

**ASSESSMENT OF THE ROLE OF THE MASS MEDIA IN
PREVENTION OF ENVIRONMENTAL POLLUTION AMONG
RESIDENTS OF ETSAKO WEST LOCAL GOVERNMENT,
EDO STATE**

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ABSTRACT: Environmental pollution and degradation have constituted a bane to the development of Nigeria. The media have been seen to be an important tool in creating awareness, informing and educating the public. However, this study examined the role of the mass media in prevention of environmental pollution among residents of Etsako West Local government Area of Edo State. The survey approach was used for this study and questionnaire was used as the instrument for data collection. A sample size of 400 respondents was taken for the study and data from the questionnaire were analysed in frequency tables and simple percentages. The study was anchored on Agenda setting theory. Findings however revealed that the mass media have not been carrying out environmental campaign/communication. The study also found out that media's extensive involvement in environmental campaigns suggests that they have the power to set the agenda and prioritise environmental issues in public discourse. It therefore recommends that, Mass media should engage more in environmental communication, advocacy campaign to address environmental issues in Nigeria.

Keywords: Mass Media, Environmental Pollution, Environmental Degradation, Etsako,

INTRODUCTION

Environment is an important requirement for existence of human and non-human components of the society. The word “*Environment*” is derived from the French word “*Environ*” which means “*Surrounding*”. Thus, literally, environment means everything around a living being, especially the circumstances of life of people or society in their life conditions. It comprises the set of natural, social and cultural values existing in a place and at a particular time, that influence in the life of the human being and in the generations to come. i.e., it is not only the space in which life develops, but it also includes living beings, objects, water, soil, air and the relations between them as well as intangibles like culture.

Unless the environment is protected, the existence of life on the planet earth would be impossible. That is why environmental issues have become globally important. All people must give their contribution for the betterment of environment.

Apparently, the need to protect our environment is pertinent. This certainly led to the United Nations Conference on Environment 'Stockholm Conference' and the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED). The conference came up with AGENDA 21 which spelt out the strategies for improving the quality of the environment. The document emphasized the need for environmental education as a weapon that could be used by the nation to arouse people's consciousness, positively charge their attitude and instil in them those values and skills that can promote effective environmental management. and making information about the environment publicly available to the media essential for achieving sustainable development (EIR, 2002); with access to environmental information, the people have full knowledge of the implications of their activities on the environment and are able to participate more effectively in decision making process that affect the environment.

Over the years, the Nigerian environment especially the Niger Delta region has been faced with problem of environmental pollution ranging from oil pollution and spillage. Every state suffers from one form of environmental problem or the other in varying degree. Additionally, soil erosion, deforestation, bush burning, pollution of the air and water, poor solid waste disposal, and other issues endanger metropolitan areas. These have led to agitation over the years (Ukaogo, et al, 2020).

Wind, erosion, and deforestation issues are literally "blowing away" Nigeria's states in Nigeria. For instance, Cross River State alone has tropical high forests covering more than 29% of the state. These forests are rich in biodiversity and produce economically valuable wood and non-timber forest products. However, the majority of these woods fall under the direct control of the Federal Government of Nigeria as a component of the National Park system and are off-limits to both state and community use. As a result of rapid farmland expansion and illegal logging, the remaining forest outside the park has come under increasing pressure. Over the past few years, both community forest (traditional/communally owned forest areas) and the state forest reserves have experienced significant loss and degradation (Jharotia, 2019).

In the past decades, sustainability and environmental awareness have gained media attention. This is because it is believed that the media through their information, education and enlightenment roles have the capacity to create awareness among the people with a view to bringing to end the environmental degradation and pollution woes that have bedevilled the nation over the years. This paper in view of this examined how the media in Nigeria have been able to create awareness on environmental issues with a view to bringing about a lasting solution.

Environmental pollution is a pervasive global concern that poses significant threats to human health and the overall ecosystem. Etsako West, a local government area located in Edo State, Nigeria, also faces its fair share of environmental pollution challenges. In order to combat and prevent such pollution, the role of mass media becomes crucial in effectively disseminating knowledge, raising awareness, and influencing positive behavioural change among the local residents.

Statement of the Problem

Over time, the problems of environmental pollution and degradation have constituted a bane to the development of Nigeria. This problem has attracted the attention of international community. The government in a bid to be responsible has organized various intervention programmes to tackle the problems of pollution. Such interventions include but not limited to the Ogoni Cleanup.

Today, problem of hunger has increased because farmlands and waterways have been greatly damaged because of oil spillage and other environmental pollution agents. This has increased criminality, agitation and other forms of insecurity in the communities where they occur.

Over the years, the media have been seen to be an important tool in creating awareness, informing and educating the masses on key issues that is paramount to the society. In spite of the remarkable progress made in providing environmental information in Nigeria, the issues of environmental pollution still persist. This study in view of this examined the role of the media in preventing environmental pollution.

Apart from the above, there are few studies like Enobakhare, Orem and Ogah (2013); Jharotia (2019) have carried out studies on media and environmental awareness but little or nothing has been done regarding the role of the media in the prevention of environmental pollution. This gap is what this study is out to fill.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this study were to:

1. Determine the Role of the media in Prevention of Environmental pollution;
2. Examine the medium through which Estako West Residents are exposed to environmental pollution messages
3. To find out the effectiveness of media campaign towards environmental pollution
4. To Ascertain the perception of Estako West residents of role of the media in the prevention of environmental pollution

LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigeria is a country with a varied landscape. Its southernmost point has a tropical rain forest and mangrove swamps across the coastlines. The areas outside the rainforest are largely Savannah consisting of fewer trees and grasses. The country has an estimated population of 218,541,212 (<https://www.macrotrends.net/countries/NGA/nigeria/population-growth-rate>). This large population has been observed to be particularly dense in the urban area as population density in urban Nigeria is 167.5 people per square kilometre. This large population engages in activities for survival with consequences for the environment. The environmental effects of hosting such a large population are deforestation, soil degradation and oil spillage. Nigeria has been particularly noted to have the highest rate of deforestation in the world. There is an annual loss of about 2.4% of forest in 15 years from 1990 (FAO, 2022). One place where there has been a monumental ecological disaster as a result of human activities in the Niger

Delta region. For Afinotan and Ojakorotu (2009), the Niger Delta area is a crisis region. The region, prior to oil exploration supported substantial subsistence resources for the people who are largely sedentary. Subsistence activities involved medicine from mangrove resources, food from water as well as wood for energy and shelter, stable soil for crop farming as well as commercial fishing. The activities of oil majors were to affect the subsistence of the local populace in a more profound way through the mechanism of pollution. The activity of drilling and equipment failure operational error has led to occasions of blow outs, pipeline verbalization with onshore and offshore spillage creating an environmental problem for the local people. For Ebegbulem, Ekpe and Adejumo (2013) oil exploration in the region has led to income poverty for the residents of the oil producing communities in their own words.

The Niger Delta region of Nigeria is richly endowed with natural resources with oil and gas accounting for over 85% of the nation's gross domestic product (GDP), over 95% of the national budget; and over 80% of the national wealth. Paradoxically the region remains the poorest, due largely to the ecologically unfriendly exploitation of oil and state policies that expropriate the indigenous peoples of their rights to these natural resources p. 279.

The Niger Delta region is home to approximately 30 million people. However, this people are largely deprived as they lack basic essential services such as electricity, sanitation, healthcare and primary education. Energy poverty, poor governance, gas flaring and oil pollution continues to put this large population in a cycle of poverty. The UNDP assessment of the situation paints a gloomy situation," a prime example of a region and nation deeply affected by the resource curse. The paradox that a country with an abundance of natural resources, specifically non-renewable minerals and fossil fuels tends to have a negative effect on economic growth and development than countries with fewer natural resources (UNDP report in stakeholderdemocracy.org). Oil production contributes the largest share of government revenues since the 1970s. The resultant effect of this singular activity is the displacement of other economic activities in the region as such as farming activities due to the spillover of oil exploration and oil spills in the environment.

Pollution has been defined as the introduction of harmful materials into the environment. Harmful materials are known as pollutants such as noisy human activity, trash, sewage, carbon mono-oxide, pesticide and others (Ukaogo, Ewuzie, & Omwuka, 2020). Pollutants undermine the quality of air, land and water. This is because every living thing, whether it is one called microbes to complex beings, depends on the earth's supply of air, water and land to thrive. Chemicals known as chlorofluoro-carbons (CFC) which can be found in gases, aerosol cans have been known to damage the ozone layer. The ozone layer is known to protect the earth by absorbing harmful ultraviolet radiation. If people get exposed to the ultraviolet rays, they can develop skin cancer, eye disease and other illnesses (Balk & CEHSD,2011).

Increasing concern with pollution has led to the concern with the issues associated with pollution since the 1990s (Martinez, Dabert, Barrington & Burton,2009). Global movements such as the green movements which seek to stop the degradation of nature from human activity have become immensely popular because pollution discourse reflects a bleak future for humanity if the current trend in the introduction of harmful effects in to the environment is not

curtailed. Pollution across the world manifests varyingly. In Europe, about 90% of people living the cities are exposed to air pollution (eea.europa.eu/themes/air/intro). Harmful toxins like particulate matter and nitrogen dioxide have been observed to be common pollutants. Fine particulate matter has been observed to reduce life expectancy by as much as eight months. Air quality in India falls below world health organization standards. China's waste pollution is huge as China generates 300 million tons per year (229.4kgkap/year). About 38,610 square miles of China's land have been polluted with contaminated water which amount to 1/10th of China's cultivatable land. In Nigeria, pollution is a worrisome problem with little policy intervention according to the brogan project (2022) Nigeria has the largest number of fatalities from air pollution in Africa.

Bearing in mind this ugly trend in pollution in Nigeria and globally, the need for the mass media to engage in environmental communication is very important. It is necessary and will help in making the difference in the future.

The use of advocacy campaigns for environmental communication; Speaking for the environment

An advocacy campaign is described as a planned and organized set of actions destined for a particular audience in order to influence a course of action (Welton & Freelon, 2018; Mayne, Green, Guilt, Walsh, English & Cairney, 2018; Gardner & Brindis, 2020). The course of action encompasses policymaking, change of attitudes and norms. This implies that advocacy campaigns as environmental communication is a communicative role. Through communication, a particular message is sent to a particular audience. Advocacy campaign is thus a type of social campaign. Andrews (2008) described a social campaign as a large-scale attempt to communicate ideas and practices either through mass media, ideas and/or interpersonal communication. All social campaigns seek to demonstrate to decision makers and the public that an issue is important and should concern everyone.

Mass Media and the Environmental Agenda

The first thing that advocacy does is to define the problem. Agenda setting refers to the list of problems or issues that government officials or organization are paying serious attention and giving time and considering as a public agenda at the at the public meeting or legislature, in other word it is the set of issues that government decide to take action against. Agenda-setting is also used to explain the creation of public awareness and concern on salient issues deemed so by decision makers. It is this capacity of selective approach to issues that also informs the political communication of specific issues. In recognition of this selective approach to issues, Cobb and Elder (1977) developed the agenda setting theory. It identifies as its core assumption the power of some groups to have a greater ease of access than others and are thus more likely to get their demands placed on agenda than others. Cobb and Elder ascribed even more importance to decision makers, claiming that in order for an issue to attain agenda status, it must be supported by at least some of key decision makers as they act as guardians of the formal agenda. They also asserted that certain personages can act as opinion leaders and bring media coverage to a particular issue. Very powerful resources of information can even influence whether an issue receives media attention at all. Policy formulation is the passage of legislation designed to remedy past problem or prevent future potential problem, it can be

inducements, rules, facts, rights or powers, and typically it is the legislature task and policy implementation is the most important part of policy cycle, it means what happen after a bill become a law (Bardach, 1977) or the actions that will be taken to put the law into impact or the problem will be solved by following a set of process to translate the law into actions that ensure the achievement of the legislation. Policy evaluation is the measurement of the actual effects of legislation on the particular problem or to what extent policies achieve its intended results, and that's will be possible by looking for the consequences of the implementation of these policies and learn from it. Policy changes or termination is the redesign some policy to become a new policy after evaluates it (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980).

The mass media can elevate an issue to a pressing problem. Through framing, mass media can draw the attention of the public or the government to pollution in the environment which will lead to greater interest in policy formulation to address the issues of pollution and the environmental health.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is anchored on agenda setting theory.

Agenda setting theory states that the news media have a large influence on audiences, in terms of what stories to consider newsworthy and how much prominence and space to give them. Agenda setting theory's main postulate is salience transfer. Salience transfer is the ability of the news media to transfer issues of importance from their news media agendas to public agendas. Through their day-by-day selection and display of the news, editors and news directors, etc, focus our attention and influence our perceptions of what are the most important issues of the day. This ability to influence the salience of topics on the public agenda has come to be called the agenda setting role of the news media. Related to agenda setting is agenda building theory, which explores how an issue comes to the attention of policy makers and media. The media agenda is the set of issues addressed by media sources

The use of this theory on this paper is premised on the assumption that mass media can elevate an issue to a pressing problem. Through agenda setting, mass media can draw the attention of the public or the government to pollution in the environment which will lead to greater interest in policy formulation to address the issues of pollution and the environmental health.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the survey research method. Survey, according to Asemah, Gujbawu, Ekhareafu and Okpanchi (2017), is a form of research design that is aimed at collecting large and small samples from a population in order to examine the distribution, incidence, interaction of educational activities like sociological and psychological variables. Survey is mainly used because it is considered the most suitable method for data collection method in the behavioural sciences.

The population of this study comprises all residents of Etsako West Local Government Area of Edo State. The projected population for Etsako West Local Government in 2018 according to the National Population Commission (NPC) is 260,700. From this population, the researcher

used the Taro Yamani sample size to determine the sample size. The Taro Yamani sample size was used because it gives room to a fair sample size and it was deemed appropriate for this study.

The sample size was derived using the Taro Yamani sample size as follow:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne^2}$$

Where

n = sample size

N = population

e = 0.05

$$n = \frac{260700}{1 + 260700(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{260700}{1 + 651.75}$$

$$n = \frac{260700}{652.75}$$

$$n = 400$$

Because of the complexity of Etsako West Local Government Area, the multi-stage probability sampling method was used in selecting the sample for this study. At the first stage, Etsako West was divided into five major clans (Auchi, Uzairue, South-Ibie, Anwain and Aviele). At the second stage, from each of these clans, two villages were selected each. From the two villages, ten streets were selected and administered with 40 copies of the questionnaire each. Which is $40 \times 10 = 400$.

The instrument that was used as data collection was the questionnaire. The data collected were analysed using the simple percentage method.

RESULTS

A total of 400 copies of questionnaire were administered out of which 350 were returned and found useable.

Table 1: Respondents' view on Role of Mass media

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Environmental sensitization	10	2.9%
Report degradation	80	22.9%
Report populations	10	2.9%
All of the above	250	71.4%
Total	350	100

Table two showed respondents' views on the role of mass media in environmental communication. The data showed that mass media monitor environmental activities, report degradation and report irregularities in our environments. This is because 71.4% of the respondents said so.

Table 2: Respondents' view on Extent of media in environment communication

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very high	200	57%
High	50	14.3%
Undecided	50	14.3%
Low extent	50	14.3%
Very Low	—	—
Total	350	100

Table two shows the extent to which respondents perceive media to be involved in environmental campaigns. Findings showed that the extent to which they are involved in environmental campaign is very high. This is not unconnected with the fact that 200 of the respondents or 57% said the extent to which media are involved in environmental campaign is very high.

Table 3: Respondents' view on the Media Platform they were exposed to environmental communication

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Radio	30	8.6%
Television	20	5.7%
Newspapers	100	28.6%
Magazine		
Social media	-	0%
All of the above	200	57.1%
Total	350	100

Table three showed the response on the most preferred medium that respondents use. The findings showed that all media platforms were used to access environmental information. This

is because 200 or 57.1% of the respondents said they got exposed to information on environmental pollution via newspapers, magazine, radio, television and social media.

Table 4: Respondents' view on the Effectiveness of Mass media in the campaign against environmental pollution

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Very effective	200	57.1%
Effective	50	14.3%
Undecided	10	2.9%
Less effective	80	22.9
Not effective	10	2.9%
Total	350	100

Table four shows the extent to which respondents perceive mass medias' effectiveness against environmental pollution. Findings showed that mass media are very effective in the campaign against environmental pollution. This is because 57.1% of the respondents admitted that mass media are very effective in the campaign against environmental pollution.

Table 5: Response on whether media have been carrying out campaign against environmental pollution

Variable	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Agreed	50	14.3
Agreed	10	2.9
Undecided	70	20.0
Disagreed	10	2.9
Strongly Disagreed	210	60.0
Total	350	100.0

Data showed media have not been carrying out environmental campaign against vote buying. This is because 60% of the respondents strongly disagreed that mass media have been adequately carrying out their campaign against environmental pollution.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The data showed that mass media monitor environmental activities, report degradation and report irregularities in our environments. This is because 71.4% of the respondents said so.

Table two shows the extent to which respondents perceive media to be involved in environmental campaigns. Findings showed that the extent to which they are involved in environmental campaign is very high. This is not unconnected with the fact that 200 of the respondents or 57% said the extent to which media are involved in environmental campaign is very high. Firstly, the finding that mass media monitors environmental activities, reports degradation and irregularities in our environments aligns with the agenda setting theory. This

shows that the media plays a crucial role in highlighting environmental issues and bringing them to the attention of the public.

. The findings showed that all media platforms were used to access environmental information. This is because 200 or 57.1% of the respondents said they got exposed to information on environmental pollution via newspapers, magazine, radio, television and social media.

Table four shows the extent to which respondents perceive mass Media' effectiveness against environmental pollution. Findings showed that mass media are very effective in the campaign against environmental pollution. This is because 57.1% of the respondents admitted that mass media are very effective in the campaign against environmental pollution. Furthermore, the high perception of media involvement in environmental campaigns supports the agenda setting theory. The media's extensive involvement in environmental campaigns suggests that they have the power to set the agenda and prioritise environmental issues in public discourse.

The finding that all media platforms were used to access environmental information further supports the agenda setting theory. This indicates that the media has the ability to shape public opinion and influence people's understanding of environmental pollution by using various channels to disseminate information.

Additionally, the perception of mass media's effectiveness against environmental pollution aligns with the agenda setting theory. The fact that a significant majority of respondents believe that the media is very effective in their campaign against environmental pollution suggests that the media has successfully influenced public opinion and raised awareness about the issue.

Data showed media have not been carrying out environmental campaign against vote buying. This is because 60% of the respondents strongly disagreed that mass media have been adequately carrying out their campaign against environmental pollution. This is against the provision of the agenda setting theory that this study is pinned to. It is pertinent to state that if the media gives salience to the issue of environmental pollution by giving it the needed attention.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that mass media play a significant role in monitoring environmental activities, reporting degradation, and highlighting irregularities in the environment. The majority of respondents agreed that mass media are involved in environmental campaigns to a high extent. Additionally, all media platforms, including newspapers, magazines, radio, television, and social media, are utilized to access information on environmental pollution.

Furthermore, the data suggests that mass media are perceived as being very effective in the campaign against environmental pollution. However, it is important to note that the findings also indicate that media have not been carrying out environmental campaigns against vote buying adequately, as a significant percentage of respondents strongly disagreed with this statement.

Recommendations

The following are hereby recommended in view of the findings of this study:

1. Based on the agenda setting theory, which posits that media influence the salience of issues in public opinion, it can be recommended that mass media continue their efforts in monitoring and reporting on environmental activities, degradation, and irregularities. This can help raise awareness and mobilise public support for environmental protection.
2. Additionally, the media should focus on addressing and raising awareness about other important environmental issues, such as oil spillage, indiscriminate refuse dumping, to ensure comprehensive coverage of environmental concerns.
3. To further enhance the effectiveness of media campaigns against environmental pollution, it is crucial for media organizations to collaborate with relevant stakeholders, such as environmental organisations, government agencies, and community groups. This can help amplify the impact of media messages and facilitate collective action towards environmental protection.
4. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of media in shaping public opinion and driving action on environmental issues. By leveraging their influence and utilising various media platforms, media organisations can contribute significantly to the protection and preservation of the environment

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