



## GENDERED NARRATIVES IN CLIMATE CHANGE DISCOURSE IN THE MEDIA AND PERCEPTION OF RURAL NIGERIAN COMMUNITIES

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### ABSTRACT

The study focuses on how climate change communication in the media influence gendered understanding of the concept in rural Nigerian communities. It used a qualitative approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of how media represents climate change and its effects on different genders. This involved in-depth interviews with members of rural communities in Ovia Northeast local government of Edo State and media professionals, capturing their experiences and interactions with climate change media content. The findings reveal that media coverage of climate change in rural Nigeria is limited and often fails to address gender-specific impacts adequately. Most respondents access climate change information rarely, indicating a gap in effective communication strategies. The study concludes that enhancing media coverage and incorporating gender-sensitive approaches can improve climate change awareness and response in rural communities. It recommends targeted media campaigns and participatory communication strategies to bridge the information gap and empower rural populations in addressing climate change challenges.

**Keywords:** Climate Change, Media Coverage, Gender Impact, Rural Communities, Communication Strategies.

### Introduction

The intersection of climate change and socioeconomic challenges poses a significant threat to agricultural production and food security in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in vulnerable regions like Nigeria. With a high reliance on rain-fed subsistence agriculture, rural farm communities in Nigeria face the compounding impact of climate change, exacerbating existing issues of poverty, food insecurity, and health (Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2022).

The negative effects of climate change, such as extreme events like drought, floods, and bushfires, disproportionately affect rural areas, leading to seasonal migration to urban areas. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) recognizes the urgent need to address the balance between economic progress and environmental well-being (USAID, 2021; UNFCCC, 2019), without losing sight of the health ramifications (Odoemelum, 2020).

Studies (NCCP, 2021; Akande, 2017) emphasize the visible impact of climate change in Nigeria since the 1980s, with a significant temperature increase across ecological zones. The consequences include a decline in crop and livestock productivity, affecting access to drinking water and posing a threat to food security, especially in weather-sensitive agricultural regions like sub-Saharan Africa.

In the face of these challenges, coping strategies become crucial for rural farm communities. Factors influencing these strategies include climate change awareness, access to information, agricultural input availability, education, and household characteristics (Ishaya and Abaje, 2008; Avanelade 2018; Enete 2015).

The urgency of addressing climate change is underscored by the vulnerability of rural farm families. The media, as a powerful communication tool, plays a pivotal role in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy responses, including environmental issues (Odoemelam & Odoemelam, 2023; Forum Report, 2022; Nerlich & Koteyko, 2009).

Hence, radio and television programmes of Edo Broadcasting Services (EBS), Independent television, Independent radio and other online platforms usually discuss environmental and climate change issues that are accessible to rural communities in the state (Ihechu & Okugo, 2013). However, the media landscape is complex, with challenges such as financial constraints and ideological polarization affecting the dissemination of climate change information (Avanelade 2018; Okoro, Odoemelam, Obayi, 2013).

While studies highlight the positive attitudes of journalists toward reporting climate change (e.g., Odoemelam & Odoemelam, 2023; Amu & Agwu, 2012), the focus shifts to whether journalism reflect the gendered perspectives. The assumption that rural communities perceive gender differences in climate change as urgent and consider it a key journalistic responsibility forms the basis of this study. Understanding the perceptions of journalism is crucial for enhancing climate change communication. The study, conducted in rural communities in Ovia North East Local government, Edo state, Nigeria, aims to provide insights into how they perceive climate change in the media and its impact.

Rural communities, with their deep connection to the environment, face unique challenges due to climate change. These communities are often marginalized, with limited access to resources and remedies for adaptation (Oelz et al., 2017). Despite their vulnerability, they play a crucial role in biodiversity conservation and sustainable development (Woldemichael, 2020). Recognizing the importance these communities can contribute significantly to climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts (Oelz et al., 2017). However, their voices and experiences are often overlooked in mainstream media coverage

The media's role in bridging the gap between scientific findings and public understanding is pivotal. In the context of climate change, media coverage should not only raise awareness but also amplify the voices of vulnerable communities, including rural communities.

### **Gendered Narratives in Media Coverage**

Climate change, with its far-reaching consequences, often exacerbates existing gender disparities. In rural Nigerian communities, where traditional roles and responsibilities are deeply entrenched, women often bear the brunt of climate-related challenges. Therefore, the media's role in portraying these nuanced gender dynamics is crucial for fostering an inclusive and equitable understanding of climate change impacts.

The preliminary literature review highlights the need to explore gendered narratives in media coverage. Drawing from the works of authors like Oelz et al. and Nerlich & Koteyko, the study aims to unravel how media outlets portray the experiences of women in rural communities grappling with the effects of climate change. Understanding the gendered impact necessitates an exploration of not only the challenges but also the resilience and adaptive strategies employed by women.

By analyzing media content, the study seeks to identify potential biases, stereotypes, or underrepresentation of women's perspectives in climate change discourse. This critical analysis will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the gendered dimensions of climate change in rural Nigerian communities.

## **Community Engagement and Participatory Media**

Community engagement is a cornerstone of effective climate change communication. This research acknowledges the need for participatory media approaches that involve communities in shaping the narratives that concern them directly. It draws inspiration from studies by Ishaya and Abaje (2008) and Nzeadibe. (2011) to explore how participatory media can be integrated into climate change discourse.

Authors like Enete (2015) and Achike (2019) underscore the significance of recognizing local coping mechanisms. The study seeks to shed light on how media coverage either highlights or overlooks these solutions, providing insights into the potential areas for improvement in representing the resilience of rural Nigerian communities.

Understanding the role of community members as active contributors to media content ensures that the representation is not only accurate but also reflective of the community's priorities and concerns. This participatory approach aligns with the overarching goal of inclusive climate change communication.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The lack of awareness and knowledge about climate change in rural areas pose significant challenges to effective adaptation and resilience strategies in rural communities. As well, inadequate media coverage hinders effective dissemination of information on climate change challenges faced by rural communities, including how communities perceive climate change and its impact on gender.

This suggests a lack of comprehensive reporting that addresses the specific vulnerabilities and coping strategies within these communities. Existing media narratives often neglect the intersectionality of climate change, gender and socioeconomic factors that may hinder a nuanced understanding of the challenges faced by rural populations. The present study aims to address this gap and draws attention to how rural communities in Ovia North East local government of Edo State perceive narratives on climate change in the media as mediated by their gender.

## **Research Questions**

The following research questions guided the study:

1. How do rural communities in Ovia North East Local government perceive current media coverage of climate change in rural Nigerian communities and how it affects women and men?
2. What are the perceived socioeconomic impacts of climate change on rural communities in Ovia Northeast local government, Nigeria, particularly in terms of poverty, food security, and health?
3. In what ways are rural communities in Ovia Northeast local government portrayed in media discussions on climate change, and what unique vulnerabilities and contributions are highlighted?

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study applies the democratic participant media theory in examining media narratives on climate change and its gendered influence rural communities to provide understanding on how citizens engage with and contribute to climate change discourse through media channels. Thus, the theory provides a lens through which the participatory nature of media in rural communities can be analyzed.

In the context of climate change communication, the democratic participant media theory aligns with the study's focus on representation and communication strategies. By acknowledging that media

content should be produced by and for the people, the theory supports the investigation into how rural communities actively participate in shaping the narrative around climate change. This aligns with the study's exploration of citizen journalism in disseminating information about climate events and their gendered impacts.

The theory's emphasis on democratizing media access also resonates with the study's goal of understanding the challenges and opportunities for rural communities in accessing and contributing to climate change information. It allows for an exploration of how media, when functioning as a democratic and participatory tool, can bridge gaps in knowledge and empower communities to respond effectively to climate uncertainties.

Moreover, the democratic participant media theory underscores the need for tailored communication strategies, especially in rural settings. It supports the investigation into how local knowledge and perspectives can be integrated into climate change discourse through media channels. This theory encourages a bottom-up approach, where the media serves the interests of the rural population, contributing to their resilience against climate-related challenges.

Overall, the democratic participant media theory serves as a guiding framework in this study, enabling a comprehensive analysis of how media coverage of climate change in rural communities in Ovia Northeast local government, Edo State, Nigeria, can be more inclusive, participatory, and aligned with the democratic principles of representation and access

## **Method**

Employing a qualitative approach, this research engaged in in-depth interviews, and thematic coding drawn from the transcripts of the interview sessions. It drew insights from the democratic participant media theory and related frameworks. The study explored the nuances of gender and traditional broadcast media's role in representing climate change in rural Nigeria communities in Ovia Northeast local government.

The communities were selected from clusters of agrarian settlements in Okada in Ovia Northeast local government of Edo State. Participants included 12 interviewees selected from six communities, and six interviews from media organisations from Edo Broadcasting Service (EBS) ITV and IRadio to represent media professionals. Participants, who accepted to be interviewed, self-reported their gender and age. Each session lasted for an average of 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Standard English language and pidgin language (adulterated English spoken mostly in in the south-south region of Nigeria).

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Media Coverage of Climate Change in Rural Nigerian Communities**

To address this research question, one of the interview questions focused on participants' perceptions of media coverage frequency and sources regarding climate change. Respondents were asked, "How often do you access information about climate change in the media?" This question aimed to gauge the frequency of exposure to climate change-related content in various media platforms within rural Nigerian communities.

The findings from this interview question contributed to understanding the extent of media coverage of climate change and its gendered impact in rural Nigerian communities. For instance, a study by Odoemelam (2023) explored journalists negotiating authenticity in climate change discourse, offering insights into the dynamics of media representation.

Additionally, studies by Atton (2009) and Salawu (2011) discuss alternative journalism's role in specific communities and its implications for democracy, which are relevant to understanding media

coverage dynamics in rural Nigerian contexts. These references provide theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to support the discussion of findings related to media coverage of climate change and its gendered impact in rural Nigerian communities.

### **Socioeconomic Impacts of Climate Change on Rural Communities**

To explore the socioeconomic impacts of climate change on rural families in Nigeria, particularly focusing on poverty, food security, and health, one of the interview questions delved into participants' perceptions of how climate change affects their livelihoods and well-being. Participants were asked, "How do you perceive climate change impacting rural farm families in terms of poverty, food security, and health?" This question aimed to gather insights into the socioeconomic consequences experienced by rural communities due to climate change, with the project's focus on media coverage and its gendered impact in rural Nigerian communities.

In rural Nigerian communities, where agriculture often serves as the primary livelihood source, climate change poses significant challenges to rural farm families, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities and socioeconomic disparities. The findings from the interview question shed light on the multifaceted impacts of climate change on poverty, food security, and health within these communities.

The topic provide theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to support the discussion of findings related to the socioeconomic impacts of climate change. Salawu (2011) underscores the profound implications of climate change for poverty and food security in Nigeria, highlighting the need for effective communication strategies to address these challenges. Additionally, studies by Apeverga (2010) and Okoro (2013) examine the socioeconomic consequences of climate change on rural livelihoods, offering insights into the gendered dimensions of vulnerability and resilience.

Furthermore, Odoemelam and Odoemelamin 2023, explored the intersectionality of climate change discourse and gender representation in media narratives and provided a nuanced understanding of how socioeconomic impacts are communicated and perceived within rural Nigerian communities. By integrating these scholarly works into the discussion of findings, the study enhances its theoretical framework and empirical basis, offering comprehensive insights into the socioeconomic ramifications of climate change on rural farm families in Nigeria.

Overall, the discussion of findings highlights the complex interplay between climate change, socioeconomic vulnerabilities, and media representation within rural Nigerian communities. By examining the gendered impact of climate change through the lens of perceived media coverage, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by rural farm families and the communication strategies needed to address these issues effectively.

### **Portrayal in Media on Climate Change**

To understand the portrayal of indigenous communities in media discussions on climate change and to identify the unique vulnerabilities and contributions, an interview question was crafted to explore participants' perceptions of indigenous representation in media narratives. The question asked, "How do you perceive the portrayal of indigenous communities in media discussions on climate change, and what do you think are their unique vulnerabilities and contributions?" This aimed to uncover the representation of indigenous perspectives in media coverage of climate change, aligning with the project's focus on examining media coverage and its gendered impact in rural Nigerian communities.

Responses indicate that, in media discussions on climate change, indigenous communities are often depicted through stereotypical lenses, characterized as either victims of environmental degradation or

passive recipients of aid and interventions. This narrow portrayal overlooks the diverse knowledge systems, adaptive strategies, and resilience inherent within indigenous cultures. Furthermore, responses show that, indigenous voices are frequently marginalized or silenced in mainstream media narratives, perpetuating power imbalances and reinforcing dominant narratives that prioritize Western perspectives.

Empirical evidences to support the discussion of findings related to indigenous perspectives in media coverage of climate change. For instance, Martinez-Alier et al. (2014) examined the importance of recognizing indigenous knowledge and practices in climate change discourse, and found their role as custodians of biodiversity and stewards of natural resources. Additionally, studies by Coulthard (2014) and Tauli-Corpuz (2018) uncovered the vulnerabilities faced by indigenous communities in the context of climate change, shedding light on the intersectionality of social, economic, and environmental challenges.

Therefore, to address the shortcomings in media representations of indigenous communities in climate change discourse, proactive measures are needed to amplify indigenous voices, promote cultural diversity, and foster inclusive dialogue. Media platforms should prioritize collaborative partnerships with indigenous leaders, knowledge holders, and community-based organizations to co-create narratives that authentically reflect indigenous perspectives and experiences. Additionally, capacity-building initiatives should be implemented to enhance media literacy and cultural competency among journalists and media practitioners, enabling them to navigate complex cultural contexts sensitively and responsibly.

Furthermore, initiatives to decolonize media spaces and challenge hegemonic narratives are essential to promote equity and social justice in climate change communication. By centering indigenous voices, acknowledging their agency, and recognizing their contributions to climate resilience, media coverage can become more inclusive, intersectional, and empowering.

Through these concerted efforts, media can play a transformative role in fostering solidarity, empathy, and collective action towards climate justice for all communities, including indigenous peoples. Insights from the interviews shed light on potential solutions and strategies. One of the interview questions aimed at eliciting participants' perspectives on the effectiveness of media coverage in raising awareness about climate change and their suggestions for improvement. Participants provided valuable insights and recommendations, aligning with the project's goal of examining media coverage and its gendered impact in rural Nigerian communities.

Several key themes emerged from the interviews, highlighting both challenges and potential solutions to enhance the representation of climate change issues in rural Nigerian communities through the media. Participants emphasized the need for greater inclusivity, accuracy, and diversity in media narratives, advocating for the amplification of local voices, indigenous knowledge, and community-based solutions. They also underscored the importance of collaborative partnerships between media outlets, civil society organizations, and government agencies to foster information sharing, capacity building, and community engagement initiatives.

The study provides theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence to support the discussion of findings related to recommendations for improving media coverage of climate change in rural Nigerian communities. For instance, O'Brien (2019) emphasizes the importance of participatory approaches to climate communication, highlighting the role of local media in facilitating dialogue, fostering resilience, and promoting social change. Additionally, studies by Leiserowitz et al. (2018) and Boykoff (2019) suggest effective communication strategies for engaging diverse audiences and mobilizing collective action on climate change issues.

## Conclusions

This study sheds light on the complexities of media coverage of climate change in rural Nigerian communities and its gendered impact. Through rigorous data collection and analysis, we have identified key challenges, including limited representation, misinformation, and inadequate engagement with indigenous perspectives.

It is evident that addressing these challenges requires a multi-faceted approach. Firstly, there is a need for media literacy initiatives to empower communities to critically evaluate climate change information. Additionally, media outlets should prioritize diversity and inclusion in their content production to ensure the representation of diverse voices and experiences.

Moreover, fostering collaboration between media practitioners, researchers, and community stakeholders is essential for co-creating relevant and culturally sensitive communication strategies. By amplifying indigenous perspectives and elevating local knowledge, media coverage can better reflect the realities and vulnerabilities of rural Nigerian communities.

Furthermore, investment in community-based media initiatives and participatory communication approaches can enhance community resilience and foster collective action towards climate change adaptation and mitigation. Empowering local voices and fostering dialogue within communities are critical steps towards building climate-resilient societies.

In sum, while there are challenges in media coverage of climate change in rural Nigeria, there are also opportunities for innovation and collaboration. By leveraging the strengths of diverse stakeholders and adopting inclusive communication strategies, we can work towards more effective and equitable media coverage that addresses the gendered impacts of climate change and promotes sustainable development in rural communities.

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