

# **Climate Change Reporting in Nigeria: Challenges and Implications for Development**

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## **Abstract**

The potentially grave consequences of climate change make it a significant media issue. How the media cover climate change is crucial to public understanding of its likely consequences. Comprehensive media coverage of climate change is especially important in developing countries like Nigeria because of their weak adaptive capacity. With previous studies on media and climate change in Nigeria revealing low coverage of the phenomenon, it is important to understand why the Nigerian media have paid little attention to this issue of global concern. Drawing on a qualitative research design with climate change reporters from leading news media organisations in Nigeria, this paper explores the challenges of climate change reporting and highlights their implications for development. Findings reveal that bureaucratic obstructions, occupational routines, and organisational quest for profits are some of the drawbacks and frustrations climate change reporters face. The paper concludes that an improvement in the quality and quantity of climate change journalism is likely to increase the citizens' climate change adaptation

awareness level and provoke the different tiers of government to invest in the critical infrastructure that will boost the country's adaptive capacity.

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Climate Change Reporting, Development, Occupational Routines, Global Warming, Self-censorship.

## **Introduction**

Climate change is probably the greatest threat facing humanity today. Scientists have continued to warn that its impacts will be devastating and will be felt in varying degrees across the world. "Further changes in the average temperature, precipitation, and weather events will affect human health and global and regional economies. Ecosystems will change, and some species will be made extinct" (DiMento, Doughman and Lovesque, 2014, p. 296). Generally, climate change is "expected to present a heightened risk, new combinations of risks and potentially grave consequences" for the health and survival of humans, other species both flora and fauna, and the environment (Enete and Amusa, 2010, p. 2).

To safeguard the future of humanity, therefore, there is a compelling need to act urgently on climate change, as the consequences of postponing action will be catastrophic. Hence, Elizabeth Kolbert warns in *The New Yorker* of April 25, 2005, "people tend to focus on the here and now" but "the problem is that once global warming is something that most people can feel in the course of their daily lives, it will be too late to prevent much larger, potentially catastrophic changes". Likewise, the immediate past UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon warns that "time is running out. The more we delay, the more we will pay" (Ki-Moon, 2014).

The impacts of climate change will be particularly extreme for developing countries, especially in terms of food security,

public health, poverty eradication and education as well as national and global security (Toulmin, 2009; Cameron, 2014). Climate change is likely to aggravate the identified development challenges, damaging “economic growth and wellbeing even further” (Toulmin, 2009, p. 24).

Nigeria is one of the countries that will be terribly affected by climate change. Scientists project that the country will witness major changes in weather patterns in the 21st Century (Sayne, 2011). Rainfall patterns have changed significantly in the past 40 years with, the length of the rainy season reducing across the country (FME, 2011). The northern part of the country has been battling desert encroachment for many years, even as about 800 kilometres of the country's coastline is vulnerable to the threats of sea level rise and increasing risk of storm and Atlantic Ocean surge. Added to this is the country's rapidly rising population which adds extra pressure on the available infrastructure, weakening its resilience to the impacts of climate change (Meribe, 2015). The reality of these challenges makes it imperative for Nigerians to see climate change as an issue that needs to be addressed urgently.

Engaging the public on the issue and providing them with meaningful information on adaptation key in addressing climate change. As Harris (2014) points out, “scientific evidence in support of climate change is growing” but “awareness and education about its effects, especially among vulnerable communities”, has been “lacking due to language and cultural barriers” (p.17). But because climate change is abstract and complex, it is usually an uphill struggle for climate scientists to communicate it to the lay public. As DiMento, Doughman and Lovesque (2014) observe, “Climate scientists - like scientific experts in other disciplines - do not always have the expertise when it comes to communicating their findings to the public” (p. 296). For most people with formal education, climate change

information, as is generally the case with science news, often comes from the news media. The news media play the role of a middle man, breaking down the scientists jargon and making the complex and seemingly abstract issue meaningful to the lay public. Thus, the news media nay the media practitioners (journalists) are critical to public understanding of climate change.

This study therefore, explores the challenges of climate change reporting in Nigeria and analyses their implications for development. Previous studies in media coverage of climate change have been largely quantitative; focusing mainly on the volume of coverage accorded the phenomenon. But this study adopts the qualitative approach, offering insight into the challenges and frustrations faced by journalists who report climate change and underlining the implications of these challenges for the development of the country. Generally, the overarching question that motivated this study was: What are the major issues militating against climate change reporting in Nigeria?

### **Nigeria and Climate Change**

As is the case across the world, there is increasing evidence that Nigeria is warming and its climate changing. Building Nigeria Responses to Climate Change (BNRCC), an initiative of the non-governmental organisation, Nigeria Environmental Study Group (NEST), for instance, observes that late onset of rain which used to be synonymous with only some parts of the northwest and northeast has now spread to most parts of the country, leaving only a few areas in the middle of the country with 'normal' conditions. In addition, early end to rains usually witnessed in the southwest has become the norm in most parts of the country (BNRCC, 2011).

Similarly, Akpodiogaga-a and Odjugo (2010) observe that from 1901-2005 the amount of rainfall in Nigeria fell by 81mm, dropping even further from the early 1970s till 2010. However, the Niger Delta region have also experienced slightly increasing

rainfall in recent times (Akpodigaga-a & Odjugo, 2010). Clearly, a rise in sea level will have implications for agriculture and food security as it would submerge low level lands, erode shorelines, aggravate flooding, and raise the salinity of estuaries and aquifers thus leading to unfavourable conditions for agriculture (Hossain, 2010). These are some of the reasons why the UN in 1999 declared the Niger Delta region as “the most threatened water source in the world” (FME, 2009, p. 33).

The temperature trend in Nigeria since 1901 also reveals a pattern of increase. This increase was gradual until the late 1960s when it gave way to a sharp rise in air, which has continued till date (Akpodigaga-a & Odjugo, 2010). The mean air temperature in the country between 1901 and 2005 was 26.6°C while the temperature increase for the 105 years was 1.1°C, an increase, which is obviously higher than the global mean temperature increase of 0.74°C recorded since 1860 when actual scientific temperature measurement started (Akpodigaga-a & Odjugo, 2010). Based on this, the researchers warn that Nigeria might warm beyond 4.5°C on 1990 levels by the year 2100. Certainly, an increase of 4°C on 1990 temperatures would be devastating for many species and human society. We would see a world of extreme weather events: “unprecedented heat waves, severe drought, and major floods in many regions, with serious impacts on ecosystems and associated services” (World Bank, 2012b, p. xiii).

Already, there are reports of rising temperatures and decreasing rainfall in northern Nigeria. This has increased the frequency of drought and the rate of desertification in that part of the country, resulting in a decline in productivity, reduction in arable lands, increased prevalence of pests and livestock diseases, destruction of agricultural infrastructure and general loss of livelihoods for the large population that directly depend on agriculture (Akor, 2012; Ebele & Emordi, 2016).

Desertification, sand dunes and the decline of the Lake

Chad as well as other water bodies, which are major sources of irrigation water in northern Nigeria, are also affecting food production in the Sahel region that originally accounts for 26.6 per cent of Nigeria's arable land area. The Lake Chad, which was once the sixth largest lake in the world and the second largest wetland in Africa has shrunk considerably. The lake sustains the many communities around it as their fishermen, farmers and herders depend upon it.

Meanwhile, floods triggered by sea-level rise following unusually intense downpours, have also been a problem in Nigeria in recent years. In 2010, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) reported that flood disasters across Nigeria displaced over 250,000 people (BNRCC, 2011). But the situation worsened in 2012 when the country was hit by unprecedented flooding. Heavy rains, which started in July of that year, led to floods in 30 of the country's 36 states. A United Nations humanitarian news portal, *IRIN*, reported on 10 October, 2012 that Nigerian officials described the floods as the nation's worst in 40 years as about 1.3 million people were displaced and over 400 deaths recorded.

Nigeria could also face a huge public health crisis. Considering that extreme events such as heat waves, floods, droughts, windstorms, and wildfires can affect people's health directly (FME, 2003). Climate change can also affect people's health indirectly through malnutrition due to reduced food production, from spread of infectious diseases, water-borne diseases, and from increased air pollution. "The impact of climate change on water resources, including reduced water availability in some areas and flooding causing contamination of water in other areas, will have a negative impact on the already poor sanitation situation in Nigeria" (BNRCC, 2011b, p. iii).

## **Climate Change and Development**

Development has no universal definition but it entails human progress; improvement in the living conditions of people. The goal of development is to enlarge the capabilities, choices and opportunities of people, especially the rural and the poor, to lead a long, healthy and fulfilling life. To achieve the goal, every effort is geared towards expanding the people's capacity and skills to gain access to and control over factors that affect the basic needs essential to their lives (SADC and FAO, 2004). Simply put, a country is said to be developed if within it lies evidence of: a high literacy rate, high per capita income, high life expectancy, food security, decreasing poverty rate, low maternal and infant mortality rate as well as access to basic healthcare and basic education, gender equality, solid infrastructural base, high employment rate and efficient bureaucracy, among others. The countries where there is no evidence of these are said to be underdeveloped and poor (Nwuneli, 1985; World Bank, 2009; Batta and Isine, 2012). When climate change is added to “these development pressures, economic growth and well-being could be damaged even further” (Toulmin, 2009, p. 24).

Obviously, climate change can frustrate efforts aimed at improving the living conditions of the people. It increases the frequency of climate-related disasters which trigger public health crises, affect jobs and increase hunger, among other distressing effects. These issues are well documented by IPCC (2007) and UNDP (2007) as among the most notable examples of the threats to livelihoods and development aspirations (Cited in World Bank, 2008).

In other words, climate change can impinge on development efforts in the poor and underdeveloped countries. These countries are burdened by climate-related natural disasters more than industrialized countries and as such will suffer most from the impacts of climate change (World Bank, 2008). This is

especially so in Africa where basic necessities are luxury.

Clearly, climate change presents a major development challenge for Africa. The continent is characterised by dependence on rain-fed agriculture and natural resources, low incomes, and weak institutional capacity. The intensification of global warming will thus result in dry areas becoming drier and wet areas wetter, thus posing an additional challenge to natural-resource-dependent livelihoods and economic activities in the continent (World Bank, 2009). It is, therefore, important for future development efforts in Africa to take into cognisance the continent's susceptibility to climatic variations (Ominde & Juma, 1991).

### **Studies on Media Coverage of Climate Change**

Before the present time, most research in Nigeria generally focused on media coverage of environmental issues (see: Nwosu, 1993; Nwosu, 1997; Anokwute, 1999; Onyilo, 2001; Olatunji, 2004; Kwansah-Aidoo, 2004; Nwosu & Uffoh, 2005; Oso, 2006; Galadima, 2006; Nwabueze, 2011; Okoro & Nnaji, 2012). However, there has been a growing interest in media coverage of climate change in the last decade.

For instance, Tagbo's (2010) study of media coverage of climate change in Nigeria and South Africa revealed that newspapers in both countries generally gave low coverage to climate change. Her study, which employed content analysis, found that the two South African newspapers studied, *The Star* and *Mail & Guardian*, recorded a higher number of articles than *The Guardian* and *Vanguard*, the two Nigerian newspapers studied—suggesting that the volume of climate change news in South African newspapers was higher than that of Nigerian newspapers. Her study also found that climate change reports in the newspapers studied dealt mainly with international issues, giving little or no local context.

Agwu and Amu's (2013) investigation of the frames newspapers in southern Nigeria apply to climate change news found that the 'blame/responsibility' frame was applied to most newspaper reports on climate change. According to them, this frame “focused on the finger-pointing aspect of climate change outbreak” (Agwu & Amu, 2013, p. 14). The study also revealed the 'action' frame as the second most frequent frame applied to reports on climate change. This frame, according to the researchers, “mentioned the actions that countries had to perform to mitigate and adapt to climate change effects”. They explained that “such stories discussed the duties to be performed by the developed nations, developing nations, NGOs or individual citizens” (Agwu & Amu, 2013, p. 14). The researchers recommended that the media should report farmer-centred climate change stories in order to make the issue meaningful and relevant to the public, especially farmers.

Batta, Ashong and Bashir's (2013) study explored the implications of press coverage of climate change in Nigeria for public participation opportunities. Their content analysis of four leading Nigerian newspapers revealed low coverage of climate change, the dominance of the straight news format in the reporting of climate change stories and the prevalence of foreign stories with little or no relevance to Nigeria. The researchers concluded that for the public, particularly the “ordinary people, to get more involved in climate change discourse, the narrative, discourse, frame and coverage of climate change issues must pay significant attention to natural climate change occurrences, socio-cultural issues, as well as climate science itself” (Batta, Ashong & Bashir, 2013, p. 66).

It is clear from the foregoing that studies in climate change communication in Nigeria have been largely quantitative, revealing mainly the volume and frequency of coverage of climate change without explaining why the media cover climate change the way they do. The present study however employs qualitative

methods to highlight the challenges of climate change reporting and its implications for development in Nigeria.

### **Theoretical Base**

The Agenda-setting and Cognitive Development theories were employed to drive this study as the theoretical framework. Communication scholars like McCombs and Shaw (as cited in Ndimele & Innocent, 2006) are of the opinion that agenda-setting occurs because the mass media have the ability to select from the numerous events in the society that they perceive as important to report to the people. As Ndimele and Innocent (2006) observe, proponents of the theory are of the view that the media often present to the audience certain basic socio-political and economic issues that dominate popular discussion and debate. The mass media can make an issue a matter of every day discourse by the audience when they focus extraordinary attention on the matter. Media experts believe that by giving a particular issue or event a prominent treatment in their agenda over a period of time, the mass media would have succeeded in making the audience believe that the issue is, indeed, important. This implies that public discussions are to a reasonable extent guided by how the mass media portray social reality. Thus, the mass media affect cognitive change among individuals, structure their thinking and organise their world (Okpoko, 2001).

The Cognitive Development Theory postulated by a Swiss psychologist, deals with “the processes by which human beings acquire and use knowledge to solve problems” (Shaffer & Kipp, 2007, p. 243). Knowledge acquisition, the theory explains, results in intelligence, a basic life function that enables individuals to make decisions that are consistent with their needs and preferences as well as react knowledgeably to certain stimuli and adapt to their environments. The underlying principle of the theory is that knowledge is the outcome of the nature and amount

of information available to humans and that information is vital in the acquisition of the mental ability to develop human potential. The theory emphasized that individuals become ignorant and misguided in the absence of knowledge.

The Cognitive Development Theory assumes that information provides knowledge and understanding with which the society directs their efforts to accomplishing desired goals. It explains the relationship between information acquisition and the decision making process. It suggests that the decisions people make at a given situation are the consequences of the nature and quality of information available to them. According to Shaffer and Kipp (2007), knowledge is a form of equilibrium that accounts for the kind of decision or action individuals undertake. The goal is to produce a balanced or harmonious construct or state of affairs consistent with the desire of the individual. This state of affairs has been christened “cognitive equilibrium” (p. 244).

Information refines the individuals who increasingly and constructively organise their world, adjusts and welcome the ideas that are consistent with the gains they desire. A citizen who is ignorant or ill-informed cannot make a good living as well as participates in the functioning of the government. A well informed citizen is an asset to the government while an ill-informed citizen is liability (Reddi, 2009). It is this belief that the ill-informed individual is a problem to the society that educating the people on the danger of climate change, adaptive measure to be taken in the event of occurrence and the journalists who play this role must be given the enabling environment to perform their roles.

## **Methodology**

This paper draws on a qualitative study conducted from February to December 2013 in Lagos. Six environment reporters of leading national newspapers were purposively selected for interview. In addition, a focus group discussion was conducted with six other

environment reporters: four of the discussants were from national dailies and two from television stations with wide reach. The focus group was divided into three groups. Each group had two reporters and each session lasted for about 50 minutes. Six of the discussants were later brought together for a session that also last for about 50 minutes.

Aside from the two television reporters, all other reporters interviewed were drawn from the print media. Overall, 12 reporters participated in the study. Lagos was chosen as the location of the study because the state is the media capital of Nigeria. Most of the national dailies and television stations in Nigeria with wider reach have their headquarters in the state. It is also the national dailies and top television stations that have the funds to employ specialised environmental reporters. Thus, it would have been pointless to interview reporters in other states as most-if not all of them- were general reporters unlikely to have good understanding of climate change. The names of the journalists interviewed have been replaced with code names so as to protect their identity. The code names of the reporters interviewed individually were: CCR1, CCR2, CCR3, CCR4, CCR5 and CCR6, while those of the reporters who participated in the focus group discussions were given the following code names: D1, D2, D3, D4, D5 and D6.

Thematic analysis was employed to treat the data. Anderson (2007) describes thematic analysis as 'a descriptive presentation of qualitative data' (p. 1). In this type of analysis, "the researcher groups and distils from the texts a list of common themes in order to give expression to the communality of voices across participants" (Anderson, 2007, p.1). Usually, the themes emerge through an inductive, analytic process, involving close reading/listening and coding which typifies the qualitative research method. According to Fink (2003), inductive thematic analysis is a relevant method for interpreting and analysing

qualitative data. To create themes from the research data, texts were used to find words or phrases that best expressed the common experiences of participants. Heeding the counsel of Anderson (2007), the researchers strove 'to employ names for the themes from the actual words of participants' and to group themes in manner that directly reflects the texts as a whole'. This involved 'some level of interpretation,' but in heeding Anderson's (2007) counsel, the 'interpretation' was kept ... 'to a minimum,'... since 'our feelings and thoughts about the themes or what' they 'may signify are largely irrelevant' to the analysis. The themes created from the data formed the subheadings used to analyse and present the findings.

## **Findings**

This qualitative case study focused on the challenges militating against climate change reporting in Nigeria. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. The findings of the study are presented under the following subheads thus: Periodic training, bureaucratic obstruction/access to information, financial survival, and occupational routines.

### **Periodic Training**

Participants were in agreement that they needed periodic training to report climate change better. They argued that the seemingly abstract and technical nature of climate change demanded that those reporting it should be regularly trained to enable them to communicate it better to the lay public. CCR5, for example, stated: "we need regular training to update our knowledge of the issues involved. News organisations generally are not concentrating much on training in this area". Similarly, CCR2 believed that many environmental reporters needed training to enhance their knowledge. Regretting the dearth of training for journalists reporting climate change, he noted that without

updating their climate change news gathering and reportorial skills they might end up confusing the lay public rather than educating them.

Surprisingly, however, some respondents related that some news organisations rarely allowed their reporters to participate in available training while others would only reluctantly permit their reporters to participate. For instance, D6 observed:

...But even when you talk about the training, there is still a lot of hesitation in allowing journalists go for such trainings. There are cases where some NGOs complain to me that 'this organisation does not want to release their reporter to come for this training that we are inviting you to attend...And these are the people that are supposed to be disseminating information to others but if they are not trained, they are not well equipped for what they ought to do, how will they equip others for what is to come.

Likewise, D5 lamented that some 'stations don't readily spend on journalists to pursue stories except there are international organisations sponsoring the story, the reporter informed:

This is the third TV station I have worked for and I tell you, no station has done it for me. Even the one I am with right now is not prepared to though when you get sponsorship they can allow you to go. But some stations may even frown at it that you're going for training.

While it may seem odd that some media organisations do not allow their reporters to attend training which could improve the quality of their reports, the lamentations of D5 tends to corroborate this observation. The reporter who works for a state government owned television station informed that she lacked the institutional support she needed for the effective coverage of her beat: 'I am not allowed to attend a lot of events. For me to do my job

many of the times I will have to spend about half of my salary. I have to rent a camera; I have to pay a cameraman'. She lamented that due to commercialisation, her organisation preferred providing support for the coverage of those stories which would guarantee revenue.

### **Bureaucratic Obstruction/Access to Information**

Most of the reporters who participated in the study were of the opinion that bureaucratic bottleneck and access to information also constituted a challenge in climate change reporting. According to one of them, CCR4, government agencies were always suspicious of environmental reporters and had devised different methods of frustrating those seeking information on potentially controversial issues.

... For instance we did a story on beautification and planting of trees, you know these are also climate change issues. We criticised the method the government was using and the amount of money they were spending on it. We did that and it became a major issue between the government of Lagos State and my organisation. It took quite a while before issues were resolved. This is a major challenge.

Agreeing with CCR4's, another participant, D4, also narrated how journalists were often frustrated by government officialdom:

Access to information is also an obstacle. For instance, you may go to the Lagos State Ministry of Environment to seek information but the public relations officer will not talk to you. He will tell you to wait for the commissioner. And when you see the commissioner she will tell you to go to the Ministry of Information that it is only the ministry that can talk on it.

This situation, according to D4, was particularly

frustrating because “you have a story to do and you have a deadline for the story”

### **Financial Survival**

Participants in this study were in agreement that media organisation's focus on political and business news as well as other news capable of attracting revenue was a major drawback to climate change reporting. CC3, for example, observed that “our news media have commercial orientation because they have to survive. Most of them do not see how much revenue environmental issues will bring to the organisation”. He added that the norm for media businesses was to 'lean towards reporting things that will bring revenue'. Similarly, D5 stated:

My station does not support me. Climate change reports won't bring in any money for them. The station is particular about revenue generation. Since it is not a business report like what we call 'Paid-for events', that is, the events that guarantee revenue for the station when reported. Climate change stories don't bring money for the station.

Participants noted that they rarely did investigative stories because of this relegation of climate change stories by editors. For instance, CCR2 noted that his editors usually prioritised stories in order to decide those worth spending scarce funds to investigate, adding that climate change stories had never made the cut. Similarly, CCR4 also told of how climate change reporters would go the extra mile to convince their editors to permit them to travel interstate to investigate issues. He informed that most of the time the editors would tell them to use the newspapers' correspondents in those states to do the story. This, according to him was usually counter-productive because they [Outstation correspondents] 'may not have the expertise to do the story from a climate change perspective” and also lacked “the patience to listen to you to tell them what you want”.

## **Occupational Routines**

Occupational routine here are certain everyday news media practices that influence the quantity and quality of climate change journalism. Working to deadline, self-censorship and over-reliance on the Internet were identified by respondents as occupational routines that affect climate change reporting in Nigeria.

**Working to Deadlines:** Many of the reporters interviewed, however, said that their ability to do in-depth investigative climate change stories was being hampered by the numerous responsibilities they were saddled with by their editors. For example, D4 noted that in addition to the environment beat he also covered two other beats, a situation which he said rarely allowed him to produce good climate change stories as he might not meet deadline if he did in-depth stories which usually takes time to produce. Indeed, handing in in-depth climate change to their editors might be an uphill task for reporters when they also cover other beats which also need a high level of industry. CCR3 particularly harped on this point:

If you want to do a good climate change story it will involve travelling and taking time off from the office. I report environment but environment is just about one-tenth of what I do, I do other things here. So if I have to take time off to focus on and do a climate change story, the other areas will suffer...

Certainly, environment is a broad area and reporting the beat together with other beats will have implications for the quality of climate change stories reported in the media.

**Self-Censorship:** Several reporters interviewed disclosed that there had been times they could not make use of certain information they had because of where they worked. D5 who worked for a state-owned TV station noted how important parts of stories very critical of the government were edited out on several

occasions. CCR3 observed that his organisation had subtly indoctrinated staff towards reporting stories that would bring in revenue and that, “nobody will tell you not to report environmental stories but you just have to understand the mentality of where you work”. Similarly, CCR6 revealed that reporters would deliberately shun climate change news to be in editors' good books “This is not church bulletin; even church bulletins are paid for at times'. So to be in the good books of your editors and managers, you will need to mainly report stories that are capable of attracting advertisements”.

This indicates climate change reporters internalise understanding of editors' story preferences and unwritten institutional policies regarding some stories such as environmental and climate change stories.

Over Relying on the Internet: Generally, reporters must do their job whether bogged down by responsibility or not. They must hand in stories to their editors (and before, deadline, too) as that is why they are paid. So, with the heavy workload and dearth of events capable of throwing up climate change news, how do environmental reporters generate stories to beat deadlines? CCR1 even advised reporters to make good use of the Internet: 'When I started reporting there was no Internet, I used to read textbooks and huge documents. But now we have a lot of information on the Internet yet many journalists do not want to read. D4 said reporters depended mainly on the Internet to meet deadlines. According to him, heavy workload and many spaces to fill under limited time “are the things that make stories about the environment to be more Internet-based”. Likewise, CCR2 disclosed that the Internet had been a very useful tool for reporters covering climate change. According to him, 'it is just how events happen that we report them. When nothing happens, we have to resort to using foreign [Internet] stories to fill the pages”. Certainly, the Internet has become a huge resource site for the contemporary journalist. But it is also a source of worry.

## **Discussion**

From the findings, it appears that journalists covering climate change in Nigeria receive no special training before being assigned to the beat. And training is still a luxury even while they are on the beat. Given the complex and abstract nature of climate change, this situation does not bode well for public understanding of the phenomenon, given that very few climate change reporters, as noted in the literature review, come from science background. In fact, only one of the climate change reporters who participated in this research project had a science background. Hence, Kakonge (2013) calls for a climate change reporting training that will emphasize 'investigative journalism and humanizing storylines, that finds a nexus between local events and the larger climate change debate, and that avoids climate change jargon in favour of the familiar, everyday terminology that is most desirable in developing country context' (p. 413).

But more importantly, because climate change affects every facet of human development - from politics, food security, energy, education, health to transport, human settlement, transport, and land use, among others - there may be need to train every journalist to understand the implications of climate change for their fields. Mare (2011) counsels that climate change should not just be an appendage to the environmental beat but should cut across all beats: 'Mainstreaming climate change in political, economic, entertainment and sport news has the capacity to unlock a lot of intricacies driving the whole discourse' (pp. 17-18).

Clearly, training will enhance reporters' imaginativeness and ability to identify climate change stories and make them more interesting and engaging for the readers. However, while training is very important for climate change reporters, nevertheless, it should not be a substitute for curiosity and imaginativeness, two qualities critical to the success of every reporter.

Findings also revealed that bureaucracy can be a problem

for reporters seeking information from government offices in a civil service-dominated country like Nigeria. Shanahan (2009) also reported lack of access to information as one of the obstacles faced by climate change reporters in developing countries. Governments, argue Shoemaker and Reece (1996) provide “a convenient and regular flow of authoritative information, which reporters find efficient compared with more labour-intensive research. Reliance on official sources reduces the need for expensive specialists and expensive research. Interestingly, we have a situation here where official sources are frustrating journalists. Two things could be responsible for this situation: One is fear of being misquoted by journalists while the other is corruption” (p. 130).

Government officials are sometimes wary of talking to reporters for the fear of being misquoted or having their view being misrepresented. Alive and Thrive (2014) reports that spokespeople, during a workshop it organised in Bangladesh on media engagement and capacity building to increase childhood nutrition policies, “often cited the concern of being misquoted or represented as a barrier for them individually, or on behalf of their organizations” (p. 8). Indeed, some government officials, perhaps, because of previous misrepresentations by reporters, tend to doubt the capacity of reporters to interpret the information they are given. This takes us back to the issue of training we discussed earlier. Even though official sources in Nigeria are wont to shifting the blame to journalists, by claiming that they were quoted out of context by journalists, whenever public condemnation trails views they expressed in interviews they granted, reporters many time mangle stories and misquote officials because of poor knowledge and understanding of issues in the beats they cover, particularly in beats such as environment which require a certain level of specialised knowledge. Therefore, a level of training in understanding and communicating issues to the audience will earn

reporters the respect of sources, whether officials or experts.

It is not surprising that financial survival or the quest for revenue by news organisations was found as a major problem for climate change reporting. Indeed, news organisations are first and foremost business organisations established to make profits or at least break even. Hence, they are more likely to cover those sectors that will attract advertisers. Clearly, climate change is not one of such areas. Shoemaker and Reece (1996) observe that “print media pages are a function of amount of advertisements attracted. When ad lineage is down, a newspaper's newshole is reduced accordingly” (p. 149). Complaints of lack of funds for climate change stories resonate with reports of several studies across Africa and other developing countries. Harbinson, Mugara and Chawla (2006), in a Panos Institute-commissioned study on media attitudes to reporting of climate change in Zambia, Honduras, Jamaica and Sri Lanka, found that “journalists lacked financial resources to dedicate more time towards covering climate change issues” (p. 5). In another Panos Institute commissioned study on media coverage of climate change in Mozambique, deSalema, Salvador and Nobre (2007) reported that journalists covering climate change lacked funds for travelling to areas facing climate change threats. Mare (2011) also reports that the underfunding of the media in Zimbabwe affects climate change coverage.

A possible explanation for this trend is that dwindling revenue from newspaper sales and advertising could force editors to focus on the issues they assume will help them cultivate the type of audience they are looking for. As a result, editors are more likely to fund stories bearing on such issues than 'less important' issues such as climate change.

This study also found that occupational norms frustrate climate change reporting. As noted earlier, working to deadline, self-censorship and over-reliance on the Internet are some everyday journalism practices which, according to findings, affect

climate change reporting in Nigeria. Indeed, journalists must work to their organisation's deadline schedules if their reports are to be read or viewed by the audience. 'Deadline forces journalists to stop seeking information and file a story, and reporters must adjust their schedule accordingly' (Shoemaker and Reece (1996, p. 119). Through the everyday pressure to meet deadlines, the journalist learns 'that an average story delivered on time is more of use than a perfect story that arrives late' (Harcup, 2009, p. 29). Climate change issues seldom fit into the journalistic news values and as such, rarely make news. But then, newsholes must be filled, and within deadline too. At this critical stage, therefore, Internet comes to the rescue, especially when there is no advertisement to fill the holes.

The problem with over reliance on Internet sources, however, is that it can lead to bad habits, tempting journalists to cut corners in fact checking and even in crediting authorship (plagiarism). Obijiofor (2001) in a study of Singaporean and Nigerian journalists, and Chari (2013) in a study of Zimbabwean journalists, found that the Internet has increased the tendency for journalists to lift materials without attribution. Also, when journalists know that there is always news material on the Internet, complacency and inertia are more likely to undermine the zeal required to follow leads that is the hallmark of the journalistic enterprise. But it appears that this problem is not peculiar to Nigerian journalists covering climate change as Chari (2013), in his study on new communication technologies and journalism ethics in Zimbabwe, notes that there is a general consensus among Zimbabwean journalists that 'The Internet promotes 'lazy journalism' because instead of venturing outside to interact with news sources, journalists were now relying on the Internet' (p. 127).

Reporters self-censure most of the times to avoid conflict with their editors or employers. Analyses of findings suggest that

the reporters interviewed must have internalised their understanding of their editors' story preferences and unwritten organisational policies regarding environmental/climate change stories. Indeed, internalising editors' feedback and organisation policies may well be a survival strategy for reporters. Ayodele (1988) note that journalists seeking to remain long term with their employer organizations have to understand and abide by their laws and conventions on 'how events are not only to be reported, but are to be interpreted and analysed. Journalists do not learn this formally. At times, they learn how to conform through how the stories they submitted were edited and presented (Becker and Lee, 1979).

### **Implications for Development**

Although climate change has been a major area of scientific concern since the 1970s, it became a significant issue in the media in the last two decades. Nelkin (1987) has stressed the significance of the news media in public understanding of science. How the members of the public perceive climate change, individually and collectively, and how they act on it are determined by 'how it is made socially and culturally meaningful' for them (Doyle, 2011).

Certainly, the media have a significant role to play in making climate change culturally and socially meaningful to Nigerians. Poor climate change journalism will have implications for the overall development of Nigeria because without accurate and timely information it will be difficult to correctly address the effects of climate change. Indeed, regular media reports on climate change will improve public understanding of the phenomenon, particularly in the area of adaptation, which is important for developing countries like Nigeria with low adaptive capacities. Adaptation simply means what we need/will do to survive the adverse effects of climate change; it is about preparing for the projected impacts of climate change with a view to adjusting to

them.

As noted earlier, climate change will heighten development concerns in the developing countries like Nigeria. Scientists predict that climate change “will alter the path and pace of economic growth because of changes in natural systems and resources, infrastructure, and labour productivity” (Kreft, Harmeling, Bals, Zacher & van de Sand, 2010, p. 10).

An increase in extreme weather conditions such as hurricanes, tornados, cyclones, and flooding 'will cause displacement of facilities and destroy infrastructure, which might block access to schools, and hindering universal primary education' (Toulmin, 2009, pp. 24-25). Extreme weather events will also displace people and force families to migrate, thereby truncating the education of children. Basic education is the foundation for life-long learning and employment, and it is key to poverty reduction and development in general (CIDA, 2010). Climate change is also likely to lead to loss of livelihood assets, which may lead to many children dropping out of school to engage in income-earning activities. Climate change also has critical implications for public health. 'Most diseases are associated with poor water quality and parasites thrive when it floods, which can result in cholera and malaria' (Boyd, 2014, pp. 342-343). These scenarios may appear remote, but they are not unlikely in Nigeria. However, with improved climate change journalism in the country the citizenry will be better prepared for any eventuality.

## **Conclusion**

Journalists and media owners cannot therefore afford to be passive in the efforts to address climate change. Where training is needed, efforts should be made to train climate change reporters, as quality of climate change journalism will produce an informed citizenry. While the media need advertising revenue to survive they should

appreciate the threat climate change poses to humankind and give it the level of coverage it deserves. Rather than use occupational norms as an excuse, climate change reporters can still produce quality stories in spite of the norms. Mastery of their beats, imaginativeness and the good old curiosity are some of the qualities needed to overcome the challenges posed by occupational norms. It is also important for journalists covering climate change to establish and build trust with official sources. Perhaps, climate change journalists should avoid being too critical of the sources as it can affect relationships and lead to reporters losing important government contacts.

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