list of keywords related to (The Right to Sight) Onchocerciasis and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Nigeria were compiled to ensure a thorough search.
- b. **Database Search:** the researchers used the Google Search engine to retrieved relevant research articles. To find pertinent research papers, the following words and terms were used: socioeconomic impact of Onchocerciasis, media advocacy, media advocacy and Onchocerciasis in Nigeria, media coverage on Onchocerciasis in Nigeria.
- c. **Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria:** After series of search, the researcher downloaded the articles and selected only those that met the inclusion criteria based on the objectives of this study after which these articles that were meticulously read and analyzed

Data Analysis: The collected data, which includes findings from the literature review were subjected to qualitative analysis. Thematic analysis is employed to identify key themes, patterns, and trends related to Onchocerciasis and other Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) in Nigeria

Results

The Socio-Economic Effect of Onchocerciasis Endemic in Nigeria

Evidences from extant studies revealed that Onchocerciasis has diverse socio-economic effects. According to Kale (1998), the greatest adverse effect associated with human onchocerciasis are caused by the microfilariae's ocular and skin lesions, as well as intense itching. Ubachukwu (2006) corroborates that Onchocerciasis produces grave socio-economic consequences. According to Etya'ale (2001), onchocerciasis is also accountable for bad academic achievement and a higher drop-out rate among infected children in Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Sudan (due to itching, lack of sleep etc.). From the foregoing, it is apposite to infer that children are extremely affected by river blindness as the disease hamper with their educational performance. The implication of the above is that the future of children in regions affected by river blindness in Nigeria and other parts of the world is under jeopardy and uncertainty as they are likely to drop out of school due to the symptoms associated with the diseases.

Wogu & Okaka (2008) discovered that onchocerciasis was linked with a range of negative social and economic effects on individuals in their research. In fact, 40.54% of the study subjects in Wogu & Okaka (2008) study revealed that onchocerciasis prevented them from sleeping at night as they claimed to spend the whole night scratching. 16.2% of the participants reported being distressed and angry. 13.5% of the subjects reported that continuous scratching decreased their stamina and caused a lack of focus at work, while 12.7% confessed that constant itching caused disruptions in class. In synopsis, Wogu & Okaka (2008) summarized the socio-economic effect of Onchocerciasis thus:

Onchocerciasis was of public health importance at Okpuje, Edo State, Nigeria. The disease had adversely affected the social and economic life of the population. Onchocerciasis is associated with significant levels of stigma which cuts across the entire aspects of life in the community. While some people pity those infected by the diseases, others despise them. Treatment of the disease takes a long time and it is costly. Infected individuals are burdened with low marriage rate, falling birth rate, drop in productivity, economic stagnation or decline, and social disintegration. The disease adversely affects the productive population, including farmers, artisans, traders etc as well as school children (Wogu & Okaka, 2008, p.118).

From the above submission, it could be deduced that river blindness has an enormous adverse effect on the economy. This is because the river blindness has the potency to hinder infected persons from being productive and useful to the society. In other words, people infected with river blindness may not be able to engage in farming, fishing, trade etc. which are the major preoccupation of people that resides in most of the third world countries especially in Nigeria. This implies that the river blindness has avalanche of socio-effect on the populace of Nigeria and Africa at large. Hence, suffice it to say that these socio-economic effects justify the rationale behind the initiation of Vision 2020 by the World Health Organization.

Media Coverage of Onchocerciasis Endemic In Nigeria

The mass media generally are important institutions in every society of the world today, (Ijwo 2012). They serve as channels of communication and possess the potent force for development in all its ramifications, be it social, economic, political, educational, cultural, mental and otherwise. The authenticity of the above postulation is associated with the fact that the mass media has a potency of reaching a large heterogeneous audience simultaneously. Suffice it to say that the media has a role to play in the health sector through its coverage and awareness creation on different diseases.

In an ideal ambience, journalists and media outfits are generally supposed to campaigns against diseases such as river blindness because it forms part of the media's social obligation. However, media coverage of diseases in Nigeria especially Ochocerciasis is likely to be debated and contested especially among media scholars. The veracity of the above claim hinges of the fact that despite avalanche number of researches conducted on media's coverage on disease in Nigeria, only a few of these studies concentrate on Ochocerciasis. In fact, it's axiomatic though arguable to infer that Ochocerciasis is one of the diseases that have been neglected by both media scholars and the media. Ashong & Chinedu (2018) corroborate that Ochocerciasis is one of the Neglected Tropical Diseases that affects Nigerians adversely. In the same vein, findings of a study conducted by Ashong & Chinedu (2018) revealed that Nigerian newspapers gave scanty coverage to neglected tropical diseases (Ochocerciasis inclusive). Another study conducted by Ijwo (2012) revealed that the broadcast media in Nigeria don't cover or give priority to Ochocerciasis. In other words, media advocacy on the disease is low and dormant. The table 1 below summarizes Ijwo's (2012) findings.

The table 1 presents data on the disease categories as reported by the broadcast stations in Ijwo's (2012) study. Findings reveal that out of the 22 news stories on health as shown on table above, Malaria was more reported by the stations with 21 specific mentions (30%) out of the 71 mentions made of the selected diseases. This was followed by HIV/AIDS mentioned 19 times (27%) and Poliomyelitis came third with 15 (21%) mentions. Typhoid fever followed 8, representing (2%) percent of the total specific diseases mentioned while Yellow fever was mentioned four (4) times 6 percent. Both the Tuberculosis and Pneumonia tied up with just two (2) mentions respectively (3% each). It was also discovered that some of these selected health challenges such as Cholera, Leprosy, Guinea worm, Goitre, River Blindness (Ochocerciasis), Meningitis, and Avian Influenza were not even mentioned or reported by any of the broadcast stations at all. This implies that media's advocacy on Ochocerciasis is dormant and this may perhaps likely affect the actualization of the WHO's Vision 2020.

Table 1. Showing the Distribution of Stories Reported by Disease Categories

Diseases	Radio Rivers	RSTV	ESBS Star TV	ESBS Cool City FM	Capital TV	Capital Sound	NTA Surulere	Metro FM Ikoji	ATV Yola	ABC Yola	NTA MKD	Radio Benue	NTA Channel 5 Abuja	Capital FM	Total	Percent %
Cholera	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Typhoid Fever	2	1	1	0	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	8	11
Tuberculosis	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Malania	1	2	1	1	0	1	0	2	1	3	2	3	2	2	21	30
Poliomyelitis	1	1	1	1	1	0	1	0	2	0	2	1	2	2	15	21
Leprosy	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Guinea Worm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Goitre	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Yellow Fever	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	4	6
River Blindness	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pneumonia	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
Meningitis	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
HIV/AIDS	2	0	1	1	2	1	1	1	0	2	1	2	3	2	19	27
Avian Influenza	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	7(10)	5(7)	4(6)	3(4.2)	6(8.4)	4(6)	3(4.3)	3(4.3)	5(7)	6(8.4)	5(7)	6(8.4)	8(11.2)	6(8.4)	71	100

Source: Ijowo (2012).

Level of Public Awareness of Onchocerciasis in Nigeria

There are assorted scholarly revelations on the level of awareness on Onchocerciasis in Nigeria. We shall examine these scholarly revelations with the core purpose of appraising the effectiveness of media advocacy on onchocerciasis in Nigeria.

In a study conducted by Olamiju et al (2014), the researchers found out that there was an average rate of awareness on river blindness (onchocerciasis) compared to other Neglected Tropical Diseases in Nigeria. Olamiju et al (2014) captured it thus “there was an average (50.8%) public awareness on (onchocerciasis) in Nigeria.” Similarly, Adeoye, Ashaye, and Onakpoya (2010) discovered in their research that there was a high level of knowledge in Nigeria about the serious, curable, and disfiguring nature of onchocerciasis. However, Adeoye, Ashaye, and Onakpoya (2010) discovered that there was a significant lack of information among southwest Nigerians about the source, transmission, treatment, and care of infected people. Similarly, the results of Manafa and Isamah (2002) agreed with the preceding findings, revealing a poor level of understanding about the cause, treatment, and consequences of onchocerciasis in Nigeria. The preceding prompted Wagbatsoma and Okojie (2004) to state that there is a need for suitable activism on river blindness in Nigeria in order to realize the World Health Organization's Vision: 2020.

Coversely, Afolabi, Okaka, Oke, and Oniya (2016) discovered that 235 (61.2%) respondents were ignorant of the onchocerciasis disease, while 149 (38.8%) respondents had adequate knowledge of the disease's cause and mode of transmission. The table below summarises the Afolabi, et al (2016) findings:

Table 2. Aetiological knowledge or ignorance of onchocerciasis in Idogun community of Ondo State, Nigeria.

Aetiological knowledge	Group A:	Group B:	Total
	Respondents ignorant	Respondents knowledgeable	
Number infected	88 (22.9%)	20 (5.2%)	108 (28.1%)
Number uninfected	147 (38.2%)	129 (33.5%)	276 (71.9%)
Total	235 (61.2%)	149 (38.8%)	384 (100%)

$$\chi^2 = 26.034; P = 0.000^{**}$$

Source: Afolabi, et al (2016).M1

In another different but similar study titled “a Survey of Teachers’ Knowledge, Attitudes, and Practices Related to Pupils”, Okoloag, et’al (2019) found that the majority of the Primary School Teachers had inadequate knowledge and practices related to their pupils’ eye health and school-based eye health services. Though the above study was not specially on river blindness (Onchocerciasis) but notwithstanding, it still reveal the level of public awareness on eye related diseases of which Onchocerciasis is one of them.

In another different but similar study conducted by Olatunji, Adepoju & Owoeye (2015) revealed that:

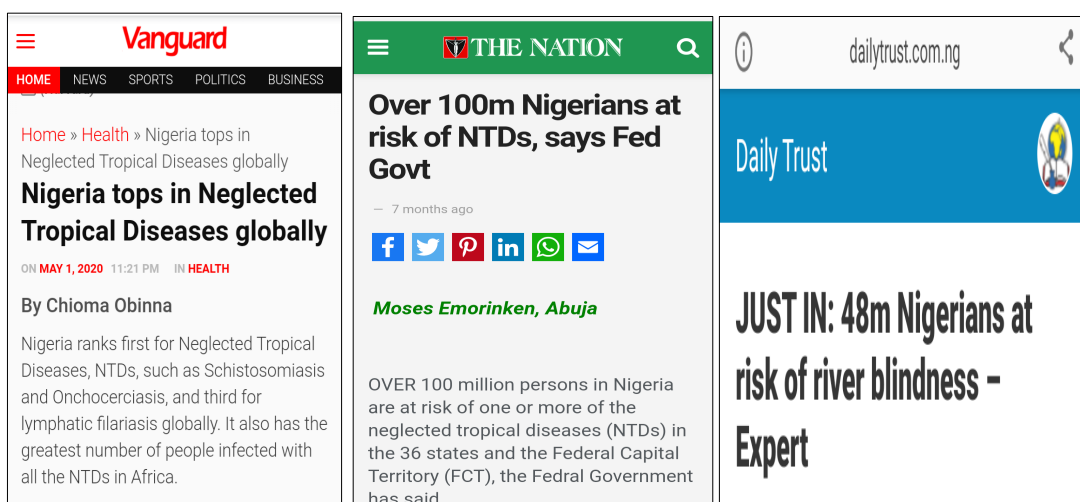
Punishment from supernatural forces was also viewed as a major cause of adult blindness in this study. This belief in superstition is common in the most rural settings where there is strong belief in evil powers and deities. ...This findings may constitute a strong negative influence on eye health seeking behavior; hindering individuals from seeking or accepting proper, timely management. When the supernatural is considered as a cause of disease, there may be a reluctance to accept modern preventive or therapeutic options (Adepoju & Owoeye, 2015, p.511).

The implication of Olatunji, Adepoju & Owoeye (2015) findings is that there is still low level of awareness on Onchocerciasis and other blindness related cases among Nigerians hence the need for awareness creation. From the foregoing, it is apposite to infer that there is lack of adequate knowledge regarding Onchocerciasis in Nigeria.

Success Of Vision 2020: Right To Sight On In Nigeria

Reports emanating from both the media and academic publications indicates that there are still prevalent cases of Neglected Tropical Diseases (Onchocerciasis inclusive) in Nigeria. Babalola (2011) confirms that Nigeria’s management of onchocerciasis is not remarkable. For instance, lately, there are reports by some Nigerian online newspapers that decries the high prevalence of some Neglected Tropical Diseases such as Onchocerciasis (river blindness), lymphatic filariasis, Schistosomiasis etc. in Nigeria. The above revelation implies that there is still the need for advocacy for Onchocerciasis in Nigeria since the country still experience reported cases of the disease in high proportion. The figure below is a screenshot of some of the headlines that decries the prevalence of Onchocerciasis in Nigeria.

Figure 1. Reports on Onchocerciasis and other NTDs



Source: Vanguard, The Nations & Daily Trust Newspapers (Online Version).

The figure (screenshot) of newspaper headlines above revealed that Vanguard Newspaper had a headline on May, 2020 which stated that “Nigeria tops in Neglected Tropical Diseases globally”. Similarly another headline by The Nation Newspaper on January, 2020 revealed that over one million Nigerians are at risk of NTDs according to the Federal Government of Nigeria; Finally, another reports by Daily Trust revealed that about 48 million Nigerians are at risk of river blindness i.e. according to an experts analysis. The above headlines are clear indications that Nigeria as a country is bedevilled with the issue of river blindness despite the intervention of the World Health Organization and other organizations who are working tirelessly to eliminate the menace of river blindness. In other words, Onchocerciasis remain a threat to the populace of Nigeria.

In light of the above, it is apposite though arguable to infer that the level of success recorded on total elimination of onchocerciasis in Nigeria as proposed by the World Health Organization’s Vision:2020 is discouraging since Nigeria still tops in Neglected Tropical Disease which Onchocerciasis forms part of the tropical diseases as reported by Vanguard Newspaper.

Discussion

Based on the results of the analyzed articles, it is clear that Onchocerciasis has a wide range of socioeconomic consequences, particularly in a developing nation like Nigeria. These consequences include a low marital rate, a declining birth rate, school dropout, a lack of output, economic stagnation or decline, and societal disintegration. Wogu and Okaka (2008) discovered that Onchocerciasis has a negative impact on the productive populace, including farmers, artisans, merchants, and so on, as well as school children. Suffice to say that people suffering from river blindness are in most cases a liability to the society. The veracity of the above claim is hinged on the fact people affected by river blindness barely engage in any productive venture; in fact most of them automatically become dependent on family and friends for their welfare. Some may even resorts to begging on street and market places in order to put body and soul together. Suffice it to say that the socio-economic effects of river blindness are numerous and enormously adverse hence there is the need to actualize the World Health Organization’s Vision 2020.

Meticulous observation from the reviewed studies also revealed that the Nigerian mass media gave scanty coverage to Neglected Tropical Diseases especially Onchocerciasis (Ijwo, 2012; Ashong & Chinedu, 2018). There are certain factors that may likely be the cause of low level of media coverage on river blindness in Nigeria. Some of these factors include:

1. The political economy: the political economy of the Nigerian mass media serves as an impediment to not just creating awareness on river blindness but to developmental projects in Nigeria. In most cases, the media often cover stories that are “juicy” thereby neglecting other developmental issues such as river blindness and other related diseases (Asogwa, & Asemah, 2012). In other words, Over the years, ‘news commercialization’ which basically has to do with turning news into a commercial product where advertisers or prominent individuals pay media organizations for their stories to be covered and reported as news has extensively affected their coverage of development issues. This implies that the media give priority to adverts and commercialized news at the expense of developmental subjects such as creating awareness on river blindness.
2. Dearth of Qualified Journalists: another factor that may be an impediment to creating awareness or media coverage on river blindness in Nigeria is the lack of qualified journalists. Most of the people that are into journalism profession in Nigeria do not have formal journalism training. In other words, there are reasonable number of people who parade themselves as media practitioners yet lack the journalism training, expertise and skills. Hence, such people lack the ability to know salient subjects such as media advocacy for diseases like river blindness.
3. Language Barrier: Due to lack of professionals in the journalism profession in Nigeria. There is always an issue of language barrier when it comes to media advocacy. Most of the media programmes or campaigns are disseminated in English language and it is not all Nigerians especially ruralite that comprehend English language. Therefore, for media advocacy on river blindness to be effective in Nigeria, there is the for the media to adopt the use of local languages such as Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba or even Pidgin English i.e. if it happens that the people within the coverage of a media outfit are conversant with the language.

Onchocerciasis has a wide range of socioeconomic consequences, particularly in a developing nation like Nigeria

4. Poor Coverage (Signal): another problem that may likely affect the effectiveness of media advocacy in Nigeria is the issue of poor coverage. It is pathetic that there are still state owned radio, television or newspapers outfits that are not accessible within their supposed area of coverage due to lack of booster stations.

The above revelation has a gross implication on the actualization of “Vision: 2020 the Right to Sight” because public health communication (especially through the mass media) has an enormous potency of improving the health and overall wellbeing of a community or population. As a result, the media must make a concerted effort to combat the diseases through advocacy, as one of the normative theories of the press (social responsibility theory) holds that media organizations and journalists are expected to accept and fulfill certain obligations to the society in which they operate. (Suntai & Shem, 2018). In other words, the Nigerian mass media should holistically accept and fulfil their social responsibility role by creating awareness on the symptoms, effects and causes of river blindness.

Most of the extant studies reviewed revealed that the level of awareness on Onchocerciasis and other blindness related cases among Nigerians is not impressive. For instance, Olamiju et al (2014) found in his study that there was an average public awareness on (onchocerciasis) in Nigeria while Manafa and Isamah (2002) also discovered that there is a lack of information about the underlying causes, preventative measures, and complications of onchocerciasis in Nigeria. From the foregoing, it is apposite to infer that there is limited knowledge regarding the cause, transmission, treatment, and care of Onchocerciasis in Nigeria.

Similarly, reports emanating from both the media and academic publications indicate that there are still prevalent cases of Neglected Tropical Diseases (Onchocerciasis inclusive) in Nigeria. For instance, Babalola (2011) revealed that the control and advocacy of onchocerciasis in Nigeria is quite not remarkable. Suffice it to say that the level of success recorded on total elimination of onchocerciasis in Nigeria as proposed by the World Health Organization’s “Vision:2020: The Right to sight” is discouraging since Nigeria still tops in Neglected Tropical Diseases especially Onchocerciasis as reported by both Vanguard, The Nation and Daily Trust Newspaper. From the above, it is obvious that the core objective of the “Vision 2020” initiated by the World Health Organization may not be actualized in the year 2020 due to the low level of media advocacy and public awareness on river blindness.

Limitations/Research Avenues

Three authors of this research paper acknowledge some extant limitations associated with the paper, these limitations include the availability of relevant literature, the reliability of data sources, and the possibility of bias in the selection and analysis of literature. Therefore, the researchers suggest that future research studies should explore the use of survey and in-depth interview to retrieve first-hand information from relevant sources

Conclusion

The English adage says, the eye is the light of the body. Blindness leads to poverty, as many with visual limitation cannot find employment to support them, live a productive life and provide for their families hence it is axiomatic to say that the actualization of the World Health Organization’s “Vision 2020: the right to sight” is not just the responsibility of the mass media but a task that the government and all Nigerians shift work towards achieving. In light of the above, this study recommends that:

- i. Health programs should be designed in native languages so that no group is disadvantaged.
- ii. The Government and stakeholders and policy makers should partner with media practitioners by providing financial support to help media practitioners to effectively campaign against the river blindness
- iii. Using only traditional media to disseminate knowledge about river blindness is insufficient. In a culture like Nigeria, a combination of traditional and other interpersonal modes of communication, such as the church/mosque, market, traditional institutions, and so on, should be used to disseminate disease information.
- iv. Media practitioners should be consistent with disseminating messages regarding the diseases; this would make the message more effective among the audience.
- v. More booster stations should be established for wider coverage so that no part of any State in Nigeria would be left out in receiving messages regarding the river blindness.

The above recommendations imply that the actualization of vision 2020 is not just the responsibility of the media but of all Nigeria especially the government and health care specialists. Therefore, there is the need for all hands to be on deck so as to actualize the core objectives of the World Health Organisation’s Vision 2020.

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The authors of this work equally contributed to the development of the manuscript and approved the final version submitted.

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Data Availability Statement

The data presented in this study can be requested from the corresponding author through this email address shem.woyopwa@yahoo.com

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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