

Media Coverage on Climate Change: Kenyan Scenario

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Climate change is a dynamic agenda globally; the change is very complex to be understood by all walks of life without explanation. In Africa media coverage on this phenomenon seems to be weak. This study has demonstrated that effects of climate change have been poorly covered in the mainstream print media receiving only 2% coverage. Instead, climate change issues in the Kenyan print media have been reported extensively from the political (28%), disaster (28%) and national development (18%) points of view. The other poorly covered area that related to climate change was human settlement (4%).

Kenyan print media coverage on climate issues is fairly good as has been established by this study. However, what is news and the content of news stories on climate change has been seen with the lens of personalities where competition has been focused more on them than on climate change.

Overall, in the milieu explored in this document, we can say that the Kenyan media has kept the issue of climate change alive even though it has been limited to coverage under other major societal issues namely related to political, disaster and national development. Put it plainly, the Kenyan print press has played its role as a reformist in its portrayal of the needed action on climate change. However, it can still do more to enlighten its public to embark on truly revolutionary changes by raising issues of climate change to the highest level of government and political consensus as well as the complete involvement of the common person. More will always need to be done to develop climate change awareness in the media sector.

Key words: Media, climate change and Kenya

Introduction

Climate change is one of the most important issues on the global political and economic agenda, yet it has taken at least two decades to become an international priority. In diverse ways, this is because; climate change was originally communicated as a scientific problem. Complex, confusing, and at times contested scientific information resulted in a slow public and political response to the climate crisis. The climate change debate has also taken place largely in industrialized countries, among a public largely safe from its worst effects. For numerous people climate change is still an abstract concept.

In Africa, climate change is far from abstract because it is already determining the nature of people's lives. Extreme weather events and greater unpredictability in weather patterns are having serious consequences for people who rely heavily on land and water bodies (lakes, seas and rivers) to feed themselves and to earn a living. Due to this, Africa's involvement with this issue is evolving rapidly, presenting an opportunity to surpass the slow evolution of western public opinion and political action.

The African people's response to climate change is hindered by a fundamental shortage of relevant, useful information for African audiences. The intensive media coverage and public awareness campaigns existing in much of the industrialized world have been absent to some extent in Africa, particularly outside urban centers. Very often African voices are absent from the international climate debate.

The response to the climate change issue by the Africans will be dictated by how well they are made to understand it. The media has a major role in doing this by trying to reach out to all both in the urban and rural areas. Those worst affected by the issue have the right to be better informed, in order to understand and respond effectively. There are a number of initiatives in the media that aim to raise public awareness of urgent environmental problems. Despite the fact that climate change is a common aspect in today's discussions, it has received minimal media coverage in most parts of the world more so in Africa. It is against this backdrop that we discuss the role of media in communicating climate change in Kenya.

In this research, content analysis has been carried out on the Kenyan mainstream print media which have a high readership and reach all parts of the country; the *Nation* and the *Standard* newspapers. To achieve the objectives of the research, quantitative analysis is used to analyze the climate change content issues contained in the two dailies from October 2009 to March 2010. The instruments of measurement that are used to determine the analysis are: the unit size of the article, the story placement, the story treatment, running story and the themes. This paper is guided by the following questions: What is the practice of reporting climate change in Kenya? What is the manner in which the messages are relayed? What are the shortcomings of reporting climate change?

Kenyan media scene

Kenya has a sophisticated, diverse and lively mass media sector characterized by television, radio, print and a thriving new media such as internet and mobile telephones. The types of media can be classified broadly as: public; private/independent; the private local language radio; community radio; the independent religious stations; the alternative press; international media and new media. They serve various and diverse information, education, religious, advertising and entertainment needs of various segments of the audiences. However, this media is mainly concentrated along the equator and to the south of the country where the majority of the population live. The northern part of the country is media scarce because of the low population. Most media operate from Nairobi although large media houses have news bureaus in various regions in the country. The media has been thriving due to good economic performance over the past eight years (especially since 2002). The advertising expenditure on radio, TV, newspapers and cinema has been growing since 2003 when sponsors spent Sh6.6 billion, Sh8.4 billion in 2004, 9.3 billion in 2005, Sh13.6 billion in 2006 and 17.4 billion in 2007(Makali 2008).

The print media scene

The Kenyan newspaper scene, relative to the population, is still small and urban based. About 2.2 million urbanites read newspapers daily compared to 2.6 million in the rural Kenya (Steadman Group 2008). Newspaper readership stands at 23% of the total population.

The dominant publishing houses are: The Nation Media Group and The Standard

Role of media in socio-economic development

Kenyan media are powerful drivers of socio-economic transformation in the country. They continue to provide the people with information critical for making enlightened decisions and choices on socio-economic issues. In addition, they provide mechanisms for feedback from the citizens on matters that affect them such as school bursaries and Constituency Development Funds (CDF). The media has played a key role in policy and legislation by covering issues that go on in Parliament. Kenyan media supported the Governance Justice Law and Order (GJLOS) programme and actively participated in the *Jirekebishe* Awards. The GJLOS programme aimed at improving governance and accountability in the governance, justice and law sectors of the government, while the *Jirekebishe* awards aimed at improving the accuracy of reporting GJLOS issues by the media (Makali 2004).

Kenyan media has over the years supported the following critical socio-economic programmes some of which deal with climate change issues: Water sector reforms through the Water Sector Program by World Bank, Public Service reforms such as the Public Finance Management Reforms, HIV/AIDS campaigns by the National Aids Council and JIKA and other civil society (BBC's *Kimasomaso* programme), Livelihood programs such as *Mali Shambani* on KBC, Energy sector reforms for sustainable energy such as the *Mr. Reddy Kilowatt* campaigns by Kenya Power and Lighting.

Unfortunately, the potential of radio and TV in their current situation to promote socio-economic development is questionable because they give too much airtime to foreign content, entertainment, trivia and politics compared to socio-economic and developmental issues. This raises the issue of how much time private broadcasting stations should dedicate to public service broadcasting that promote socio-economic development (Makali, 2004).

State of Communication for Development

Although Kenya has no communication policy per se, it has been using strategic communications to realize its development goals. The Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth Creation and Employment 2007 and the Kenya Vision 2030 recognize the use of strategic communication platforms. The various government reforms such as GJLOS programme, water sector reforms, energy sector reforms, public services reforms, HIV/AIDS programs have relied on strategic communication to communicate with the general public (Ibid).

The government established the Office of Public Communication in 2004 with a view to improve government communication by disseminating and clarifying important government decisions and policy actions to the public. The government has also produced the ICT policy and strategy aimed at supporting socio-economic recovery and creates prosperity in Kenya.

The government in mid 2008 entered into an agreement with United Nations Development Fund to support communication development. The agreement involves strengthening public communication, media training and capacity building for The Media Council of Kenya (MCK). There are indications that the government with the support of donors is committed to use strategic communication to support its socio-economic programs (Ibid).

Kenyan media role on climate change

Throughout the 1990s, the media in Kenya like in other developing nations was at the forefront of reporting on the devastation brought by “El Nino” rains and bringing into light the issue of global climate change and its impact on the local economy into sharp focus. The intensive coverage provided agriculturalists and rural communities with a scientific explanation for the dramatic weather changes that they had been witnessing in recent years.

But while such high profile events captured the public imagination and generated intense debates on the impacts of environmental degradation on people’s daily lives, the momentum generated wasn’t sustained. The media has continued to focus on the “big” stories such as deaths from drought or the destruction caused by floods, with little information being provided on how to cope with effects of climate-related changes. Yet above all, what agriculturalists and rural communities need for mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change is access to information (Ogodo 2007).

What do Africans know and understand about global climate change?

In order for us to carry out a better quantitative and content analysis of media coverage on climate change issues in the Kenyan press it would be helpful to base ourselves on some of the findings by *Africa Talks Climate* research team so as to single out the themes for analysis. The team carried out research on the topic “The public understanding of climate change in ten countries” (Kenya was included).

The researchers found out that that one of the principal barriers to understanding climate change is its terminology. “Climate” is a difficult word to translate into many local African languages. The question of how to communicate climate change is an important one and journalists have an important task in helping their audiences comprehend this issue well.

The *Africa Talks Climate* research team established that the most pertinent climate change and environmental degradation issues facing Africa are: drought, deforestation, desertification, gas flaring, oil contamination, erosion, poor sanitation flooding, waste, pollution and overcrowding. Kenyans were particularly concerned with drought, deforestation, flooding, sums, rubbish and congestion. Our analysis will view the media coverage of these issues in the Kenyan print media.

At the heart of people's responses to these climatic changes is a belief that individual actions have little impact on problems caused by large groups of people. People's sense of individual powerlessness means that they place a great deal of responsibility for action on their governments. We shall analyze how the government, international community and NGOs actions in curbing the negative impact of climate change have been reported in the press.

Content and quantitative analysis of the newspapers Oct 2009-March 2010

Our analysis of climate change issues as covered by the two dailies will be under the following categories: political news, disaster news, weather report, Copenhagen issues, Africa related, effects of climate change and human settlement. The content analysis revealed the following results: Disaster news (28%), Political news (28%), National development & foreign aid (18%), Copenhagen News (9%), African issues (6%), Weather reports (5%), Human settlement (4%) and Effects of climate change (2%).

Natural Disaster news and climate change

The results obtained show that within the six months period that extended between October 2009-March 2010, news that described disaster due to the effect of climate change dominated the two dailies media coverage registering 28%. This goes in line with the views expressed by Ochieng Ogodo who in his report on "Media's role on climate change in the developing world" advanced the opinion that the "media has continued to focus on the big stories such as deaths from drought or flood destruction with little information being provided on how to cope with effects of climate related-change. (Ogodo,2007). The disaster news mainly reported on floods and heavy rains that dominated the month of January. During these six months very little news coverage appeared on "drought" in any of the two dailies, largely because of the rains that have been pounding the country for quite sometime now. Flooding is a particular concern for a good number of citizens as the media coverage shows. News on flooding in the Coast, in the drier areas of northern and north-eastern Kenya, mudslides in Central and Rift Valley areas, and heavy downpours in urban areas were reported even at times getting front page coverage or full page or two pages coverage.

In the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report of 2007, Maxwell Boykoff and Timmons Robert carry out a study on "Media coverage of climate change" and they emphasize on how natural disasters are dominating media coverage citing examples of the Katrina (USA-2005), the storm that occurred in Honduras (1998) and the typhoon of Mozambique (2000).

Political News and Climate Change

Media coverage on climate change has been influenced to a big extent by the political arena. Kenyan journalists like their counterparts globally, have been pushing climate change from an environmental issue to one garnering the attention of a wide range of interests and constituents, thereby permeating many political, economic, social and at

times “celebrity” issues. This can be attested by the 28% political media coverage on climate change issues (at par with disaster coverage). One issue that was largely reported during this six months period was the “Mau Forest issue.” This issue received several headline coverages mainly pitting two political heavyweights Raila Odinga (the Prime Minister) and William Ruto (the Higher Education minister) and to some extent Mwai Kibaki (the President).

What is news and the content of news stories in this case has been seen with the lens of personalities where competition has been focused more on them than on climate change. Stories have conformed more on the idea that news focuses on individuals rather than group dynamics (Boykoff 2007, Gans 1979). The gaze is on the individual claim-makers who are locked in a political battle, and thus structural or institutional analyses are skipped over in favour of stories that cover the trials and tribulations of individuals. As an effect these stories are seldom linked to a deeper social concern and are less concerned about climate change. This connects to dramatization. Examples of articles that elicited such drama include: Standard 16/1/10 “Mau saga is tale of twins who are only differing in their levels of honesty”(a whole page), Standard 13/1/10-two articles “Will Kibaki go to Mau? (Headline) and “Mau: Kibaki and Raila in tree planting doubt.”,Standard 24/11/09 “Mau: Raila , Ruto tell different stories separately”-two pages, Nation 16/11/09 “Ruto demands land for evicted Mau squatters”-headline, Nation 13/1/10 “Kibaki and Raila in Mau tug of war.”-Headline and Nation 14/1/10 “Raila vows to push on with Mau tree drive”-headline.

Hilgartner and Bosk write that “Drama is the source that gives social problems life and sustains their growth” (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Dramatized news tends to downplay more comprehensive analysis of the enduring problem in favor of movements at the surface of events (Wilkins and Patterson 1987). The journalistic valuation of drama can serve to trivialize news content, as it also can lead to the blocking out of news that doesn’t hold an immediate sense of excitement or controversy. However, this norm doesn’t necessarily lead to reduced coverage. In their report entitled “Warm Words” Eraut and Segnit have posited presenting news in this dramatized form is most common, and “sensationalized” alarmist reporting can even become secretly thrilling (Eraut and Segnit 2006, 14).

Dramatization intersects with the common journalistic attraction to novelty (Gans 1979; Wilkins and Patterson 1991). Pointing to the relationship between dramatization and novelty in the mass media, Hilgartner and Bosk assert, “saturation of the public with redundant claims and symbols can dedramatize a problem “ (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988) because the perceived need for “news “peg, certain stories are deemed suitable and others are not (Wilkins and Patterson 1991). Gans asserts there is a “repetition taboo” whereby journalists reject stories that have already been reported in favour of news that that is fresh, original and new (Gans, 1979).

Stocking and Leonard comment that this allows persistent and growing environment problems to slide out of sight if there is nothing “new” to report (Stocking and Leonard 1990, 40). In effect, this feeds into a preference for coverage of crises, (like the ones mentioned above “disaster analysis), rather than chronic social problems. Therefore, when it comes to climate change climate, Wilson notes, the underlying causes and long term consequences are often overlooked in the day to day grind to find a new angle by deadline” (Wilson 2000, 207).

What the Kenyan journalists have tried to do is to make their audience be interested in a subject that may not appear to be very “newsy” by bringing in political protagonists into the climate change debate.

By covering extensively on political involvement in the “Mau Forest issue” the journalists have tried to recast what would have been considered environmentalist initiative as social, political issue that also makes economic sense.

In a sense the political tone has tried to bring the Kenyans to the fold in the spirit of pulling together to work in combating climate change.

The Kenyan findings are similar with others like the one of Australia that found out that media coverage on climate change is marked by significant acceptance of political and expert voices (McManus 2000). McManus carried out investigations of headlines, page placement and content on Australian newspapers.

National Development, Foreign aid and Climate Change

Beyond the traditionally held categorization of climate change as an environmental issue, it is clearly also a developmental issue. It is of no wonder then that climate change issues reported under the aspects of national development claims the third spot with media coverage of 18%. The areas covered by the two Kenyan dailies concentrated on poverty reduction, food security, economic, health, human rights, governance, international support and equality. Covering climate change from these perspectives makes it a Millennium Development Goal (MDG) issue.

The Kenyan media has commendably brought these issues into light as can be attested by the following media coverage: Nation 8/12/09 “Kenya stares at health and food crisis as rains fail despite optimistic forecast”- two pages, Nation 10/12/09 “Green fund proposed for the poor.”, Nation 17/12/09 “Wind power to help Kenya lower toxic gas emissions.”, Standard 8/12/09 “Dwindling cash flow dogs healthcare as focus shifts to climate change”-two pages, Standard 16/01/10 “Diplomats pledge to back conservation” and Nation 16/11/09 “Ruto demands land for evicted Mau squatters”- headline-human rights issue.

Climate change and global poverty have attracted a lot of attention in recent years as key global justice challenges of our time. Both are serious challenges to the future health and prosperity of our planet. They must be combated simultaneously; we cannot take care of one without addressing the other. An effective attack on poverty and the ill-effects of climate change requires taking comprehensive action that encompasses both issues. We cannot fight climate change without considering the rising energy needs of poor people and countries, nor can we effectively address global poverty without accounting for the impacts of climate change on agriculture, disease patterns, and violent weather events, all of which impact the poorest countries.

Since World War II, foreign aid has repeatedly been promoted as a key part policy as either a sound investment in national security, in addressing global issues like diseases and political instability or for some as part of the need for international redistribution of wealth. Aid comes in many forms, and each has important implications for adaptation to climate change. Historically, the most funding went to “infrastructure aid” (Hicks *et al.* 2007). These include roads, dams and electrical energy, generating systems: the most basic needs for further development.

A few scholars have documented the role that the media plays in driving the allocation of foreign assistance to developing countries. Among the observations they made was that press coverage on climate change issues was significantly related to grants but not loans as was the case with Japan (Van Belle *et al.* 2004). Media is often used as a bell of public opinion in an area about which little is known and bureaucrats seek to avoid internal and public critique by allocating aid where the media is focusing.

As is evident in the Kenyan dailies analysis, most disaster coverage focuses on the suffering and only a small proportion mentioned International relief efforts (CARMA 2006, Van Belle 2003). There was only 2% media coverage on international support as compared to 28% of disaster news coverage. There is mention of European support towards environmental conservation of the Mau Forest (Nation 13/10/09 “European Union to fund Mau evictions”). Hicks *et al.* (2007) have shown that overall, environmental aid in general is driven by geopolitics and history of donors as much as environmental needs of a recipient nation. History of corruption in Kenya and sometimes bad blood between it and its donors may have reduced foreign aid and hence the poor injection of it.

Within the six months no media coverage was made on assistance provided by NGOs. Aid agencies have been under pressure to show they are “doing something” about the environment, but this funding is constrained for a number of reasons. The first been that aid for environmental issues has only risen slightly compared to total foreign aid, largely leveling at about 10% (Hicks *et al.*, 2007). A second factor is that since sewage, water projects are so expensive, and because host governments most openly welcome such investments/aid, they tend to get the vast majority of funding. Climate change aid meanwhile remains a small part of that aid reaching 1-2% of total foreign assistance over the past two decades. Further aid for adaptation of climate change has been a tiny part of environmental aid. This explains why the coverage on foreign aid related to climate change is almost absent from the Kenyan press coverage.

The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

The 15th Conference of the Parties (COP 15) meeting in Copenhagen, Denmark in December 2009 was the culmination of months of negotiations complemented by community, industry and private sector-led events aimed at promoting urgent decision-making and action to combat climate change. The news for this conference were not featured as much and only accounted for 9% of the total media coverage on climate change. The two newspapers only covered the forthcoming event once, mainly with some political undertone concentrating on the two big powers the USA and China. There was an equal article coverage by the two dailies with both having titles that prayed for a breakthrough in talks between the two nations. The success of the conference was being viewed in this light. The Standard (17/11/09) spoke of “Focus shifts to US, China leaders for breakthrough” while the Nation title went “China studying UN climate deal ahead of conference”. However, the Standard had bigger coverage devoting two pages to two articles showing the emphasis it placed on the climate change issue.

Both dailies carried out extensive coverage in the days of the conference in mid-December 2009. More emphasis was given to climate change issues and lesser importance to the Kenyan political representation at the conference. However, the stress

was more on the threatening failure of the talks as rift widened between the rich and poor nations (Nation, 18/12/ 2009).

Thereafter, there is little follow up coverage until February where the Standard (8/2/10-two pages) has a good news caption “Farmers to benefit from Copenhagen carbon deed” while the Nation speaks of China’s woes “China at war on weather change.” USA and China are Kenya’s great partners in various aspects: developmental, economic and political and this may explain why there was wide media coverage on their position in matters related to climate change.

Writing on “Global warming, spin and media,” Anip Shah (2010) observes that some countries of which USA is the most influential and powerful have been accused of being counter-productive during climate change negotiations. When the Kyoto Protocol was written in 1997, it was mainly the US and its business lobby that vehemently opposed the protocol based on economic concerns. While the Clinton administration signed and ratified the protocol, the Bush’s one was opposed to it, withdrawing from the international agreement. President Bush cited a number of concerns, along the following themes: Economic concerns; that the Kyoto protocol was a political document; That it is unfair that countries like China and India do not have emission reduction targets. Yet combined with delay tactics, this may be a way to ensure the US doesn’t lose its position of power by implementing climate change measures. By going that way, it is ignoring international issues and concerns, and so this can be seen as a political move to ensure economic and geopolitical success on this major environmental issue without consideration of the rest of the world. Yet it is this “go alone” approach that also creates a lot of resentment against the US in the eyes of many around the world.

Politically, it has long been established and agreed that it is the industrialized nations that are responsible for the anthropogenic aspect of climate change and that developing nations have only recently entered industrialized phases. Therefore, it was intentionally agreed that there would be “common but differentiated responsibilities” and that industrialized nations would need to reduce their emissions, while developing countries should continue down the path of development but avoid the polluting route of today’s industrialized countries (Shah 2010).

The Kenyan dailies coverage shows the global concern when there is a lack of consensus between the rich and poorer nations by carrying out articles like the following “Summit staring at failure as rift widens between rich and poor nations” (Nation 18/12/09).

However, a combination of lack of action by richer nations (who have been increasing emissions) with the realization that the climate is already changing has at least created a sense of urgency amongst some richer nations. But the additional line coming from governments of countries such as the US, Australia and even UK (where climate change is accepted and recognized as something that needs urgent addressing) is that little can be achieved without large developing countries such as India and China being part of the solution.

Africa News on Climate Change

The media—television, radio, print and online—naturally has a vital role to play in climate change issues in Africa. However, as Ogodo notes there is a dearth of coverage

on this issue. This is evident from the 6% print media coverage on Africa and climate change issue from the Kenyan most read dailies.

The issues that are saliently covered evolve around: the diminishing snow levels on the mountains of Africa (Nation-4/11/10,7/11/09); a call for Africa to act on Climate change (Standard 3/2/10); Africa being accused of bearing brunt of climate change (Nation-7/12/09) and the concerted efforts by Africa in fighting carbon justice (Nation-17/12/09). It is commendable that at least two pages coverage is done on the melting of snow in Africa's key mountains: Kilimanjaro, Kenya and the Ruwenzori.

In relation to Africa there is to some extent no coverage on climate change factors such as: drought, deforestation, flooding, waste, pollution and overcrowding.

While Africa is one of the world's worst affected by climate change, the continent isn't a significant emitter of greenhouse gases. Africa fossil fuel emissions account for only 3% of the global total. Fossil fuel emissions per capita in Africa are also among the lowest in the world. The only African country with significant emissions is South Africa, which ranks 13th in the world for fuel emissions (Africa Talks Climate 2009). However, emissions are increasing and that means even Kenyan journalists ought to report more on Africa in relation to climate change.

African journalists are aware that they are a main source of climate change information for most people. One of the reasons that we may attribute to the low reportage on climate change in as far Africa is concerned is the claim that most Africa citizens are not aware of global climate change and that only an elite few Africans fully understand the topic. Many talk of a lack of "information sharing" with the general public, which they see as a barrier to understanding and effective public response (Ibid). Some small scale perception studies hint at the impact climate change is having on Africa lives. Lack of information or poor reportage can be a critical barrier in dealing with its effects. Indeed, research in the United States has shown that a limited understanding of climate change can restrict people's ability to distinguish between effective and ineffective response strategies and this can be true in Africa as well (Leiserowitz et al. 2009)

Weather Report and Climate Change

Africans have noticed changes in their weather patterns. They talk of a loss of distinct seasons, erratic rainfall and increases in temperature. These issues are often mentioned in the frequent weather reports. This consists of 5% media coverage during the six months period. Even though the percentage isn't very big, when the weather reports is given it receives ample coverage appearing either in two pages or full page or headline coverage. Of the four instances where the report was covered, two articles were in two pages while the other two were on a whole page. The media houses therefore give great importance to the weatherman's report. This concurs with some research done 2009 on journalists in UK who admitted that news reports on climate change were predominantly framed through weather events... and the movements of political actors and rhetoric (Boykoff and Mansfield 2008). The reports in all these instances deal with rain (presence or absence of) and flood reports. The weather reports are covered as follows: Nation 19/10/09: "Change of weather, downpour raises fears of delays as roads become impassable"-two pages, Nation 8/12/09: "Kenya stares at health and food crisis as rains

fail despite optimistic forecast”-two pages, Standard 4/1/10: “Weatherman predicts heavy rains will persist until mid this month”-full page, Standard 6/1/10: “In Japan they ring bells to raise alarm for floods”-full page.

Africa relies a lot on rainfall and its unpredictability is causing concern to its people. People are increasingly becoming affected by the lack of rain now in many areas not only in the semi and desert regions of Africa. Farming is almost entirely dependent on rain. Africans are worried that rainfall patterns are becoming less predictable and in some places, when the rains do come, they are stronger and more intense than they used to be, spoiling crops and washing away fertile soil.

The stark impacts of changing rainfall patterns on Africa are manifest. The Kenyan media should continue highlighting on this fact because a more powerful hydrological cycle will bring other challenges, including flooding. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) says that “by the 2080s, many millions more people than today are projected to experience floods every year due to sea level rise...(largely) in the densely populated and low-lying mega deltas of Asia and Africa...small islands are especially vulnerable” (Global Humanitarian Forum 2009).

This outlines in a way the importance of the forecasts by meteorologists, and why the journalists should carry out more detailed coverage on weather reports.

Human settlement and climate change

As climate change threatens Africa’s health and homes and the natural resources upon which many depend to survive, Africa’s population faces an urgent crisis that of human settlement. This is demonstrated in the 4% media coverage on the problem of squatters especially in the Mau Forest. Issues related to this aspect were majorly characterized by squatters’ panic and eviction. Nation 2/11/09: “Panic grips Mau settlers with only 7 days left for eviction notice to expire.” Nation 2/11/09: “Mau settler’s troop out as forest force arrives” Nation 23/11/09: “Mau settlers ordered out of camps.”

In many of the cases that related to human settlement more specifically the Mau Forest settlers, politics was at the forefront. Some of the examples are as follows: Standard 19/11/09: “MPs issue ultimatum on Mau settlers.” Nation 16/11/09: “Ruto demands land for evicted Mau squatters.” Nation 19/11/09: “No compensation for Mau evictees.” Nation 23/11/09: “Kibaki and Raila hold talks on Mau eviction.”

The two dailies demonstrate that human settlement issues are closely related to political media coverage in view of climate change in Kenya.

Effects of Climate Change

Many of the weather and environmental changes that Africans have observed are potentially linked to climate change, or could be exacerbated by climate change in the future.

There were three articles that reported on the effect of climate change more specifically, representing 2% media coverage. Two of them reported on the decreasing snow in the snow capped mountains of Africa (Nation 4/11/09, Nation 7/12/09) while one of them highlighted on the “cooling off” interest in greenhouse gas emissions (Nation 7/12/09).

The low media coverage of the effects of climate change may be attributed to some of the reasons given by Ochieng Ogodo (2007) who says that “few journalists-or even editors (in Africa), who are the gatekeepers of the stories that go on air or into print-have a clear grasp of the science behind this phenomenon (climate change). On many occasions, science-oriented stories, as well as those covering forestry, agriculture and climate change, get “spiked”. Publishers prefer stories about crime, violence and political scandal because this is what sells” Ogodo (2007). Yet above all, what Kenyans require for mitigating and adapting to the effects of climate change, is access to information. By minimally reporting on effects of climate change the people are denied this right.

A challenge for the Kenya mainstream print media

Climate change is in theory, the perfect topic for an international environmental agreement. All countries are affected by and contribute to the build up of greenhouse gases, and should be willing to join in the effort to stop it. However, it is far from easy to agree what to do, and how to do it. Similarly it is a “safer political topic for the media to cover than many other issues.

From the research findings it is promising that the recent mainstream attention seems to have turned towards actions (e.g. political, developmental) and solutions (e.g. Copenhagen Conference, Weather reports). But can a mostly corporate-funded Kenyan mainstream media be part of the solution, or will some of the more business-impacting measures be likely toned down? Will consumers be willing to change their lifestyle if technology and industry cannot find some quick energy-related solution? And what of media reporting? Some fear that too much reporting of climate change in headlines will lead to a climate fatigue whereby people are desensitized to the issue. Yet, just as it is common to have large sports segments, why not more topical issues? Granted, with competition for space and coverage by various other themes (i.e. politics, crime and violence), if the headlines at the time of writing this managed to include a celebrity with some scandal, surely a small note about global issues such as climate change or poverty could be added more regularly.

As the case is with other global issues, another problem is what makes climate change a headline -worthy item: if a major report or a world leader says something about an issue, or if it is sensational enough, then it seems to make headlines. If they do not, then it seems not to be newsworthy. In other cases, if the country faces a heat wave or other extreme weather (rain, floods, drought), then climate change may be discussed in that context, but when that is gone, and we continue spewing out greenhouse gases. This may appear to be a generalization, but the findings of this study analysis reveal that that it is hard for issues like climate change per se to be covered at other times in immense depth. This is well demonstrated by the 2% media coverage of issues directly connected to effects of climate change.

As some scientists warn there is fear of “overplaying” the global warming message which risks confusing the public about the threat of climate change. Reactionary media coverage shows that the public may be further confused if sensationalism on all sides wins over proper debate and understanding (Shah 2010).

The Kenyan print media in as much as it can be commended in trying to bring into light the issues related to climate change still needs to borrow a leaf from the

international media many of whom are writing more about the issue than before. Yet if history is any indicator even at such challenging times, propaganda, spin and misdirection will be perhaps be the norm unless the Kenyan democracy truly lives to its expectations and the print media influences other media also to report on climate change issues more thoroughly.

Kenyan journalistic balance as a climate change bias

One of the challenges facing journalists who cover environment and climate related issues is that of being balanced. In terms of viewpoints presented, journalists are taught to abide by the norm of balance: identifying the most dominant, widespread positions and then telling both sides of the story. In 1996, the Society of Professional Journalists removed the term “objectivity” from its ethics code (Columbia Journalism Review, 7-8/03). This reflects the fact that many contemporary journalists find the concept to be an unrealistic description of what journalists aspire to, preferring instead words like “fairness,” “balance,” “accuracy,” “comprehensiveness” and “truth.”

The professional canon of journalistic fairness requires reporters who write about a controversy to present competing points of view. When the issue is of a political or social nature, fairness-presenting the most compelling arguments of both sides with equal weight-is a fundamental check on biased reporting. But this canon causes problems when it is applied to issues of science. It seems to demand that journalists present competing points of view on a scientific question as though they had equal scientific weight, when actually they do not.

For instance in the issue of the Mau Forest, the Kenyan journalists in seeking to be fair, comprehensive, accurate and truthful reported on several occasions views and activities by the different protagonists: Kibaki, Raila, Ruto, the Rift Valley MPs and the Mau settlers. Titles such as the following demanded for reportage of all protagonists: Standard 23rd November 2009 “Mau: Raila, Ruto tell different stories separately.” Standard 24th November 2009 “Kosgey breaks ranks with PM on Mau evictions.” Nation 1/12/09 “Saving the Mau, You will never walk alone, MPs assure Raila.” Nation 13/1/09 “Kibaki, Raila in Mau tree drive tug of war.”

In the wake of the Copenhagen Conference the titles that journalists used were: Standard 17/11/09 “Summit President resigns as police tear gas climate protestors.” And in the same daily “Focus shifts to US, China leaders for breakthrough.” Apart from political related issues, there were also articles (though few) that presented different scientific points of views in as far as some climate change issues were concerned. Examples include: Snow melting on African mountains (Nation 7/12/09), Flamingoes flying back to Lake Nakuru (Standard 13/1/10) and “This isn’t the time to put on ice climate science” (Nation 9/2/19)

These articles mentioned demonstrate that adhering to the journalistic norm of balanced reporting may, in the end lead to biased coverage. By giving fair coverage to opposing views, the major mainstream newspapers significantly downplay to some extent scientific understanding of the role humans play in climate change. Certainly there is a need to represent multiple viewpoints, but when generally agreed-upon scientific findings are presented side-by side-with the viewpoints of a handful skeptics, readers are poorly

served. Meanwhile, the world dangerously warms, conservative think tanks gut the precautionary principle and humankind faces a dire future.

In fact, adhering to the norm of balance is a sign of professionalism but it must be borne to mind that superficial balance-telling both sides of the story can actually be a form of informational bias. Despite the consistent assertions of the United Nations-sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that human activities (like the Mau case) have had a “discernible” influence on the global climate and that global warming is a serious problem that must be addressed immediately, reporting (like the examples cited above) has allowed a small group (e.g. US leaders especially in the Bush administration; some politicians in the Mau issue, Mau squatters, some protestors in the UN summit) of global warming skeptics to have their views greatly amplified.

Conclusion

The Kenyan media (like the global one) has an obligation to inform its audience on climate change issues by looking more and more at climate change per se, its effects and what people are doing. This study has demonstrated that effects of climate change have been poorly covered in the mainstream print media receiving only 2% coverage. Instead, climate change issues in the Kenyan print media have been reported extensively from the political (28%), disaster (28%) and national development (18%) points of view. The other poorly covered area that related to climate change was human settlement (4%).

Kenyan print media coverage on climate issues is fairly good as has been established by this study. However, what is news and the content of news stories on climate change has been seen with the lens of personalities where competition has been focused more on them than on climate change. Stories have conformed more on the idea that news focuses on individuals rather than group dynamics. The gaze is on the individual claims-makers who are locked in a political battle. As a result at times structural or institutional analyses have been skipped over in favour of stories that cover the success, trials and tribulations of individuals. Where there has been absence of influential personalities, a major event (e.g. Copenhagen summit), or violent weather conditions there has been very little coverage on climate change issues. In March for instance, there were only two articles in the Nation and none at all in the Standard (by this time the Draft Constitution issues were getting more media attention). Throughout investigations of headlines, page placement and content during the six months studied, this research has found out that coverage is marked by significant acceptance of the political voices.

The Kenyan media must however be cautious not to jump onto the bandwagon without first of all understanding the delicate issues of climate change. That is why carrying out reports on climate change particularly from the political front may render the coverage unprofessional. Such a delicate matter should never be addressed by pseudo-professionals; journalists poorly versed in science and environmental issues.

The media is increasingly becoming the main source of climate change as most researches have shown (e.g. Africa Talks Climate). What the Kenyan journalists have to do is to know how Kenyans understand the issue. Lack of information regarding this issue can be a critical barrier in dealing with the effects. A limited understanding of climate change can restrict people’s ability to distinguish between effective and ineffective response strategies.

Climate change and poverty (aspect covered in terms of disaster, politics, national development, and human settlement) have attracted a lot of journalistic attention in the Kenyan press. Both are serious challenges for the future health and prosperity of this nation. They must be combated simultaneously; we cannot take care of one without addressing the other. An effective attack on poverty and the ill-effects of climate change requires the Kenyan journalist to take a comprehensive action on extensive media coverage that encompasses both issues. We cannot fight climate change without considering the rising energy needs of the poor Kenyans, nor can we effectively address national poverty without accounting for the impacts of climate change on agriculture (Kenya's mainstay), drought, disease patterns (e.g. malaria), and violent weather events (floods). This study has brought into light the commendable job that has been done by the Kenyan journalists in covering both these issues by giving them headline, two pages and one page media coverage.

Overall, in the milieu explored in this document, we can say that the Kenyan media has kept the issue of climate change alive even though it has been limited to coverage under other major societal issues namely related to political, disaster and national development. Put it plainly, the Kenyan print press has played its role as a reformist in its portrayal of the needed action on climate change. However, it can still do more to enlighten its public to embark on truly revolutionary changes by raising issues of climate change to the highest level of government and political consensus as well as the complete involvement of the common person. More will always need to be done to develop climate change awareness in the media sector.

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