

Media Advocacy in Climate Action: Showcasing Best Practices in West Africa

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Abstract: Despite the level of threat climate change poses to humanity, climate action is poorly advocated for using one of the most powerful and easily accessible tools, the media. This stands particularly true in West Africa, the part of the planet factually concluded to be most severely affected in the case of possible climate crises. Using desktop review, this research was carried out to comb through existing literature for evidence of Africa's active advocacy for climate action through the utilization of the media. In its aim to do so, the researchers examined a total of 144 sources. 52 sources were seen to achieve best practices, based on the authors' conceptualization of media advocacy (a measure that incorporates sustainability). Out of the sources examined, the best practices were found most in Southern Africa and least in Western Africa. Furthermore, the best media practices to carry out climate advocacy in West Africa were highlighted and explained in detail. The study contributes to the scarce literature showcasing best media practices in advocating for sustainable actions in climate adaptation with West Africa. It has the potential to open new themes and spark media discourse surrounding the drivers of sustainable climate actions in West Africa, a region with the lowest enthusiasm for climate action amongst other regions in Africa. The paper acts as a wake-up call for countries in West Africa to emulate the showcased practices in tackling climate challenges.

Keywords: *Best practices, Climate action, Media advocacy, Sustainability, West Africa*

Conflicts of interest: None

Supporting agencies: None

Received 30.09.2022; Revised 11.11.2022; Accepted 27.11.2022

Cite This Article: Binuyo O.A., Bamgboye O.E., & Adeola, G.A. (2022). Media Advocacy in Climate Action: Showcasing Best Practices in West Africa. *Journal of Sustainability and Environmental Management*, 1(4), 419-424.

1. Introduction

The credibility of the existential threat that climate change poses to the continued survival of planet earth and, consequently, all its inhabitants have been continuously downplayed since the 19th century. West Africa which is known as the western part of Africa is bordered by the Atlantic Ocean in the west, the Sahara and the Sahel, the Gulf of Guinea in the south and the Sahara Desert and the Sudan Savanna. Western Africa consists of 16 countries which occupy 8 million km², which accounts for one-fifth of Africa. The countries within the West African region includes Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, Liberia, Mauritania, Mali, Guinea-Bissau, Niger, Togo, Ghana, Cape Verde, The Gambia, Guinea, Benin, Senegal. The region also houses a population of over 400 million people which accounts for 5.16% of the world's population according to the African Development Bank Group. The CDP Africa (2020) reports that Africa

accounts for 3.8 percent of the world's carbon emissions, with Western Africa contributing to 2.3% out of the 3.8% of the global emissions in Africa.

It is no more news that climate change is becoming a more glaring crisis with every passing day. Climate change is posited by the United Nations to be consequential in terms of intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms, and declining biodiversity. The World Health Organization (2021) projected that at least 250,000 deaths will be recorded annually between 2030 and 2050, thanks to the climate change induced illnesses like malaria, heat stress and diarrhea.

As climate and environmental factors constitute the single biggest threat facing humanity, such fallout is already being experienced through air pollution, disease, wildfires caused by global warming and the likes, claiming the lives of approximately 13 million individuals per year (World Health Organization, 2021). Apart from

that, climate change also constitutes the biggest hindrance to the achievement of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. (World Meteorological Organization, 2021).

It would be a terrible understatement to say that this is in any way less than an existential crisis. However, many individuals in rural areas do not yet grasp that the underlying problems that create such drastic changes in climate are born of various ‘normal’ activities that appear harmful at a surface glance. The destructive climatic nature of such change is a global culmination of more than millions of seemingly harmless practices and actions. To combat the devastating effects of climate change using the bottom-up approach, there is a need to explore the use of media advocacy.

Countries in West Africa have undergone several climate informative phases, yet the concept of sustainability has not been properly included. Abbasi and Nawaz (2020) opined that climate awareness is pertinent for sustainability and climate adaptation actions as there is a low level of good sustainability practices in developing countries. Findings from existing literature (Abbasi & Nawaz 2020; Sola, Omowunmi & Michael 2016; Ibeabuchi, Thomas, Jenkins, Philip & Kantamaneni 2017) show the growing awareness of climate change in African countries. Despite the growing awareness, the concept of sustainable actions in tandem with the level of awareness is lagging (Njoku 2016). Sustainable actions are required to put an end to climate issues. One of such actions is the use of media advocacy.

Epule, Chebouni, Dhiba, Moto and Peng (2021) ranked regions and countries in Africa according to their performance in mitigating climate issues. They found out that the Northern and Southern regions of Africa are the best performers regionally. These African regions have been consistent with implementing sustainable actions towards reducing greenhouse emissions and corruption and promoting good climate policies and renewable energy. West Africa needs to catch up with other regions in taking responsible action towards climate change. Ayodotun, Bamba, and Adio (2019) reiterated that the West African region is one of the most vulnerable regions in terms of climate change hazards and little is being done to combat the grave consequences of climate change.

Much worse is the unequal level of advocacy for climate action through the singular most powerful communication tool in the modern world; the media. The media, no matter what form it might take, is exceptionally fundamental to society. The influence it possesses on the rhythm of events, for instance, cannot be overstated. For this reason, while the media seems unbound, as a tool not owned by any single individual or body, it yet has a “social responsibility to provide effective information services for climate change adaptation and mitigation policy cycle for sustainable development” (Okaka & Nagasha 2017).

The major aim of this study is to showcase best practices of media advocacy for climate action within the region lagging in climate action, West Africa. The objective, factored therein, is to measure the disparity in

media-factored advocacy campaigns between the regions of the African continent and properly place the West African region's status amongst these. The study further highlights the few best practices within the region to determine the level of necessity for more research to be conducted in the field of media advocacy in relation to climate action.

Media Advocacy in Climate Action

Media is a broad compound concept used to refer to varying channels and outlets of communication through which all forms of information are disseminated. Often collectively referred to as the ‘mass media’, it is a constitution of smaller ‘mediums’, all of which are constructed for the purposes of informing, educating and entertaining, ranging from the individual level to the global scale (Nity & Singh, 2017).

It would be a fatal mistake for one to assume that those who contribute the least to climate change should equally contribute the least to climate action. As proven by Bathiany S. et al (2018) in a recent study, unequal regional effects and variability are consistent factors in climate change, effectively stating that different planetary regions undergo varying, and possibly localized, effects. This deceptive window of opportunity is acted upon as an excuse to contribute less to climate action than other largely affected regions of the world; the COP25 to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in a report by the African Development Bank Group reported that, such regions as Africa that contribute the least to climate change (not more than 3 percent), tend to be the “most vulnerable” to the most extreme and disastrous climate change-induced weather events. Based on this conclusion, as a global crisis, climate change can only be effectively tackled by a “global community” (Hase, et al, 2021).

The media being, in effect, the singular medium through which the world is interconnected and recognized as a global community is, inadvertently, therefore an indispensable tool and major asset to provoke and foster positive, sustainable climate action, as proven by Mavrodieva (et al, 2019). In this light, media advocacy refers to the utilization of selected communication outlets for sustainable and sustained actions that stand in favor of a certain cause and by proposing related positive and sustainable solutions, propels a certain targeted people or body to realize such solutions into active practices. In agreement with the earlier opinion of a global crisis being only able to be solved by a “global community”, it is only feasible that media advocacy for climate action is not the duty of a sole individual or corporate body. Media advocacy for climate action is a democratic advocacy, in the practical sense that it is ‘of everyone, by everyone and for everyone’; a global-scale coalition of every media-literate agent that identifies as a citizen of planet Earth (Mavrodieva, et al, 2019).

One path through which media advocacy becomes relevant in climate action is providing substantial information which culminates in best practices for climate action, motivating and propelling the global climate inactive populace into becoming practical actors and

tackling adversarial climatic action brought about by ignorance (Al Sheikh & Al Serhan 2022).

2. Materials and methods

Using desktop review, this research was carried out to comb through existing literature for evidence of Africa's active advocacy for climate action through the utilization of the media. In its aim to do so, the researchers examined a total of 144 sources: 100 websites, 19 journal articles and 25 reports. According to the authors, media advocacy refers to the utilization of selected communication outlets for sustainable and sustained actions that stand in favor of a certain cause and by proposing related positive and sustainable solutions, propels a certain targeted people or body to realize such solutions into active practices. This definition incorporates the important concept of sustainability, and this was the selection criterion. After sorting out the sources based on the authors' definition of media advocacy, only 52 projects were seen to be best media advocacy practices towards climate action.

3. Results and discussion

Out of the sources examined, it was seen that Southern Africa (n=15) has the highest number of media advocacy interventions for climate change. This is followed by the North African region (n=12) and Eastern and Central Africa had 10 interventions each. It was found that West Africa (n=5) has the lowest media advocacy campaigns for climate change. Compared to the other cardinal regions in Africa, advocacy through the media for climate action in West Africa is rare and uncommon. This buttresses the findings of Njoku 2016; Onyekuru, and Marchant (2018); and Ogunbode 2019. They all opined that there is need for more sustainable actions using innovative tools (like the media) to promote knowledge and adaptation regarding climate change. From the study, Southern and Northern regions of Africa are the best performers in tackling climate issues and this is consistent with the findings of Epule et al. 2021. They discovered that Northern and Southern Africa are best performers in their computation of an innovative measure called the African Climate Change Policy Performance Index (ACCPPI). It is noteworthy that majority of the reviewed selections in West Africa took place in Nigeria. These campaigns will hereby be discussed in detail.

3.1. Renewable energy for communities' campaign - 350 Ghana reducing our carbon, Ghana

The increment in the country's greenhouse gas emission rates, which skyrocketed to a total of 59 million metric tons (MtCO_{2e}); a high rise of 20% in the space of only twenty years, has caused a consequential increase in desertification and temperature but a decrease in much needed rainfall. As a result, Ghana is at a greater risk of

suffering economic disruption, health complications and the likes compared to other West African countries.

In a bid to solve this problem, 350 Ghana - Reducing Our Carbon (G-ROC), a non-governmental organization based in Ghana with the aim of reducing carbon emissions by actively aiding the empowerment of youths established the Renewable Energy for Communities Initiative to change the narrative surrounding the use of energy in the country. 350 G-ROC is committed to climate change mitigation by embracing clean energy solutions starting from Ghana. In the year 2021, 350 G-ROC launched a dual campaign that took place physically and across social media with the tag: "Renewable Energy for Communities" (RE4C) and met with the Deputy Director of the Environmental Protection Agency in Accra and four other regions to make their stand known to the country's policy makers.

Under the umbrella of the RE4C campaign, they organized and held a 2-day online training workshop for digital campaigners in the climate action focus. In this workshop, they sensitized more than 50 youth activists on the best practices of social media, the relevance of social media to fossil-free campaigns and more. To this same end, 350 G-ROC took to a prominent television station in Ghana, TV Africa, in April 2022 and sensitized viewers on renewable energy for Ghanaian communities. Following this, they petitioned the Ghanaian Ministry of Energy using the RE4C coalition in the month of March 2022, requesting that at least 10% of the proposed regional renewable energy plans be implemented by 2030.

The actions of the RE4C campaign promotes environmental sustainability as awareness and sensitization spur the populace to act and tackle climate issues. Luthfia and Alkhajar (2018) emphasized the relevance of awareness in combatting climate change. Using a social youth movement in Indonesia as a case study, they realized that youth-led campaigns are very effective in bringing about coordinated efforts from relevant stakeholders in the society. In the same vein, the RE4C Campaign focused on youth mobilization, empowerment, and partnerships to provide renewable energy for local communities and mitigate climate problems in Ghana.

3.2. SurgeX media initiative, Surge Africa, Nigeria

There is widespread ignorance about the causes of climate change in Nigeria, with a great number of the population being superstitious about the topic. The average Nigerian citizen is not accurately informed about climate change issues nor is he aware of ways to tackle these issues through climate action. Most of the rural community populace have poor knowledge about the causes and implications of climate change and no practical knowledge of the ways to mitigate these issues due to limited educational background.

To combat this problem, Surge Africa, a Nigerian-based NGO that aims to influence landscape governance and promotes climate adaptation through policy and

sustainable practices created a media advocacy initiative - SurgeX Media. This initiative focuses on bridging the information gap between community impact and climate data using media advocacy tools such as visual data, storytelling, and advocacy journalism as a tool for social change. Pearce, Niederer, Özkula, & Querubin (2019) posited that social media platforms deepen the imaginations and assessment of the public about climate change. Hence, the importance of media in climate action.

Under this initiative, a media advocacy project - Media for Climate Justice a training program for climate advocates in the media space was executed in July 2021. The 2-day workshop program which had twenty-two participants from ten African countries was aimed at providing participants with the necessary skills to use media for climate policy, and media for climate justice which will, in turn, secure social change across the society. Ogunjinmi, Sunday, Ogunjinmi and Adekoya (2016) explained that social media is essential in the dissemination of climate knowledge and trending issues around it in Nigeria.

During the workshop, the participants were enlightened on using social media tools to bridge the information gap and enhance social engagement and widespread inclusion. They were also educated about the importance of media credibility and encouraged to provide credible and verified information in a bid to change the social construct around climate change. By the end of the workshop, the participants which were media personalities such as journalists, writers, content creators etc. from Gambia, Nigeria and 8 other African countries, were able to unlearn, learn and relearn a lot about providing climate information to the society.

3.3. Shehu Musa Yar'adua Foundation, Nigeria

Carbon emissions are caused by different human activities such as the burning of fossil fuels, garbage burning and burning of vegetation. Forest management plays a huge role in reducing the amount of carbon emission in the atmosphere by absorbing and storing them in plants, woods, and dead trees. Nigeria produced 127 million tons of greenhouse gas emissions in 2021. In another report according to the Nigerian Conservation Foundation, was reported in 2018 that Nigeria has lost 96% of its forest cover coupled with a deforestation rate of 11.1% per year. To fight against these alarming climate issues in Nigeria, Shehu Musa Yar'adua Foundation, an organization committed to promoting unity, good governance, and social justice by creating engaging platforms to foster inclusion in Nigeria through national conversations using media advocacy tools.

One of this organization's interests is climate advocacy using media tools such as short films and documentaries to drive social engagement to the dying climate in Nigeria. The foundation produced a short documentary titled *Nowhere to Run: Nigeria's Climate and Environmental Crisis*, which spotlights environmental threats and climate challenges faced by the communities. Ozden and Ozden

(2021) revealed that fiction, documentaries, and movies are efficient tools to provoke community discourse around climate change and environmental sustainability. Bondi, Monani, Principato and Barlett (2020) opined those short films surrounding climate change that serve as an instrument for educating and communicating to the citizenry. Using quantitative methods, they discovered that there is an extensive impact of films on the understanding of the audience which promotes climate change education. Another documentary of the Shehu Musa Yar'adua Foundation is titled *Swallow: Food Security in Nigeria's Changing Climate*, a short film that was able to draw crucial attention to the climate crisis of numerous communities in Nigeria. This film talks on challenges such as food security resulting from the ever-changing climate and crude agriculture practices. This short film which has been translated into different languages such as French, Hausa, Yoruba, Pidgin was broadcasted on 37 local television stations and reached an estimated viewers of about 25 million people. This figure produces a ripple effect and promotes climate education amongst the fans and audience of the films.

3.4. Climate change media fellowship, Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism – Nigeria

The Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism is a Nigeria-based media not-for-profit that was established by the Premium Times, a reputable online newspaper, and seeks to promote human rights, good governance and accountability through investigative journalism, open data, and civic technology. Established in the year 2014, PTCIJ, as part of a commitment to innovation and development, commenced a climate change media fellowship in the year 2021.

This media fellowship was established in August 2021, on account of the negative climate change impacts in West Africa and engaged practitioners from five West African countries including Liberia, Sierra Leone, The Gambia, Ghana, and Nigeria. A three-day workshop first was conducted to induct the fellows and brief them in introductory lectures on the constituents of the media fellowship.

Going forward, the nonprofit proposes partnering to further achieve its aims of sensitizing the ignorant population of the negative effects of climate change by training journalists to become climate action media advocates. This enables relevant stakeholders in the society like the media specialists to participate in promoting environmental sustainability in Nigeria.

4. Conclusion

The study highlights the best practices in the role of media advocacy towards climate action. It was seen that the West African region has the least number of interventions amongst other regions in Africa. This calls for more concerted and sustainable efforts in advocating

for quality practices in climate action using the power of the media. It is only logically acceptable that humanity, the same race largely responsible for the onset of global warming, retrace its steps through globally safe environmental practices. The study contributes to the scarce literature showcasing best media practices in advocating for sustainable actions in climate adaptation. It has the potential to open up new themes and media discourse surrounding the drivers of sustainable climate actions in West Africa, a region with the lowest enthusiasm for climate action amongst other regions in Africa. The media carries its indispensable weight in advocacy for climate action, being utilized by both standalone individuals and affiliated organizations promoting the cause for sustainable climate action. Hence, West African countries should take this as a wake-up call and emulate the showcased practices to tackle climate change issues in the region.

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