

DISASTER RISK REDUCTION: FRAMING OF FLOOD DISASTER IN NIGERIAN NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

The study examines how the Nigerian newspapers report flood disaster. Media plays crucial role in disaster risk reduction. Its reportage of flood disaster issues aids readers' understanding of the activities that make them vulnerable and what to do to mitigate the risk. Also, it prepares them for effective management of disaster when it occurs and moulds people's beliefs and perception about disaster risk reduction. Through framing, media assists people to draw "cognitive map" and influences behaviours. Two Nigerian, English language newspapers (*Punch* and *Trust*) were selected for the study based on circulation and credibility. The contents of the hard copies of the newspapers published from January 1 – December 2012 were analysed. The study reveals that the media was least active (18.56%) in creating awareness and educate populace before disaster occurrence. However, it was very active (81.44%) during and after flood occurrence. This shows that Nigerian media is not proactive in its reportage of flood disaster but reactive. The study recommends that media should see itself as a key stakeholder in disaster risk reduction and active participants in reducing disaster risk. These can be achieved by employing disaster risk reduction and proactive frames through disseminating information about disaster risk reduction, early warning and educating populace before disaster occurrence. More collaboration activities with other stakeholders and sustained campaign against activities that make society vulnerable to disaster are also recommended. These may help people to understand the urgent need to safeguard their society from the increasing spate of flood disaster.

Key words: Disaster risk reduction, Communication, Flood, Newspapers, Framing, Journalists

INTRODUCTION

Flood has been identified as one of the commonest disaster ravaging the world. Its occurrences are become a source of worry to the public and government. Its frequencies and destructions are becoming alarming and threatening developmental strides recorded by nations (UNISDR, 2013). Nigeria is one of the countries grappling with this perennial problem annually.

According to Killenberg (2008) and Scalon (2007), there is an urgent need for stakeholders to team up and find lasting solution to the menace. Also, a 2015 report by the World Resource Institute (WRI) underscores the need. The report forecasts that people that would be affected by flood globally would be over 54 million by 2030 from 21 million affected in 2015 (Statistic View, 2015).

Nigeria, the 7th most populous country in the world, is not an exception. Flood ravages the country annually. With the official population of 182 million (NPC, 2017) and estimated population of 186,987,563 (World Population Review, 2017) mainly living in coastal and urban areas, flood is a major threat to Nigeria's development (NEMA, 2010). Media is identified as one of the crucial stakeholders. Its roles as an agent of change and development have been variously acknowledged (Daramola, 2006; Whitten-Woodring, 2007). In disaster management, media and disaster management organisations have greater duty to disseminate early warning and educate populace of impending disasters and warn people against activities that could make them disaster prone.

The new paradigm for disaster management emphasizes stakeholders being proactive and embarking on activities that can prevent or reduce disaster risk. This is in contrast to the hitherto paradigm that laid emphasis on reacting or managing disasters after occurrence. Thus, the media is expected to join others in campaign for disaster risk reduction (Lowrey et al, 2007). Stakeholders in disaster management consist of government and its agencies at local, national and international levels and non - governmental organizations responsible for managing disaster, the media, corporate sector, experts, civil societies, communities and their leaders among others.

Disaster and Media

Conventionally, media perform some basic roles in the society. It educates, informs, persuades, mobilizes, interprets and entertains the public. It is the performance of these roles that make media a powerful actor in the societies and well recognized as an agent of change and development (Akinfeleye, 2010; Toennesen, Hodgson & Mimmack, 2013). Mass media include newspapers, magazines, radio, television and social media that convey information to heterogeneous audience located at diverse locations. Expectedly, media has been reporting flood disaster and issues related to it. Scholars like Al – Hmouudi and Aziz (2016) and Faulkner (2001) note that through its reportage, media contribute to disaster management.

For example, some recent large scale disasters like floods in Nigeria, India, Pakistan, Malaysia, Malawi (2017); Landslides in Japan (2014) and Burma in 2015; Typhoon in Philippines (2013); Tornado in Oklahoma (2016); Wildfires in Australia and California (2015 & 2016), among others, became instant major media events. Media organizations worldwide reported the happenings in the devastated areas as they unfolded. These assisted in numerous ways in galvanizing actions and overall management of the disasters (Ress, 2013; Ashdown, 2013).

There are three stages of occurrence of flood disaster. The stages are – Pre - disaster, During - disaster and Post - disaster. As stated earlier, it has been established that reporting issues related to disasters before its outbreak assist in reducing frequency and impacts of disasters management (Aronu, F.I, Ebeze & Aronu, C.O, 2014; Perez-Lugo, 2001; Wijkman & Timberlake, 1988). Such proactive reportage is advocated in reducing flood disaster risk. In contrast, reporting disaster during and after its occurrence is now seeing as not effective way of contributing to the social, developmental problems (USAID, 2011; UNISDR, 2015). Thus, this study examines the reportage of flood disaster in Nigeria as an index of Nigerian newspapers participation in flood disaster risk reduction.

Research Question and Research Objective

Research question of this study is:

- (1) To what extent does Nigerian press create awareness and educate people before flood occurrence?

In line with the above research question, the study's objective is:

- (1) To identify the extent to which Nigerian newspapers create awareness and educate people before flood occurrence.

FLOODS IN NIGERIA

Flood is an abnormal progressive rise in the water level, which may result in overflowing and inundation of normally dry land (CDEMA, 2010). It has devastating, long lasting effects on all facets of life - health, education, environment, transportation, economy, agriculture, electricity, water resources, housing social, political etc.

Historically, the first flood can be traced to the time of Prophet Noah /Nuh when God in annoyance sent a deluge of water to the earth to exterminate mankind. According to Bible (Genesis 6-9) and Quran (7: 64; 11: 44; 23: 27), man's sins were overwhelming and God decided to visit His anger on them. However, a warning was sent to them through Prophet Noah. Noah warned people on the impending flooding, urgent need to turn away from their bad practices, fear God and get salvation by entering the Ark he constructed. Most of them did not obey his early warning call and education. The flood came and only few people and animals that were in the Noah's Ark were saved.

Till date millions of lives and property have been lost to flood worldwide (Melina, 2011). Until recent time, the belief that flood disaster is an act of God subsisted. Disasters like flood, earth quake, drought, plane crash, etc. were seen as a sign of God's fury against mankind and unpredictable. However, with advanced technology and man's identification of activities that could make the society prone to disaster, most disasters are now predictable and preventable. Despite the predictability of flood disasters, its frequency and scale of destruction are disturbing. To stem the tide of disaster, stakeholders are collaborating to find solutions to practices that are making the society disaster - prone. Media is one of the key stakeholders saddled with responsibility of disseminating early warning information and educates people on disaster risk reduction and prevention.

Like other parts of the world, flood is the commonest and most recurring disaster in Nigeria. Nigeria is a rapidly developing country with over 178.5 million populations (World Population Review, 2014). Its developmental plans and determination to become a developed nation are being threatened by disasters. According to NEMA (2010), at least 20% of Nigerian's population is at risk of flooding annually. It discloses that flood and heavy rainstorm affect urban

and rural areas claiming lives and destroying millions of dollars' worth of property annually. Table 1 shows the of severe floods disaster in Nigeria.

Table 2.2.

Severe Floods Disaster in Nigeria

No	Year	People affected
1.	1988	300,000
2.	1994	580,000
3.	1998	100,000
4.	1999	90,000
5.	2001	84,065
6.	2003	210,000
7.	2007	50,000
8.	2009	150,000
9.	2010	1,500,200
10.	2012	3,891,314

Source: EMT-DAT in FGN (2013).

Furthermore, Director - General, Nigeria Hydrological Service Agency, disclosed that states in Nigeria are classified as high risk, medium and low risk flood prone annually (Olaosebikan (2014). In 2012, Nigeria, the 7th most populous nation in the world, witnessed its worst flood disaster in over 40 years. Heavy rains which started in July and ended in October threatened the existence of its about 180 million population (World Population Review, 2014). Major dams like Kainji, Shiroro, Jebba, Kiri, Lagdo and others overflowed their banks and wrecked unprecedented havocs (NEMA 2013).

In the incident, 363 people died, 5,851 injured, 3, 891, 314 affected and N2.6 trillion (US\$ 16.9billion) lost were recorded while 24 out of 32 flooded states were severely affected (FGN, 2013; NEMA, 2013; OCHA, 2012). The immediate past Director – General of NEMA, Mohammed Sani-Sidi said the flood was the worst in the country's history (Agbaje, 2013). On its impact on development, a Post - Disaster Needs Assessment report by the Federal Government of Nigeria (FGN, 2013), indicates that it would take the country many years to achieve full reconstruction of flood destroyed assets.

FRAMING THEORY

One of the theoretical frameworks of this study is framing theory. To understand the participation of Nigerian newspapers in disaster management, there is a need to understand how newspapers reported flood disaster stories and the framing of such reportage. Framing Theory is closely related to one of the earliest theories of mass communication – agenda setting theory. In fact, framing theory is referred to as a second level of agenda setting theory (McCombs, 2005; Scheufele, 1999).

Framing broadens the scope of agenda setting theory by focusing on the importance of particular issues. The two theories emphasize how media draws public's attention to specific issues of importance. Both involve similar psychological processes but different cognitive processes (Shah, McLeod, Gotlieb, & Lee, 2009). The distinction between the two theories, however, is that while agenda-setting only tell the audience what to think about, framing tells them how to think about that issue. Media focuses on some issues of public importance often result into action taken in support or against the issues being projected (Biswas & Kim, 2016; Goffman, 1974).

McCombs (2005) defines framing as "the selection of thematically related attributes for inclusion on the media agenda when a particular object is discussed". Also, Entman (2004) defines it as "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, evaluation, and/or solution". By reporting on some issues and leaving out some, the media is setting agenda for the society. However, framing theory goes beyond reporting the issues of importance. It is more interested in presenting the media contents especially news in a particular way to influence the thinking of the audience (readers, viewers and listeners).

The presentation of issues by the media creates a frame for such information and the frame influences the decision public make on the information. Framing (which involves selection and salience) is a deliberate choice by media men and it promotes problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and treatment recommendations for the item described (Entman, 2003). The theory refers to the way journalists present their reports to the public in their media outlets. Also, it has to do mainly with the way communicated information is crafted and presented to the public with the aim of not only helping audiences to know but to understand, interpret and take decisions on particular issues being reported by the media (Lowery & DeFleur, 1995).

Meanwhile, it is important to note that framing is an essential part of human communication and behavior. Man brings his own frames or intention to bear on communication process. People interpret happenings around them through their primary frameworks. The media through its presentation and other agents of socialization assist in building and setting up this frame. However, for journalists, framing is more of professional, practice oriented and has its own self-regulatory arrangements that accord its responsibility to the public (Siebert, Peterson & Schramm, 2000).

Goffman (1986) divides the primary framework into two - social and natural. While social framework sees events as socially driven determined by people, natural framework sees events as physical occurrences taking natural course without input of social forces. The basic assumption is that individuals are using these frameworks daily to process information received and communicate with others. Fiske and Taylor (1991) observe that man is "cognitive misers". By nature, man prefers to engage in minimal thinking and allow others to do the thinking for them. Frames provide this opportunity a sources of information have already processed it for audience. It is just a matter of using an already existing mental filters or a schema to make

understand the messages. Here lies the power of framing - it gives the source great power to influence receivers' interpretation of the message.

Relating this to flood disaster risk reduction, the media could use different frames to make people conscious of the need to embrace disaster risk reduction strategies. The media content can frame disaster as a purely physical phenomenon and that man is helpless or frames the contents as a social problem that man needs to take active role in its mitigation, prevention and preparedness for it when it eventually occurred. Focusing on educating people about activities that make them vulnerable, disseminating early warning and promoting resilience building strategies, disaster risk reduction is achieved.

Thus, the media role in prevention of disaster cannot be overemphasized. On the Need For Orientation (NFO) as propounded by McCombs & Weaver (1973), when there is a high uncertainty and high relevance of an issue, there is high need for orientation. Also, Barnes et al (2008) and McCombs and Shaw (1972) note that media attracts attention to issues of importance in the society by concentrating on reporting the issue and subtly shape people's opinion. This is the case with disaster issue. There is high degree of uncertainty, suddenness, and devastating expectation of disaster. The need to prevent or mitigate disaster is highly relevant to all stakeholders and the media needs to contribute its quota in preventing disasters.

Meanwhile, mobilizing people for development is another key role of the press. This is the ability of the media to make certain issues important in the minds of the public and galvanize them to action. Folarin (2002) observed that the media predetermine issues that are regarded as important at a particular time in a particular society. Through its presentation and framing, the press directs, moulds, guides peoples' mind and indirectly affects what people talk about and their behaviour. Fundamentally, the study will focus its attention on effect on the media reportage of flood disaster in Nigeria. By critical examination of its contents, the frequency of reportage, prominence, space allocation, formats, initiators of disaster story etc. are revealed.

THE MEDIA CONTENTS AND DISASTER RISK REDUCTION

Newspaper consists of different sections which cover wide range of human activities. Like other media of mass communication; newspapers inform, educate and entertain readers. Media managers and media men can make use of all components of newspaper to create disaster awareness, disseminate information on prevention and educate people.

The followings are the media contents available for disaster management:

1. News

This is the primary product of newspapers. People buy newspapers mainly because of news. News is defined as an account of events that are of interest to the public. It is reportage of the activities of governmental and non- governmental organisations and individuals and happenings in the society. News should be new, objective, appealing and relevant to the audiences. It's one of the best ways to make members of the public know about the existence and operation of an organization. News on organization can be positive or negative. Positive news is favourable and projects the image of the organization. Negative news, no matter how factual it is, is unfavourable. Organisations strive for good news as it assists them in fulfilling their objectives.

For disaster management organizations, getting good news materials before disaster happens, need more conscious, deliberate, sustained and planned efforts. The organizations are always in the news when disaster strikes and after the occurrence. Disaster, though a bad occurrence, is good news for the media. It consists of most ingredients of news. However, with good media relations, activities of the organization can also be in the news before the crisis period.

Thus, the organizations need to cultivate the media at pre –disaster stage. At this stage, seeking for cooperation and understanding are very important. Organizing series of media relations activities assist in building good relationship with the media. Such activities include issuing press releases, granting interviews, press conferences, workshops, seminars, facilities tour or simulation exercises, writing opinions, expert ideas, identifying with the media organization among others.

2. Features

A feature is more extensive and detailed than news. It consists of views of more than one source on topical issues. Unlike news which mostly takes few columns, a feature can be more than a page, a page, half a page and others. Photographs are often used to illustrate the features. Disaster managers can generate feature materials and place it in the media. They can encourage the media to write feature on the need for active involvement of all stakeholders in disaster prevention. Alerting media men to special events such as World Disaster Reduction day, October 13, visitation to disaster –prone areas, simulation exercises to show organisation’s preparedness for emergency etc. are good sources of feature materials generation.

3. Interviews

Interview is one of the contents of newspaper. It is question and answer interaction between the news source and journalist(s). It may be face to face or telephone or mail interview. It may be short or long. The chief executive officer or others in disaster management organisations can be interviewed on issues related to their activities.

4. Editorial

This is the opinion of the newspaper’s organization. It is a write up on a particular topic the media house considers of great importance to the public. It is written by the medium’s members of the editorial board. As the board consists of people who have accomplished in their endeavors, the editorial is taking serious especially by the policy makers.

With good relationship, disaster management issue could be brought to a front burner by the media’s editorial board. Agenda on prevention and mitigation can be set. As the board is powerful within and outside the media organization, cultivating members could assist in media focusing more on pre- disaster stage.

5. Photographs

A photograph tells stories more than one thousand words is a common saying in the media. People are first visually literate before being text literate. Photographs are used to illustrate stories or they can be used alone without being accompanied by stories. Good photography means photographs that are usable by the media and which reflect the intended message that the

organization wants to disseminate. Disaster managers could send photographs to the media to create awareness and educate people of incoming, ongoing and past disasters. This assists in sensitize people and build resilience.

6. Opinion / Column and Letter to the Editor

These emanate from the readers. It is a feedback mechanism as well as a channel for readers to express their views on the happenings in the society. The views expressed may be reactions to the published materials or issues not reported by the media. It may be for an issue or against it. However, while columnists are largely engaged by the media houses and write regularly (once in a week in the newspaper or every edition of magazine), opinion and letter to the editor are not engaged by the organization nor write regularly. These individuals can contribute to disaster awareness by writing on impending or already happened disaster in the country. Disaster managers and media can also engage the services of some columnists and opinion writers to write on disaster prevention issues. Members of the community can also be encouraged to raise alarm through mailing short notes and pictures of disaster waiting to happen to the media for publication.

7. Advertisement

Advertisement is another veritable way of disseminating information and educating the public. It is a paid for media content and advertiser (s) are clearly identified. The advertisers may be individual, groups, public and private organisations. However, the message may also be sponsored (supported with a space) by the media. As part of social responsibility and identifying with good course, media can donate space to good courses aimed at solving social problem, like disaster prevention, through public enlightenment and media campaign.

METHODOLOGY

This study used content analysis method to determine the extent of Nigerian newspapers reportage of flood disaster. Hard copies of two national and well- circulated newspapers were examined for a period of one year. The two selected newspapers are *Punch* and *Trust*. The contents of the newspapers from January 1 – December 31, 2017 were analysed. 2012 was selected because it was the year when worst flood in the recent history of Nigeria occurred (NEMA, 2013; Agbaje, 2013; OCHA, 2012). 32 out of the 36 states in the country were affected, 363 death, millions of people displaced, undue destruction of property among other attendant problems.

Some 730 editions of the newspapers were analysed for flood. All contents of the newspapers – news, editorial, features/ interviews, opinion / letter to editor / column and adverts, - were assessed. Thus, in this study, flood materials refer to all media contents published on flood disaster. The data were collected and coded by the researcher and two Research Assistants in coding sheets. The results were presented in a tabular form to show empirically the extent to which the Nigerian media create awareness and educate people before flood occurrence.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

There are three stages of disaster occurrence. They are Pre – Disaster, During - Disaster and Post - disaster. Through its reports, media is involved in the three stages. However, it is instructive to

note that the focus of this study is to ascertain the media reportage of flood disaster before its occurrence. This is because disaster risk reduction main focus is before disaster incident/ pre disaster stage. Thus, emphasis is laid on media awareness creation and education before disaster. Table 4.1 shows the finding.

Table 4. 1: *Stages of Reportage of Flood Disaster in 2012*

No.	Month	Newspaper	Pre flooding	- During flooding	After flooding	Total
1.	January	Punch	4	0	0	4
		Trust	2	0	0	2
2.	February	Punch	3	0	0	3
		Trust	1	0	0	1
3.	March	Punch	6	0	0	6
		Trust	4	1	5	10
4.	April	Punch	8	3	1	12
		Trust	1	0	2	3
5.	May	Punch	1	2	2	5
		Trust	3	3	1	7
6.	June	Punch	4	7	5	16
		Trust	2	3	1	6
7.	July	Punch	9	12	7	28
		Trust	5	9	6	20
8.	August	Punch	9	12	6	27
		Trust	6	29	18	53
9.	September	Punch	7	31	13	51
		Trust	3	35	46	84
10.	October	Punch	1	22	40	63
		Trust	0	6	17	23
11.	November	Punch	6	1	20	27
		Trust	1	0	7	8
12.	December	Punch	3	0	10	13
		Trust	1	0	12	13

<i>Total</i>		90	176	219	485
<i>Total</i>	%	18.56	36.29	45.15	

Statistically, in 2012, flood materials were published in the two newspapers in 485 times. *Punch* published it in 255 times (53%) while *Trust* in 230 times (47%). From the data, it is clear that Nigerian newspapers least published flood disaster stories before its occurrences. Out of 485 materials published on flood in 2012, only 90 representing 18.56% were published on pre - disaster stage. The materials published were mainly on published after flood disaster has occurred. Statistically, 219 (45.15%) materials were published after flood disaster had occurred while 176 (36.29%) of the materials were published at during stage of the disaster.

This shows that the media is less active in disseminating information and educating populace on flood disaster risk reduction. This is against the current trend where all stakeholders are encouraged to participate actively at pre - disaster stage and being proactive (Ikramova, 2012; Kakonge, 2012; Perez – Lugo, 2001; Rattien, 1990; Quarantelli, 2006).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Arising from the findings of this study, the followings are recommended to enhance media disaster risk reduction reportage and proactive reportage of flood disaster in Nigeria:

1. There is need for media organisations to be more pro – active in their reportage of flood disaster in Nigeria. The framing of stories should be more on disaster risk reduction. Through publication of reports that warn people of consequences of activities that make community flood – prone, dissemination of early warning and education on disaster risks, this would be achieved. Photographs of disaster waiting to happen, editorial, features, interviews and other formats of reportage need to be employed more in disaster reportage.

2. Considering the increasing spate of disaster, environmental, safety and other developmental challenges, media men need to be adequately trained formally (in schools) and informally (on the job and self-education) the fundamentals and practices of development communication and pro – active journalism. At present, media reportage of public issues is being criticized as lacking development – orientation. Institutions training journalists, public relations professionals, disaster managers should design a course in this regards.

3. Embarking on investigative journalism on the causes and solutions to perennial flood disaster would be of great assistance to disaster risk reduction and save the country from recurring agonies and development retardation being caused by flood. Flood is a commonest and most devastating man - made disaster. Some activities of man induced it. Heavy rain is a natural phenomenon, an act of God. Mostly, it is when man, due to his actions or inactions, impedes the free flow of water that flood majorly occurs. Thus, journalistic investigation into the triggers of flood and curbing such would be of great importance to disaster risk reduction.

4. Though media organizations survive mainly on adverts, and disaster management organisations are not profit making organization, still there is need for the latter and other stakeholders to support the former to survive. Media exists for two main reasons - a social and business entity. It has to survive as a business entity first to enable it functions effectively as a

social institution. To achieve this, working out special advert rate, sponsorship of pages, special editions, and other ethical, financial assistances would motivate media to participate more effectively.

5. Active collaboration among all stakeholders in disaster management is highly imperative. There is need for stakeholders to key into the disaster risk reduction agenda rather than responding to disaster at most time.

CONCLUSION

The objective of the study is to find out the contribution of Nigerian media to flood disaster risk reduction. Media as one of the key stakeholders in disaster risk reduction plays some key role. These responsibilities include disseminating early warning information, educating people on activities that will enhance resilience and decrease vulnerability to disaster, mobilizing human and material resources during and after disaster occurrences, effective collaboration with other stakeholders among others.

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