

# Media Agenda Setting Role in Fostering Maternal Healthcare Development: An Analysis of Kenyan Newspapers

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## Abstract

The role of agenda setting by the media is a powerful tool for tackling national issues and fostering national development. Since the media has a powerful leverage to determine the current thoughts of society, this review therefore sought to find out who sets the agenda of maternal healthcare, how media frame the maternal healthcare stories which could have a bearing on sustainable development issues. While the media in Kenya carry stories on maternal healthcare, they do not do that systematically through reporting sustainable development strategies. The articles in Kenyan newspapers carry reports on educational maternal health care features without highlighting maternal healthcare sustainable strategies, the journalists focus on recurrent themes but fail to frame the stories against the wider backdrop of fostering national development. The researchers selected the *Nation* and the *Standard* to look at how these papers have covered maternal healthcare over the last one year. The *Nation* and the *Standard* are the oldest newspapers in the country and have the leading online presence. In addition, the *Nation* and the *Standard* have nearly 90 percent of the country's newspaper circulation. In general, newspapers are read by social, economic and policy elites, their content also reaches the local consumers through a readership effect. The methodology involved using search engines on the newspapers' webpages we searched the words "maternal health" and limited the search from June 2013 to June 2014.

**Keywords:** *Agenda setting, Media, Maternal healthcare, newspapers*

## Introduction

History notwithstanding, the role of the media is to greatly influence and also have great responsibility in equal measures, due to the fact that, it can create awareness pertaining to national issues and also it can influence the tackling of the same national issues. The role of agenda setting by the media is a powerful tool for tackling national issues and fostering national development.

The concept of agenda setting (Mc Combs, 1974) explains the correlation between the rate at which media cover a story and the extent that people think that story is of importance; what people think are the key issues measured against the actual media content. Consumers of the media are slaves to the agenda set by the media. This is because, the information they provide through their mechanisms of selective dissemination end up forming basis of their audience thoughts. Since the media has a powerful leverage to determine the current thoughts of society, this research study therefore sought to find out who sets the agenda, and how can the agenda set be used to foster national development.

The need to conduct this study was motivated by the perpetual fixation of the media with 'hot issues' that do not necessarily strive to build the nation along the developmental scale. Millennium development goals and Vision 2030 are the benchmarks of economic development in Kenya hence the framework created in the two instances should be the guiding lights in achieving the said development.

The projected development in "Vision 2030" cannot be possible without the involvement of the Kenyan people and the greatest tool for reaching out to the people in order to guard against factors that may hinder its successful implementation and accomplishment would be the media. According to Mr. Wilfred Kiboro, the former CEO of the Nation Media Group during the launch of the Kenya "Vision 2030" on 30th October, 2006 at KICC, Nairobi, he said the Media is often guilty of being too sceptical about every major project by the

society and quickly pointed at past failed projects for argument. He also felt that the Media has a major responsibility to continuously remind people that it is possible to deliver people from abject poverty, persistent droughts, and disease to higher levels of well being. Therefore, national debate ought to be on how to improve on the Vision 2030 and not on how to scatter it. He further reiterated that the Media will be a critical part in steering the society from scepticism and Afro-pessimism that have so often been the source of failure across Africa. Mr. Wilfred Kiboro said, the Media must begin to question what every one of us is doing in support of "Vision 2030", and must keep a score card of the progress in finally realizing it. The study attempts to bridge the gap between the audience and the pertinent issues that affect them through the media, creating awareness on development issues and then acting as a channel for influencing the tackling of such issues. The study would paint a picture of the general roles of the media, the changing roles of the media and compare them with the roles accorded to them by their audience. This would in the end allow for the documentation of recommendations aimed at aiding the media in the proper fulfilment of their duties vis-à-vis promoting and positively influencing development in Kenya.

Maternal health care is a key societal issue which needs attention for any country working towards achieving millennium goals. The media has a role in highlighting and creating awareness on perceptions and policy on maternal health issues both to the government and the society. In Kenya's mass media system, the editors have power and legitimacy to decide on media content. It is difficult for health or science to be covered regularly when politics and other major news carry more weight. Kenya enjoys a more diverse and liberalised media scene than many other African countries and therefore stands a good chance in in-depth coverage of reproductive health issues. Health policies do exist in our country, but they need to be strengthened, and made more relevant to particular health issues and in this case maternal health.

Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) 4 and 5, concerning child and maternal mortality are the two goals with the least progress made globally and in Kenya. While global, regional and national policies and strategies to improve maternal, newborn and child health (MNCH) exists and interventions to prevent maternal, neonatal and child deaths are available in Kenya, MNCH indicators remain unacceptably poor. Progress has been hindered by poor policy implementation and weak health systems, which do not engage with or respond to community needs. This results in poor access and utilization of preventive and curative health services.

The Kenyan government is committed to the achievement of all MDGs including 4 and 5. However, the deadline for evaluating the implementation of the MDGs is fast approaching - 2015, and unfortunately Kenya will not have realised the objectives unless drastic measures are taken. While major progress has been made in reducing infant and child mortality rates, one in every 19 babies born in Kenya - will die before their first birthday.

Maternal mortality in Kenya has remained unacceptably high at 488 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births (with some regions reporting MMRs of 1,000/100,000 live births) in 2008/9, an increase from 414/100,000 in 2003, 590/100,000 in 1998. Most maternal deaths are due to causes directly related to pregnancy and childbirth unsafe abortion and obstetric complications such as severe bleeding, infection, hypertensive disorders, and obstructed labor. Others are due to causes such as malaria, diabetes, hepatitis, and anaemia, which are aggravated by pregnancy.

The proportion of women making the recommended number of antenatal care visits of 4 and above declined from 64 per cent in 1993 to 52 per cent in 2003 and to 47% in 2008/9, while the proportion receiving skilled care during delivery declined from 45 per cent in 1998 to 42 per cent in 2003. Skilled attendance at birth increased to 44% in 2008/9. The contraceptive prevalence rate for modern methods among married women increased from 32% to 39% between 2003 and 2008/ while at the same time, the use of 64 traditional methods decreased from 8 to 6% of married women. The unmet need for family planning, which is still considered high, has remained at 24 percent since 1998. This has largely been attributed to inadequate service provision, poor access due to persistent family planning commodity insecurity and limited resource allocation.

### Objective

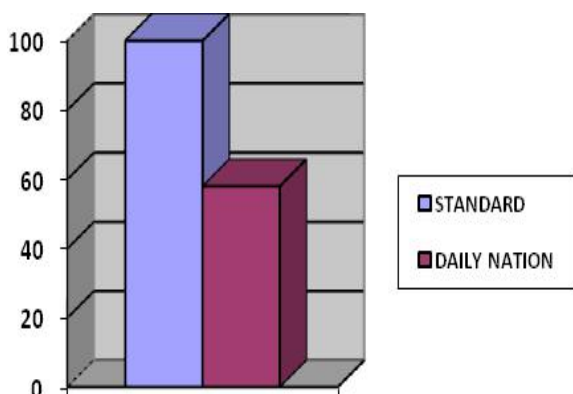
To find out on media coverage of Maternal Healthcare in leading newspapers in Kenya. Specifically, this study sought to find out how much of health care issues the Daily Nation and Standard newspaper covered between June 2013 and June 2014 as a reflection of the general media coverage of health issues in Kenya.

### Materials and Methods

The researchers selected the *Nation* and the *Standard* to look at how these papers have covered stories on maternal healthcare over the last one year. The *Nation* and the *Standard* are the oldest newspapers in the country and have the leading online presence. In addition, the *Nation* and the *Standard* have nearly 90 percent of the country's newspaper circulation. In general, newspapers are read by social, economic and policy elites, their content also reaches the local consumers through a readership effect. The methodology involves using search engines on the newspapers' webpages we will search the words "maternal health" and limit the search from June 2013 to June 2014.

### Results and Findings

This study was carried out on two leading newspapers in Kenya, the *Standard* and the *Daily Nation*, published between June 2013 and June 2014. Coverage of maternal health care issues on both newspapers was explored.



**Figure 1: Frequency of coverage from June 2013-June 2014**

From the study findings it was established that the *Standard* newspaper carried 100 issues while *The Daily Nation* had 58 issues on maternal health as shown in figure 1.

**Table 1: Maternal Health Care Issues Covered by the Standard and the Daily Nation Newspapers**

Newspaper	Categories	Issues Covered
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<b>Daily Nation</b>	Counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Devolution of health care</li> <li>• Safe abortion</li> <li>• Traditional birth attendants (TBAs).</li> <li>• Maternal mortality rate in the counties.</li> <li>• Improvement of Health services in the counties.</li> </ul>
	Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health challenges during pregnancy</li> <li>• Somalia is the worst country on Earth to be a mother, according to a report published by Save the Children</li> <li>• Support of maternal health care by the First Lady Margaret Kenyatta through the London Marathon circuit</li> <li>• Parenthood is a blessing. It marks the beginning of a remarkable lifelong journey and most of us do not want to miss a moment of our child's life.</li> <li>• World Health Statistics 2013 on child and maternal deaths, improving nutrition and reducing deaths and illness from HIV infection, tuberculosis and malaria.</li> </ul>
	News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Free maternal healthcare countrywide.</li> <li>• Allocation of development funds to support maternal care</li> <li>• Safe abortion services for women living in slum</li> <li>• A survey of government provision of free maternal health care services.</li> <li>• crisis over the shortage of incubators for preterm babies as the number of mothers delivering in hospitals increases due to the free maternity services</li> <li>• Abortion rates in the country</li> <li>• Medical issues in the region.</li> <li>• Teenage pregnancies.</li> </ul>
	Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Campaign on free maternal health care.</li> <li>• Support of maternal health care by the First Lady Margaret Kenyatta through the 2014 London Marathon.</li> </ul>
	Business	None in this category
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aids and sexual and reproductive health</li> <li>• Isn't healthcare the work of government? Isn't this why taxes are paid?</li> </ul>

	Opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Editorial: Neglect of women in labour wards has become commonplace since June last year</li> <li>• Government championing gender equality and women's empowerment.</li> <li>• the World Bank support - Sh3.5 billion (\$41 million) for Kenya's Health Sector Support Project</li> <li>• Abortion rate in Kenya</li> <li>• Effect of the free maternity services policy.</li> <li>• Teething problems in the free maternity service in Kenya.</li> </ul>
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	Counties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Firm partners with State to reduce high child deaths in remote areas (Oct 21, 2013)</li> <li>• ...Tanzanians crossing border to Kenya for Medical services (Feb 16, 2014) doubled since the government introduced free maternal health care.</li> <li>• Maternity crises in the Counties</li> <li>• Fast-tracking the implementation of free maternal healthcare service.</li> <li>• Reduce child mortality in Nyanza and Western.</li> </ul>
	Lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mothers receive outdated Maternal Healthcare</li> <li>• Clergy help sought on maternal healthcare...</li> <li>• Improvement of skills in healthcare and enforcement of breastfeeding and proper nutritional habits as a key to good health at the household level.</li> <li>• Implementation of free maternal healthcare</li> <li>• Healthcare funding</li> <li>• Kenya's Sick Health Facilities</li> <li>• Life expectancy and maternal and child deaths, the Government has a long way to go in providing access to healthcare for all its citizens.</li> </ul>
	News	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key pitfalls in maternity health care</li> <li>• Kenya's initiatives on promotion of maternal health</li> <li>• mortality ratio health-care Free maternity services in Kenya</li> <li>• Increase midwives to boost healthcare and reduce child mortality</li> <li>• disparities in access to healthcare</li> <li>• the state of health care facilities and access to emergency or ... Millennium Development Goal 4</li> <li>• challenges of implementing free maternal health care</li> <li>• Government funds to strengthen maternal healthcare</li> <li>• subsidised maternal services</li> <li>• Hospitals gets more doctors after maternity crisis</li> </ul>
	Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Beyond Zero" initiative that aims to improve maternal, neonatal and child healthcare in Kenya.</li> <li>• First lady raises funds for maternal and child healthcare.</li> </ul>
	Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• -The budget allocation for free maternal healthcare,</li> <li>• Government allocation for free access to primary health care in dispensaries</li> <li>• Referral hospitals reaction to free maternal health care</li> </ul>
	Opinions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• High Maternal mortality in Kenya</li> <li>• healthcare Report ranks Kenya poorly on healthcare</li> <li>• The government commended for rolling out free maternal healthcare.</li> <li>• Free healthcare as a Social Pillar in Kenya</li> </ul>



From table 1, it is evident that most of the issues covered by the newspapers dwelled on the implementation of the free maternal health care in Kenya, funding of the programme, the Zero initiative by the first lady in Kenya as well as the various campaign strategies to promote free maternal health care in Kenya. However, it is evident that issues of awareness for the citizens on free maternal health care have not been captured in the articles analyzed.

It is evident that the Daily Nation newspaper covered issues of safe abortion in the country, teenage pregnancies and gender equality unlike the Standard newspaper which covered more on Challenges of free maternal health, issues on disparities in access to maternal health care and improvement of skills and enforcement of breastfeeding as key to good health at household level. It is also evident that issues on maternal healthcare captured in the *Daily Nation* newspaper occupied a small percentage where 58 issues were covered within one year while the *Standard* newspaper covered 100 issues on maternal healthcare within the same period. Although the *Standard* newspaper seems to cover more issues on maternal healthcare than the *Daily Nation*, it is quite evident that more prominence is given to issues on politics, sports and business by both the newspapers hence less emphasis on maternal healthcare Development issues.

## **Conclusion**

From the findings, the review concludes that print media coverage of Maternal Healthcare Development news is wanting. Media houses are primarily profit-making organizations they tend to focus on issues that will increase their sales and as a result prefer very thrilling reports. Maternal Healthcare Development issues, by their nature do not fall under this category they need to be given more coverage as we endeavour to attain the millennium goals. The study recommends that print media as an information tool should give maternal health especially development issues prominence in their coverage and must play its watchdog role in highlighting implementation of government policies such as this one on Maternal Healthcare. Thus, raising awareness among the women on the importance of Maternal Healthcare and educating them on the dangers of unsafe abortions and use of contraceptives, will enable the government achieve its Millennium Development Goals.

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