



The Relevance of Environmental Communication and Solutions Journalism in the Quest for Sustainable Environment in Nigeria: The need for a synergy

Zekeri Ikelebe Alasa¹

Department of Mass Communication,
Edo University, Iyamho, Edo State, Nigeria
alasaiklebe@gmail.com
07069670810

Eguono Aghwadoma²

Department of Mass Communication,
Delta State University Abraka.

Solomon Obozunya³

Department of Mass Communication,
Edo State University, Iyamho, Edo State.

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Abstract

In the face of escalating environmental degradation in Nigeria, the relevance of environmental communication and solution journalism cannot be undermined, as they have emerged as pivotal to fostering a sustainable environment in Nigeria. However, this paper examines the melting pot between environmental communication and solutions journalism in a bid to know their relevance in the quest for sustainable environmental development in Nigeria.. Also, the paper x-rays the prospects and challenges of environmental communication and how they impinge on effective reportage of environmental issues. The Agenda setting Theory is the theoretical framework the study is anchored on. Data for the paper were gathered using the library research method. From the findings of the study, it was also discovered that environmental communication has been very effective in reporting environmental problems as it has brought about environmental literacy geared towards educating the people on activities that affects the environment as well as telling them what they should do to ensure a sustainable environment. The paper also found that solutions journalism has always brought solutions and spurs climate action when stories lay emphasis on both environmental problems and actionable solutions. Finally, the paper recommends inter-alia that environmental journalists should always ensure that information disseminated in his course of reportage are geared towards fostering a more comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by environmental degradation and journalists who practice the solutions genre of journalism should always emphasise constructive reporting on social problems and potential solutions to environmental degradation issues. With this, the essence of solutions journalism will not be defeated.

Keywords: Environmental Communication, Climate Change, Solution Journalism, Deforestation, Environmental Degradation, Sustainable Development

Introduction

In today's world, the environment in which we live is so fundamental to our well-being and our future that it is expected of a responsible and a responsive media to give a reasonable amount of attention. As a genre of journalism that tends to unveil social problems with the aim of analysing their positive and negative effects on the society via evidence-based reporting, solution journalism as well as solution journalist is saddled with the responsibility of reporting issues that bothers on our environment.

The environmental journalist can exert positive influence on our environment cum society and consequently make useful impact on the future of our environment via solutions journalism. As noted by Gore (1991), the responsibility of giving an account of what is happening today, is not just only what is expected of the media but why it is happening, its effects on the society today, tomorrow and possible solution. This is an onus that directly falls on the mass media. According to Archibald (2010) environmental reporting is bedeviled with lack of important information. The little information available is centered on crises, limited sources information and other problems. In the face of all these pitfalls it is only little research that has been done on how environmental reporters operate and much is not known about the hurdles they encounter in the course of their reportage.

Generally, the environmental reporters face different types of problems which could be physical attack, death threat or imprisonment. For instance, journalists who want to embark on investigating the causes of global warming in some countries may receive death threat (Nwabuee, 2007). However, environmental journalists are expected to advocate for positive changes to improve the quality of the planet. According to Zazueta (2009), it is the responsibility of the journalist to educate the people about the serious state of the environment and employ the power of the media to bring about positive changes to

improve the quality of the air, water, wildlife and natural resource. With this, it is apparent that it is not just enough to report environmental hazards especially in an era of climate change.. a reportage of the environmental problems alongside the possible solutions which is the essence of solutions journalism becomes apt. as explained by Deborah Douglas quoted in Nowakowski (2024), solutions journalism gives the people a sense of hope, efficiency and a space for the inherent dignity of everybody in our community rather than problematising every situation like the traditional journalism.

Sustainable development in Nigeria is influenced by different factors including socio-economic practices, governance structure and environmental policies. The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a framework for integrating environmental sustainability into development planning. However, achieving these goals remains a challenge due to issues such as corruption, inadequate infrastructure and insufficient public participation (Adewale et al., 2021). The need for innovative and effective communication strategies to sensitise various stakeholders about sustainable practices is greater than ever.

The prospects of integrating environmental communication and solutions journalism into Nigeria's sustainable development are promising. With the Nigeria's youth population being increasingly active on social media, there is an opportunity to use these platforms for advocacy and change (Nwosu, 2018). Moreover, enhancing community-based initiatives through participatory communication can empower local communities to adopt sustainable practices (Ribot, 2024). However, numerous challenges hinder progress. These include limited access to education and information, prevailing negative media reports, weak regulatory frameworks and lack of cooperation among

stakeholders (Udo & Igbokwe, 2020). Furthermore, the pervasive influence of political and economic interests often complicates environmental messaging and undermines sustainability efforts (Eneh et al., 2019).

By and large, environmental communication and solutions journalism stresses the importance of audience participation. By integrating principles from social science such as audience segmentation and participator frameworks, journalists can develop stories that resonate deeply with different demographics thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of environmental communication (Cameron, 2020).

Statement of the Problem

In recent years, environmental degradation has emerged as one of the most pressing challenges facing Nigeria, manifesting in issues such as deforestation, pollution and climate change impacts. Despite the growing recognition of these environmental issues, effective communication strategies are often lacking, resulting in a disconnection between environmental challenges and the necessary public engagement in addressing them. According to UN Environment (2015), effective communication strategies can promote better environmental decision-making and encourage behavioural change among individuals and organizations. This transparent communication of scientific knowledge and environmental risks is essential in overcoming public apathy and misinformation (Bucchi & Nonino, 2019).

In view of the above, it seems that a possible confluence of environmental communication and solutions journalism will present a powerful paradigm to enhancing sustainable environmental practices, through a critical examination of their respective roles. With this, the quest is, to what extent has the integration of environmental communication and solutions enhanced public awareness, **DELSU Journal of Management Sciences (DELJOMS)**

engagement and advocacy for sustainable environmental initiatives? Again, how has their synergy contributed to a more informed and proactive society in the face of environmental challenges? These questions and more are the focus of this paper.

Objectives of the Research

The objectives of this study are to:

1. To find out the extent has environmental communication been used to reporting environmental problem
2. Ascertaining the effectiveness of solutions journalism in discovering and proffering solutions to environmental risk issues

Research Questions

1. To what extent has environmental communication been used to reporting environmental problem?
 1. How effective is solutions journalism in discovering and proffering solutions to environmental risk issues?

Literature Review

The concept of environmental communication and solutions journalism

Environmental communication refers to the utilization of communication to bring to bear, issues that affects the environment in order to safeguard or promote the environment (Nwabuee, 2007). Meisner (2015) explains human interaction with the environment. This interaction is a broad one. It ranges from face to face communication mass communities to general decision-making and environmental media coverage. To Flor (2004), environmental communication entails the employments of communication approaches, principles, strategies and techniques to manage and protect the environment. As defined by environmental communication scholars, it involves the demonstration and exchange of messages related to policies, ecological risks and sustainability efforts

(Cox, 2010). This domain examines the role of the media, discourse and public perception in shaping environmental attitudes and informing policy-making.

Solutions journalism is an approach to reporting that focuses on the responses and solutions to social problems rather than merely highlighting issues. It is a type of journalism that encourages a more informed public dialogue and inspires action by showcasing real-world examples of positive change. According to Nowakowski (2024) solutions journalism tends to provide answers or solutions to pressing social problems and then evaluate the efficacy of such intervention. It made you understand how your proposed solution is working or how it could work. Also known as construction journalism, solutions journalism is a practice focused on reporting about responses to social problems rather than solely on the problems themselves. As formulated by the solutions journalism Network (2013), this approach provides evidence-based nuanced stories that highlight effective responses and promote civic engagement.

Sustainable development is a concept that integrates the need for economic growth, social equity and environmental protection, ensuring that development benefits current and future population. According to Stern (2007), sustainable development involves a multi-faceted approach that spans environmental integrity, social equity and economic viability. Succinctly put, sustainable development meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (World Commission and Development, 1987). The United Nations has emphasised that sustainable development requires “transferring the world for the better in ways that inclusive, sustainable and resilient development will be attained (United Nations, 2015, sustainable Development Goals).

In Nigeria, environmental degradation has reached critical levels, manifesting through deforestation, oil pollution, waste management and biodiversity loss. These environmental issues not only threaten the ecological balance but also significantly impact public health, agriculture and economic development (Nwankwo et al., 2021). Despite the government policies and international commitments towards environmental sustainability, there exists a glaring gap in effective environmental communication that hampers public awareness and engagement (Okonkwo & Jiboku, 2020). However, reporting the environment as a core issue for the society set numerous challenges for journalists. According to some analysis and interviews made, Zazueta (2009) supplies the challenges of environmental reporting as follows:

- Lack of environmental and scientific training.
- Unavailability or limited access to government information on environmental conservation
- Threats to life and professional activities by forest mafias.
- Journalists have to deal with the issues of lack of training, resources or support from news editorials or sponsors.
- In recent times, it seems as if media focus on environmental issues has dwindled and this has affected the international scenario. With this, journalists need to address other issues such as terrorism, poverty economy politics and international relations.

However, studies indicate that available environmental stories in the media often lack depth and fail to highlight practical solutions to environmental challenges (Adeyemi & Oguntimehin, 2019). This omission can contribute to apathy and lack of collective action among the populace, as many

individual remain unaware of relevant sustainability practices or implications of their environmental footprints (Ogunyemi et al.,2021). The recognition of these arrays of problems and solutions to them will impact the creation of a dialogue that is all encompassing and a discussion on environmental issues that are of broad public concern.

Simultaneously, the concept of solutions journalism- a reporting approach that emphasizes constructive responses to societal challenges- has gained traction globally as a means to drive engagement and inspire action (Holt, 2018). While solutions journalism has the potential in Nigeria media landscape, it faces significant challenges including a lack of training or journalists, inadequate resources and predominant focus on sensational reporting that prioritises crises over solutions (Oboh et al., 2020).

Thus, the intersection of environmental communication and solutions journalism is key to fostering sustainable practices in Nigeria. Both environmental communication and solutions journalism stress the importance of audience participation. By integrating principles from social science such as audience segmentation and participatory frameworks, journalists can develop stories that resonate deeply with different demographics thereby enhancing the relevance and impact of environmental communication (Cameron, 2020). However, the current research landscape has inadequately addressed how these two fields can be integrated to drive meaningful change. This study seeks to explore the relevance of environmental communication and solutions journalism in promoting sustainability in Nigeria, examining both opportunities they present and the challenges they face in effectively contributing to environmental awareness and action.

Types of Environmental Problems in Nigeria

As a country with different topography, climate, vegetation and culture, Nigeria has various types of environmental problems. According to Education Research and Development Council (NERDC, 2008), the major environmental problems in Nigeria include:

1. **Deforestation:** This **always** happened when we destroy vegetation in the name of processing land for agriculture or construction. These activities bring about deforestation which entails the removal of plants for different purposes. Plants are very useful in our environment as they provide oxygen to the air and their roots help to protect, hold soil particles and protect them from atmosphere forces.
2. **Soil Erosion:** The removal of topsoil or surface of the soil by various agents such as humans, water or winds is referred to as soil erosion. Serious erosion generates gullies. Soil erosions are caused by heavy rains after vegetations have been removed by human beings.
3. **Desert Encroachment:** desert encroachment or desertification is a product of deforestation. i.e. the removal or destruction of tree or vegetation remains a major environmental problem in Nigeria. This is prevalent in the northern part of the country.
4. **Flooding:** Flooding occurs when there are heavy rains and there is a lot of water in place more than what the soil can absorb. Flood destroys lands, houses and other valuable properties. It is always common in riverine areas
5. **Pollution:** There are different types of pollutions in Nigeria. Pollution can be air, water or noise .oil spillage due to breakage of pipelines can also cause pollution. Any sort of pollution can cause health hazard to human beings.

6. **Coastal Erosion:** This sort of erosions occurs in coastlines and this is very common in southern Nigeria. The waves from Atlantic Ocean are major cause of coastal erosion. This type of erosion waste off the sands on beaches.

Environmental Communication and Solutions Journalism in Sustainable Development

There is plethora of studies that have explained how environmental communication and solutions journalism have contributed to environmental sustainability. Solutions journalism can compliment environmental communication by reframing the discourse around ecological crises, moving from a predominantly problem-focused narrative to one that emphasizes adoptive strategies and resilience. Public trust in environmental information can be blistered by narratives that showcase successful innovations and positive outcomes (Johnson & Donohue, 2019)

Numerous case studies illustrate the effectiveness of this synergy. For instance, initiative that combine environmental issues and solutions journalism have played a role in mobilizing actions towards sustainable practices (Bowman & Biny, 2021). Those studies provide empirical evidence of how solutions-oriented narratives can lead to increased public interest and engagement. A study carried out by Nisbert & Goida(2007) demonstrates that media coverage significantly influences public concern for environmental issues. The study also shown that the type of framing, whether negative (problem- centered) or positive (solution oriented) can shape public perception and responses.

Recent studies indicate that media engagement through solutions journalism has led to communities- level actions such as increased participation in local sustainability projects and heightened public interest in environmental policies (Cohen, 2020). For

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instance, the reporting on urban green initiatives has been shown to foster community involvement and promote behavioural changes towards sustainable practices (Sullivan, 2021). However, the collaboration of environmental communication and solutions journalism can create a synergistic effect that will amplified their collective impact on sustainable environmental practice. By combining the informative nature of environmental communication with the proactive reportage of solutions journalism, media practitioners can cultivate a more engaged citizenry. As explained by Stibbe (2015), stories that focus on constructive solutions do not inform but also motivate the audience to actively participate in environmental sustainability efforts.

The benefits of environmental communication in sustainable environment according to Nisbet (2009), include:

- **Enhanced Public Understanding of Environmental Issues:** Environmental communication increases the public's grasp of complex environmental issues, making them more relatable and understandable. This understanding is critical for informed decision-making at both individual and community levels.
- **Promotion of Behavioural Change:** Effective environmental communication can lead to significant changes in behaviours by raising awareness and motivating action. Framing messages in ways that resonate with audiences can prompt individuals and groups to adopt more sustainable practices.
- **Facilitation of Public Engagement and Policy Advocacy:** In this regard, Nisbet (2009), identifies the role of environmental communication in

fostering civic engagement. He explains that by connecting environmental issues to public values and interests, communication efforts can galvanise advocacy for policy changes at local, national and international levels.

- **Building Community Resilience:** Environmental communication strengthens community networks by fostering discussions around environmental issues and collective actions. Stronger communities are better equipped to address environmental challenges effectively.
- **Encouragement of Environmental Justice:** Effective communication strategies can amplify marginalized voices in discussions about environmental issues leading to more equitable solutions and policies. By addressing environmental justice, communication can help in identifying and remedying inequalities.

Theoretical Framework

Any analysis of agenda setting must start with the question whose agenda, and articulated through discourse? What is obvious is that there is much more to the agenda setting process than merely listing what is important (Watson 2003). Proposed in 1972/1973 by McComb and Shaw, the theory posits that the mass/ news media may not always succeed in telling us what to think but they quite succeed in telling us what to think about. According to Asemah (2011) agenda are topical issues or subjects of discussion. These issues or subjects elicit negative or positive responses from the public.

Citing McComb and Shaw (1972), Fab – Ukozor (2004) explains that this theory was developed after the study of the media role in the 1968 presidential election of the United

States confirm that the mass media do influence the thinking of the people or shape their opinion towards a particular direction is quite tremendous. He also explained that McComb and Shaw argued that by paying attention to some issues and neglecting others, the mass media decide the agenda of public discourse. Hence, the level of public attention given to the issues is determined by the gate-keeping function of the mass media.

McComb and Shaw, cited in Fab-Ukozor (2004) say this much when they state that in choosing and displaying news; editors, news room staff and broadcaster pay an important part in shaping political reality. Readers learn not only about a given issues, but how much importance attach to that issue from the amount of information in a new story and its position.

This view further reinforced by Spears and Sevdegant's assertion that:

The images that appear in mass media not only reflect society, they play a role in directing it as well people either see themselves, their values and their aspirations reprinted in the media or they not. To the extent people find themselves represented in the media, they find their goals and activities validated.

The foregoing implies that the media “play drums and when they play their drums”, we begin to dance to the tune of their music. It is however worthy to note that the issues raised by the media change from time to time and it is because the society is dynamic. So many events transpire in our society on daily basis. Thus, as events happen at different times, the issue raised by the media change. Folarin (1998) note that agenda setting theory implies that the mass media predetermine what issues are regarded as important at any given society. Agenda setting theory does not ascribe to them the power to determine what we are thinking about. The elements involved in agenda setting according to Folarin (1998) include:

- i. The quantity or frequency of reporting;
- ii. Prominence given to the reports through headlines display, pictures and layout in newspapers, magazines, films, graphics or timing on radio and televisions;
- iii. The degree of conflict generated reports' and
- iv. Cumulative media specific effect over time.

In reporting environmental issues, the mass media are expected to mount the the driver's seat with regard to agenda setting and create awareness on environmental issues. Environmental issues should be reported in the media in different forms of media including editorials, opinion, investigative reports and interviews (Olatunji, 2004).

Methodology

This study adopted the library research method. This type of research method is based on the materials published in reports and similar documents that are available in public libraries, websites and data obtained from surveys already carried out. This method is conducted without direct interaction with individuals or the collection of new data. Library research is cost-effective and time – efficient, making it a valuable method for obtaining a broad understanding of a topic or for laying a ground work for more focused primary research. However, it is essential to recognized it limitations, such as potential bias in existing data and the inability to capture real- time or context- software or context specific information (Ikharo, Ekwemalor Agbaka and Arikenbi, 2024).

Findings

Research Question one: to what extent has environmental communication been used to reporting environmental problem?

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As a non-fiction form of reporting that bothers on reporting issues of deforestation, soil erosion, flooding, pollution etc, environmental communication has been very effective in reporting environmental problems. As noted by Nwabueze (2007), environmental communication brings about environmental literacy geared towards educating the people on activities that affects the environment as well as telling them what they should do to ensure a sustainable environment.

Research Question two: how effective is solutions journalism in discovering and proffering solutions to environmental risk issues?

As observed by Maduneme (2025) solutions journalism has always brought solutions and spurs climate action when stories lay emphasis on both environmental problems and actionable solutions. This empower readers as it showcase their potential contribution in ameliorating situations raised their sense of collective potency and zeal to act. Corroborating, Frost (2022) notes that a flooding story about Connecticut town underscores the economic benefits with environmental solutions which bring about hope and encouragement among readers. These findings are pointer to the fact solutions journalism can serve as veritable tool to fostering positive environmental change and sustainability, as far as it balances optimism with sincere calls to action.

Conclusion

Despite, the fact that environmental communication and solutions journalism in Nigeria is faced by several challenges between both genres of journalism presents significant prospects for advancing sustainable development in Nigeria. To harness the full potentials of these approaches, it is essentials to invest in media literacy enhance collaboration among stakeholders and promote policies that support independent

journalism. However, the way forward lies on nurturing an ecosystem where environmental stories and solutions are not only told but actively embraced by creating a more sustainable future for all Nigeria,

Recommendations

Based on the findings the paper recommends:

1. Environmental journalists should always ensure that information disseminated in his course of reportage are geared

towards fostering a more comprehensive approach to understanding and addressing the multifaceted challenges posed by environmental degradation.

2. Journalists who practice the solutions genre of journalism should always emphasise constructive reporting on social problems and potential solutions to environmental degradation issues. With this, the essence of solutions journalism will not be defeated.

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