

Examining Media Literacy and Climate Change Media Coverage in West Africa: A Case Study of Nigeria and Ghana

Samuel Ajala
Co-Founder / Research Lead
Solar360 Media
Abuja, Nigeria.

Oladayo Johnson Ibitoye
Graduate,
Department of Mass Communication
Kwara State University.

Abstract:- The paucity of climate journalism in Africa is a lamentable reality. The media bridges the gap between the government and the citizens; it is the powerhouse of developed countries and serves as a watchdog for political leaders. Over the years, the media in Africa has done little to educate the masses on climate change, which is currently a global challenge.

In this essay, We examine the current state of climate change in Africa, focusing on West Africa taking Nigeria and Ghana as case studies. Furthermore, this essay will hone in on the current state and recent development of climate journalism and will propose some working hypotheses on how to augment the practice in developing countries, particularly Nigeria and Ghana (West Africa)

I. INTRODUCTION

According to a report by World Population Review, Africa is one of the largest continents in the world. Africa ranks as the second most populous continent after Asia. The continent is also the most diversified in terms of cultures, languages, and people groups. However, this isn't just because of the vast population, but some of which are still largely untouched by modern life and technology. Therefore, it is important to note that population growth is still ongoing at a rapid rate due to rapid increase in childbirth.¹

In other words, while being one of the world's most populous continents, Africa suffers from extreme food insecurity and is often the most susceptible to the consequential effects of climate change as reported by Evelyn Tagbo, in a paper by Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism argues: "Africa presents a number of intriguing contradictions which in many ways capture its development challenges. It is the world's second-largest continent in size Yet, poses a great concern of being one of the poorest regions in the world struggling to feed itself (Reuters Institute, 2010)."²

The debilitating effects of climate change are far from abstract, as increased weather unpredictability and extreme weather events have been taking their toll on Africans. Health

and property are threatened and the natural resources upon which many Africans depend are affected by flood, drought, erosion and climate-amplified conflict.

The unpredictability and variability of climate change including rainfall patterns on the continent affect plant physiology, especially yields from rain-fed farms (National Library of Medicine, 2019).³ According to Schäfer and Painter (2021), this has contributed to the decline in food security in the continent, malnutrition, as well as poor public health outcomes.⁴ In addition to the many economic and social threats to the all-round stability of Africans, especially Nigeria and Ghana, the continent does not have a strong climate journalism space (Ajaero, Anorue, 2018).⁵ As a result of the poor journalism, nine climate change journalism fellows from West Africa including Nigeria and Ghana underwent five months' training on covering and reporting climate change (Punch, 2023).⁶

As the continent most affected by climate change, it is expected that Africa be at the forefront of discussions surrounding the mitigation of climate change. There can only be a way forward if the media is engaging the masses on climate change. While mere media coverage without concomitant actions cannot mitigate the effects of or facilitate adaptation to climate change. It is a way forward – a recognizably reasonable one – in climate change mitigation and adaptation. Hence, this study will examine climate change media coverage and its role in mitigating the climate change issue in West Africa by analyzing measures Ghana and Nigeria have taken to improve its media literacy and climate change journalism. The essay will delve into the intricacies of climate change journalism in Ghana and Nigeria and examine the ways both countries have and are trying to improve on media coverage as it relates to climate change.

II. CLIMATE CHANGE IN AFRICA: A CASE STUDY OF NIGERIA AND GHANA IN WEST AFRICA

➤ *The Vulnerability of Africa to Climate Change*

Multiple stressors are responsible for the vulnerability of Africa to environmental and climate changes. While

inadequate resources to resist or cushion the effects will only increase these vulnerabilities, the outcome of a study on climate change conducted in 2009 warns that the shift in rainfall patterns could put as much as a square kilometer of marginal farmlands in sub-Saharan Africa in ruins by 2050.⁷

A professor of Geological Geosciences at the University of Texas, United States, Prof. Kerry Cook, also noted that “In Africa, we have a special concern about abrupt climate change because we know from the records of past climate that climate can change abruptly in this region.”

Cook forecast that more hardship would ravage Africa due to increase in temperatures, droughts, and flooding. The abruptness of change in climate will result in the limitedness of time for the continent to mitigate its effects.⁸

Rain-fed agriculture system which completely depends on weather is mostly practiced and relied upon by Africans. The climate situation in Africa worsens even more as the continent needs better governance and better implementation of policies on adaptation strategies.

In addition, Africa is one of the least contributing regions to the emission of greenhouse but suffers disproportionately from the adverse effects of climate change (IPCC, 2022).⁹

➤ *A Case of Climate Change in Nigeria*

The current state of climate change has worsened in Nigeria with an increase in the unpredictability of the weather. The variations in weather conditions such as rainfall, sunshine, humidity, temperature of a location on an average daily basis are reflections of climate change. In recent times, it has been aggravated by human activities above other natural shifts or variations. The conversation around climate change is a difficult one, but it must happen for us to mitigate the harmful impacts of human activities.

There are two major seasons in Nigeria which are the rainy season and the dry season, with a short period of harmattan in the dry season. Interestingly, one may ask, how does harmattan occur in February/March or the ‘snowfall’ once seen in Taraba State? Or, even the extreme drought in rainforest zones? These scenarios have been proven to be the direct consequences of climate change.

Their occurrence is due to the depletion of the ozone layer in the atmosphere, which is termed global warming. The ozone layer prevents heat from the sun from reaching the earth at a high intensity, but when gases are released into the atmosphere from sources such as human and natural factors, the ozone layer gets depleted.¹⁰

From the preceding discussions, Nigeria’s climate change is seen in rise in temperature, sea level and flooding, variations in rainfall pattern, desertification, loss of biodiversity, land degradation, drought etc. The variations in

rainfall pattern have led to increase in its intensity and durations, causing runoffs and flooding in many places across the country.

To expound further, if the issue of climate change is not addressed as soon as possible, rainfall variations are projected to rise continually. In the southern parts, precipitation is expected to rise, rising sea levels may aggravate flooding and submerge coastal lines. These abnormalities may intensify droughts, especially in Northern Nigeria. Lakes, including Lake Chad, have experienced a sudden decrease in size. However, as this is threatening aquatic lives, the loss of water can lead to loss of lakes in affected areas.¹¹

There has been a significant rise in temperature since the 1980s, and climate is projected to rise proportionately in coming decades across ecological zones. These realities have evidently proven the impact of climate change on Nigeria (demographically, geographically, and on security impacts) and call for responses to address it (i.e. climate change adaptation and mitigation).¹²

➤ *A Case of Climate Change in Ghana*

The Forest Zone and the Northern Savannah Ecological Zone are the two broad ecological zones in Ghana. The Forest Zone accounts for 30% of the southern region while the Northern Zone accounts for 70%. At least 55% of Ghana’s land area is dedicated to agriculture, 14% for pasture and 18% is considered arable.¹³

The country’s agriculture sector is dominated by rain-fed smallholder family farms, and are therefore sensitive to climate changes. Only 2% of its irrigation potential is in use. The estimate of rain-fed farms is 80%, only a few irrigation systems are functional. The average size of these small farms is 1.2 hectares.

The agriculture sector is an important player in Ghanaian economy, providing formal and informal job opportunities for 45% of its labour force. It accounts for almost 20% of its total GDP and almost half the revenues generated from exportation. Some of the leading Ghanaian agricultural products include corn, yam, cassava, peanuts etc., while cocoa, rubber, palm oil, and sugar cane are some of the commercial crops. Besides Côte d’Ivoire, Ghana is the highest producer and exporter of cocoa.¹⁴

Major staple crops are projected to be lowered by rising temperatures. It is estimated that cassava yields will fall by 29.6% by 2080 and corn production by 7% in the year 2050. The presence of pests and diseases are also likely to be increased which can lead to failures or reductions in crop yields. Besides rising temperatures, soil salination, coastal erosion, flooding etc, are also causing decreased cocoa production, especially along the coast.

Expectedly, as inconsistencies in rainfall fester, shortening growing seasons, yield losses may become much more severe. Inadequate rainfall will shorten farming seasons which may bring about desertification land in which unsustainable farming practices like poor soil management and limited crop rotation are responsible for.

Two most affected sectors of Ghanaian economy by climate change effects are livestock and agriculture. They form the pedestal of the country's economy and a major player in employment of its economically active population. Ghana's water resources are already threatened by climate change. It is estimated that \$160 million worth of damage may be incurred annually from flood exposure.¹⁵

Another crucial industry driving the economy of Ghana is the fisheries sector. Some lakes for fisheries are Lake Botsumtwi and Lake Volta. Rise in sea surface temperature poses great threat to the reproductive cycles and migratory patterns of aquatic species. Some key species of Ghana fisheries are tilapia, anchovies, catfish and sardines. Climate change (and overfishing) has compelled Ghana to increase seafood imports to satisfy local demands substantially.¹⁶

➤ *The Paucity of Media Coverage of Climate Change in Africa*

Elif Cansu Illhan and Meri Baghdasaryan in an article titled, "Why Climate Journalism Matters," aver that "Climate Journalism fulfils a unique role in covering one of – if not the most – pressing issues of our time. It includes coverage of the latest environmental predictions and scientific data, as well as reporting from climate summits and conventions, thereby contributing to the public debate on climate crisis."¹⁷

A founding father of the United States who was among those who drafted the US constitution,¹⁸ James Wilson, says of the media: In regards to public policy, the media is to function in three differing roles, which are, watchdog, gatekeeper and scorekeeper for the government. The media serves as the gatekeeper in that it brings to the public awareness topics that are relevant to all public sectors. In the same vein, it also ensures that a topic is ingrained in the public's mindset. The role of the media as the gatekeeper for the government reinforces the power of the media in the education of the masses; it enunciates the fact of the media's undeniable influence in the conduct of the citizens.¹⁹ In a strikingly parallel form, a Nigerian online media outlet, the Premium Times reported on August 9, 2023, the huge step taken in the limelight by the Centre for Journalism Innovation and Development (CJID) is set to engage 20 mainstream journalists in a 2-day capacity-building workshop focused on climate change and environmental reporting.

The project manager, Felicia Dairo, mentions that there was a paucity of adequate information on climate change-related matters in Africa especially. Whereas, Africa is one of the most vulnerable to climate change. Nonetheless, the media

pays lilliputian attention to climate Journalism in Africa. With a baritone of hope, the project manager, in her own words, says, "the series of capacity building for journalists by CDJID is conscious effort in ensuring the bridge between knowledge and capacity deficit of climate change reporting across West Africa and a way of changing the narrative of low climate change reportage."²⁰

Africa, being the most vulnerable to climate change, rather than champion climate journalism by ensuring public awareness of its cause and effect and measures taken to adapt to it, and mitigate the consequences of climate change, has taken the backseat with respect to media coverage. The news of climate change is rather flowing from the least affected region to the most affected region.

➤ *Government Attitude Towards Climate Change in Nigeria and Ghana*

Both Nigeria and Ghana belong to quite a number of international bodies responsible for the control and regulations of climate change such as The National Climate Change Policy (NCCP), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), National Adaptation Plan (NAP) amongst others.

Both countries have not shown adequate policy implementation plans to prevent, adapt or curtail the circumstances surrounding climate change, while this has been a bothering issue of discussion on global platforms.

➤ *Nigeria: The Recent Campaign in Nigerian Election*

African Policy Research Institute on March 22, 2023, published an article by Habiba Ahut Daggash, one of the series on the just recently concluded Nigerian presidential election. One of the challenges stated in the series is the fact that little mention of how to ensure climate change mitigation and adaptation was mentioned in the manifestos of all leading political aspirants of the just concluded election. Daggash, in her own words:

Recently, the most domineering topic in Nigerian media coverage is the just-conducted presidential election. Candidates' manifestos, track records, and campaign speeches were endlessly scrutinized. Voters made assessments of political aspirants based on competence, meaningful, realistic and impactful ideas, to realize Nigeria's much-talked-about economic and industrial potentials. Shockingly, much of the debate are void of climate change, an issue that dominates global political commentary.²¹

If the issue is imminent as climate change is not a factor considered alongside other economic and social issues to be dealt with headlong by the presidential candidates, then the poor representation of such thoughts on the manifestos is a testament to the poor media coverage in Nigeria in this case of climate change. In 2009, Experts claimed the change in climate and weather conditions will have a significant impact

on the already compromised food security in Africa. This is already a reality in the year 2023, as unpredictability in weather forecasts is heightened and rain-fed farmlands are affected by climate change.

Far below expectations, Nigeria has been lackadaisical or inconsistent in ensuring substantial efforts are geared towards curtailing climate change. Only 1.5°C of Nigeria's actions and policies seem to be compatible when they are compared to its fair share contributions. When compared to the level of actions and steps needed to meet the warming limit, Nigeria is not on track (Climate Action Tracker, 2023).²²

According to the Energy Transition Plan of Nigeria, Former President Buhari's government passed the climate change Act in 2021 aimed at reducing carbon emissions. The ETP also claimed the Federal Government also put several fiscal incentives and sector reforms in place to catalyze the implementation of the Act and would be needing \$10 billion to kickstart the implementation and a total estimate of \$1.9 trillion, including \$410 billion above projected usual spending to get to Net Zero by 2060, begging for foreign investment and international monetary supports (ETP, 2022).²³

Subsequent to the aftermath of the 2022 flooding, it is reported that at least 662 people were found dead, 3, 174 people injured and about 2.5 million others displaced, while 200, 000 house of individuals were destroyed.²⁴ The country worked in collaboration with World Bank to achieve the following:

- Reduction of land degradation by investing in watershed management infrastructure and erosion
- Information services were developed in order to strengthen watershed monitoring, erosion, and disaster risk management
- Promoting low carbon development by strengthening strategic framework for Nigeria's climate action
- Project management supports were distributed at federal and state levels for social, environmental, and financial outreach, evaluations and safeguards.

➤ *Ghana: Actions Taken by the Government to Address Climate Change*

A body responsible for climate change policy in Ghana, the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP), has aimed to achieve an all-around policy of national development planning by incorporating climate change issues. The body also highlights robust strategies to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to change in climate. The aim of the NCCP is to compliment the Climate Change Master Plan in order to implement the policy by providing a roadmap. The government is expected to develop different initiatives in order to achieve the goals outlined by NCCP. For instance, implementation of land use practices, improvement of energy efficiency, including the promotion of renewable energy. One practical example is the Ghanaian government's launching of

the Renewable Energy Master Plan, which aims to increase the country's renewable mix to 20% by 2030.²⁵

The government of Ghana has also been involved in the Implementation and adaptation of measures to sustain the resilience to climate change. One of such measures is the development of National Adaptation Strategy and Action Plan which will be responsible for the improvement of water management, promotion of climate-smart farming and the enhancement of early warning technologies for extreme weather conditions.²⁶ It has also been carrying out a range of community and local adaptation projects, which solely aims to make vulnerable communities resilient to effects of climate change. Just like Nigeria, Ghana is a member of the Green Climate Fund, aimed at building resilience, and ensuring that climate change mitigation and adaptive initiatives are implemented in vulnerable communities. Ghana has been actively participating in international climate negotiations and has accredited the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. The country is a member of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Paris Agreement. In addition to it, it has also submitted its revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). It has promised to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 30% by 2030, and also committed to the action involving climate change adaptations.²⁷

Although Ghana does not boast a robust climate change legislation, but rather gradational policies, laws and regulations in various sectors. Furthermore, its NDC goals and targets are not enshrined in the constitution. Ghana may need approximately \$9.3 to \$15.5 billion of investment in order to implement the 47 NDC measures by 2030. The country is also collaborating with the World Bank to incorporate climate-smart agricultural investment (CSAIP). The action plan will need to prioritize a set of twelve actions and investments needed to boost and enhance the resilience of crop yields. Another initiative launched by Ghanaian government is the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM4C) at COP26.²⁸

In a research conducted on climate change literacy and awareness at a university by Ofori, Ameade, Ohemeng et al, the result is as follows, 66.9% was the overall knowledge score of the participants, and majority (92%) claimed to have adequate (75-85%) knowledge of climate change.²⁹

The report above demonstrated a reasonable awareness of climate change literacy among Ghanians.

III. CONCLUSION

Ghana, perhaps more than Nigeria, is putting more efforts into mitigation and adaptation to climate change, even the media coverage (Plos Climate 2023)³⁰ – although may be improved – is averagely okay. Nevertheless, the countries most affected by climate change ought to be at the forefront of public education on climate change.

Here are some of the reasons why media coverage of climate change in Nigeria is poor:

- Other economic and local pressing issues.
- Lack of limited resources such as financial capability of individuals and families to switch and adapt to environmentally friendly way of living such as switching from coal-powered sources e.g coal or oil to renewable sources of energy such as wind or solar energy.
- Focused attention to climate-related issues that directly affects local communities.

Here are a few suggestions on the way forward with respect to media coverage of climate change in developing countries:

- Training on climate journalism as mentioned earlier is a way forward.
- Creating more adequate updates on climate change across social media platforms.
- Recent research on climate change uncovered human factors regarding climate change, as noted earlier. Thus, ample information awareness reports and programmes should be disseminated at all local levels to aid the spread of correct information on climate change and how individuals can help in its mitigation and adaptation.
- Students should be kept abreast of necessary information regarding climate change, as they have the privilege of being in a better position to educate their parents who are uninformed on the subjects. Climate change journalism should be taken as a course or field of study across higher institutions to enlighten further and shape public opinions.
- All media outlets – local and international – must commit enough time to broadcast relevant climate change information nationally and internationally.

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