

Mitigation of Climate Change through the Mass Media

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ABSTRACT

Climate change is the term used to describe the shift in worldwide weather phenomena associated with an increase in global average temperatures; while this temperature increase is more specifically referred to as global warming. The negative effects of climate change, and specifically global warming, are signposted everywhere. The increase in the frequency and intensity of floods, the prolonged and scorching nature of the sun and accompanying heat wave, the short spell of rainfall are all signs of the present danger. Unfortunately, as a result of their activities, humans are accused of being largely responsible for most of the changes resulting into global warming. Nevertheless, the Mass Media have been looked up to as indispensable sources for information dissemination and opinion moulding on all societal issues. This position has been further strengthened by the emergence of the Social Media. The enormous power and potential the Mass Media boast of today can be profitably deployed in disseminating climate change information to achieve the desired results that mitigation and adaptation efforts, target.

Keywords: Climate change, Global warming, Mass media, Social media, Weather

INTRODUCTION

Concept of Climate Change

From the middle of the 20th century, climate change became more lasting, wider in scope and dangerous, spreading disasters of great proportions in its wake; such that more definitions have come up to properly capture the contemporary environmental scenario. According to [1], "Climate change is the catch-all term for the shift in worldwide weather phenomena associated with an increase in global average temperatures; while this temperature increase is more specifically referred to as global warming. Climate change is the term currently favoured by science communicators, as it explicitly includes not only Earth's increasing global average temperature, but also the climate effects caused by this increase". [2] Sees climate change as "the variation in the Earth's greenhouse or regional climates over time. It describes changes in the variability or average state of the atmosphere or average weather-over time scales, ranging from decades to millions of years. In recent usage, especially in the context of environmental policy, the term "climate change" is often used to refer only to the on-going changes in modern climate, including the average rise in surface temperature known as global warming".

Whether the change is caused by human actions such as greenhouse gas emissions, deforestation and pollution of all kinds; the dynamic activities within the bowel of the earth such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions and the like; or extraneous factors, it is real and has far-reaching consequences for human, animal and plant lives. The negative effects of climate change, and specifically global warming, are signposted everywhere. The increase in the frequency and intensity of floods, the prolonged and scorching nature of the sun and accompanying heat wave, the short spell of rainfall are all signs of the present danger. Unfortunately, as a result of their activities, humans are accused of being largely responsible for most of the changes resulting into global warming. "Life on earth is dependent on an atmospheric "greenhouse"-a layer of gasses, primarily water vapour, in the lower atmosphere that traps heat from the sun as it is reflected back from the earth, radiating it back and keeping our planet at a temperature capable of supporting it. But human activity is currently generating an excess of long-lived greenhouse gasses that-unlike water vapour, do not dissipate in response to temperature

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increases, resulting in a continuing build-up of heat.” [1]. Now, if human activity is responsible for the greater percentage of climate change, then it is possible that with properly coordinated collaborative actions, such harmful activities can be reduced and the impact of the change on people and environment, in turn, mitigated. Owing to the magnitude of the danger posed by climate change to the global community, various countries and organisations have taken, and are taking different actions towards either mitigating the impact of the change or adapting to it. Midwifed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), several international conferences and conventions have been held on climate change and several agreements and protocols have been ratified by member nations. Examples of international environmental actions include: the Kyoto Protocol or agreement among industrialised nations, placing mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions; the Montreal Protocol on substances that deplete the ozone layer, and the Paris Agreement on greenhouse gas emissions, mitigation, adaptation and financing with a 2020 target.

Unfortunately, positive impacts from the implementations of the international environmental actions are not too seriously felt in numerous rural communities, especially in developing countries. Nigeria for instance, is a signatory to several Multi-lateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and has a Directorate of Climate Change in the Federal Ministry of Environment, which is charged with the responsibility of driving the national action plan on climate change. Information gleaned from the Directorate’s online platform shows that the Federal Government has structured operational policies that promote Green and Resilient Cities, Climate Smart Agriculture, Reduction of Gas Flaring, and Low Carbon Electrification, among other interventions. Non-governmental organisations, civil society groups and private bodies interested in climate change mitigation are also involved in one form of climate-smart interventions or the other in Nigeria. The question however is: how much of these policy thrusts or implementation strategies aimed at mitigating in our country, are in the public domain? Stretched further, how many ordinary Nigerians in the various communities, particularly the rural areas, know about government policies and intervention actions on climate change; and can easily relate with them? Many are ignorant of what climate change is all about; let alone their impacts, and efforts to mitigate such impacts. The poor, vulnerable groups in communities are barely informed of the huge threats which climate change poses to them. If a community that depends solely on agriculture is not properly informed about climate change and its impacts on the weather, soil, temperature, etc., the farmers will not be able to properly adapt in a manner to avoid the negative effects on farm produce and thus, cannot possibly be alerted and prepared against any impending famine. In the same way, a riverine community that is not well informed about the effect of climate change on the water level and quality, may in ignorance, continue to do things the same old way and thus, not getting the expected results from their fishing or aquaculture activities. This assertion is much confirmed by [3] in a research they conducted on the impacts of climate change and adaptation strategies in some communities of Kaduna State. The research concluded that awareness creation and sustained education of the people are fundamental to the effective climate change mitigation and adaptations in rural communities. This is where the Mass Media come in.

How the Mass Media can promote climate change education in rural communities

The Media are accorded the status of Fourth Estate of the Realm in recognition of the large sphere of influence it exerts on public opinion formation on a whole range of issues. Over time, the Media have shaped government policies, pointed the public towards specific directions and actions, and become indispensable in the society. It goes without saying that the Mass Media have a huge base, capacity and reach, to drive any campaign successfully. From the traditional Media (newspaper, radio, television, films) to the new Media, otherwise popularly known as Social Media (i.e., Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram, Twitter, etc.), the Mass Media provide the best option for pushing messages on climate change mitigation and adaptations, for the realisation of desired results. This is largely because the Mass Media can reach everywhere and everyone, in addition to a reasonably high level of public acceptability and believability.

Apart from that, driving such messages will come very easy to the Media because informing and educating the people form part of their traditional roles. This foregoing expression is in agreement with the finding of [4] who pointed out that “very often the un-politicised masses look up to the Media to champion their interests, such areas as environmental sanitation, roads, water and electric power supply, health services and other basic necessities of life. According to [5], the Mass Media stand out as one of those communication approaches that have influenced public understanding and action about science. Boykoff and Roberts further states “Mass Media representational practices have broadly affected translations between science and policy and have shaped perceptions about various issues of environment, technology and risk”; and the authors concluded: “there have been many studies over the last two decades that have examined how Mass Media have covered a range of environmental issues”. Indeed, Mass Media coverage or information dissemination on climate change is already

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doing so much to point individuals, groups and the international community towards taking actions to mitigate the challenge. Equally, [6] highlighted some central roles of the Mass Media in public awareness creation on climate change mitigation and adaptation. The author acknowledged that the Media set agenda on issues relating to the subject matter and also spread information on how to effectively mitigate the impact through the reduction of the spread of greenhouse emissions. However, in this present dispensation, and without prejudice to past efforts, how can the

Mass Media be of greater benefit to climate change mitigation actions in rural communities? This paper underscores the following five (5) viewpoints:

- i. **Constitution of dedicated desks and specialised programmes:** To start with, all Media organisations that do not already have a specialised desk dedicated to climate change and issues related ought to set-up one as a matter of urgency. Such desk should be manned by competent personnel, with constant training opportunities that can enhance their capabilities on climate change reporting and communication in the face of emerging scenarios and innovations on the subject matter. In the same vein, radio and television stations could create special programmes for addressing climate change issues in addition to the normal news reports. The broadcast stations could host guests who are well informed about the issues surrounding climate change, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, the impacts on the people and what is being done in form of mitigation. Listening to such guests, greater awareness would have been created in communities.
- ii. **Qualitative content scoping and consistent editorial:** Following from the constitution of the specialised climate change desk, attention should be given to content scope, quality and precision. The content churned out by the desk should be designed to address specific climate change mitigation actions and directed to specific targets. For instance, a newspaper could, in addition to the regular news reportage of climate issues, dedicate a special page to the subject matter where special features can appear. In addition, information on weather forecast, rainfall indices and impending threats of natural disasters should be timely and regularly conveyed to affected communities through newspaper reports and features; radio and television reports, features and interviews, with snippets repeatedly posted on the Social Media. The various Social Media platforms can be effectively used to pass climate change intervention messages to the people, especially considering that many people; the youth in particular, are hooked to the internet all the time.
- iii. **Participatory broadcasting:** For agrarian communities, when there is a public intervention relating to adoption of new farm inputs such as fertilizer, seedlings and planting technologies that can withstand the change in weather and lead to high crop yield, the Media should be kept in the loop in helping to disseminate the information and the associated best practices. For wider acceptability in rural communities, climate change related programmes and jingles can be produced by radio stations in local languages and pidgin (i.e., Nigerian English) depending on which is more applicable and capable of producing the desired results. Where the activities of the people contribute to climate change, efforts targeted at making them change their behaviour pattern can also be communicated to them using the Mass Media. The locals should be involved in the packaging of the jingles and programmes to make it participatory.
- iv. **Face to Face community engagements:** Mass Media professionals can also organise town hall meetings, debates and other forms of awareness campaigns on specific climate change mitigation actions in communities. By taking such steps and getting the people directly involved in owning those programmes, the messages will go down better and faster. More specifically, those running intervention or mitigation programmes should understand that it is critical to partner with Media organisations. Through such partnership, interventions or mitigation efforts can be packaged in a manner that the Media can easily buy into them and disseminate to the people. For instance, if a mitigation action is targeted at discouraging indiscriminate felling of trees, bush burning for bushmeat, and illegal excavation of sand at riverbanks, partnership should evolve a comprehensive and inclusive awareness campaign towards encouraging community tree planting, rearing of grasscutters, reclamation of excavated sites, respectively. This way the people can buy-into any special interventions and become partners in environmental peace.
- v. **Community radio for effective climate change education:** Radio remains the best platform through which any form of public awareness, including climate change education, can be carried out in communities. Community radio stations all over, uses local content and belief-system as fulcrums

to drive home their messages by broadcasting their programmes to the people in the native languages of their host communities. Therefore, at a time when the consequences of climate change are increasingly making rural communities most vulnerable, the radio can play a critical role in climate change education towards achieving related goals of sustainable developments in communities.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

Mass Media have been looked up to as indispensable sources for information dissemination and opinion moulding on all societal issues. This position has been further strengthened by the emergence of the Social Media. The enormous power and potential the Mass Media boast of today can be profitably deployed in disseminating climate change information to achieve the desired results that mitigation and adaptation efforts, target.

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