

because as Underwood (2003, p. 5) notes:

Media underpins development and democratization and as vital elements of conflict resolution and peace building... an independent media is the foundation of a democracy and more often than not the only guarantee for transparency and good governance on conflict management and post conflict development efforts.

This aptly analyzes the prospects of using the Nigerian mass media to manage the Niger Delta crisis by bringing about social change and building sustainable peace and development.

Theoretical Framework

This discourse is anchored on the agenda-setting and gate-keeping functions of the mass media. The concepts are expected to explain the mode of operation of the Nigerian mass media in the context of social change and peace building. This is against the backdrop that the mass media are double-edged swords. They can be useful instruments of social change, peace building and conflict resolution when the information they disseminate correctly represents diverse views and respects human dignity and rights. However, there is another aspect of the media. The mass media can be frightful weapons of violence when their contents are influenced to propagate messages of intolerance or disinformation to manipulate public sentiment. It is only an independent mass media that enables society to make well-informed choices by giving equal opportunity to diverse views that can reduce conflict, enhance social change, build peace and foster human security, which are precursors of stability and sustainable growth and development.