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Climate change in Ugandan media: A 'Global Warming' of journalism ethics

ABSTRACT

The idea of climate change has reached a contentious breaking point at an international level where its major causes, existence and intensity are separating informed minds. This article is an examination of the four major schools of thought on climate change and how two newspapers in Uganda are covering those divergent views. The article argues that in the coverage of global warming in particular the hitherto treasured notion of objectivity has been replaced by a form of blind journalism instigated by frames from local and international stakeholders. The study analyses content from two newspapers in Uganda to show that media in Uganda cover the resonating frame, which argues that climate change is a time bomb, with total disregard for other views or their existence. Guided by the framing theory, the article suggests that a detachment of climate change from international meanings and an introduction of the 'scientific spirit' will restore balance by inviting media to explore counter-frames.

KEYWORDS

objectivity
framing
global warming
climate change
issue-attention cycle
sceptics
mainstream
greenhouse gas

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

This article is divided into four parts. The first part, titled introduction and literature review, addresses the three major climate change positions plus the most recent or emerging militaristic view expressed by the recipients of

the carbon dioxide emissions. The second part highlights the framing theory within the context of the research approach and methods used to carry out this study. The presentation of the findings from this study comes in the third part, where evidence of media's neglect of objectivity is showed. The article then goes on to present suggestions that can be used to help rectify Uganda's print media's ethical setbacks with regard to reportage on climate change. This appears in the last part after which a conclusion that calls for an epistemological change from subjective evaluation to empirical investigation is made.

PERSPECTIVES ON CLIMATE CHANGE

There are various schools of thought on climate change, with each having a profound ability to shape public opinion. At least there is a general consensus on the definition of Climate Change, as 'a long-term shift in the statistics of the weather – including its averages' (NOAA National Weather Service 2007: 1). Although scientists may choose to package the defining words of climate change differently, the real skirmish is on its existence and intensity. Specifically, there are three major positions in the climate change debate (Giddens 2008).

'It is now fair to say that global climate change is one of the definitive environmental issues of our time' (DiFrancesco and Young 2010: 517). Since our priority of issues is dependent on the media agenda as McCombs and Shaw (1972) acknowledge, scholars therefore believe that media are a central arena and play a part in shaping public options (Carvalho 2007; Anderson 2009) on climate change. By dealing with the notion of climate change and (mis) representing it to the public, media negotiate meaning attached to climate change that later influences our understanding of the problem.

There are the sceptics, who strongly believe that there is no scientific proof to show that the cause of global warming is the result of human activity, especially from increased carbon dioxide emissions. Instead, the sceptics believe that the existing changes in the climate are natural and that the United Nations (UN) effort to refer to such changes as man-made is not empirical but absurd. Sceptics like Anthony Giddens have challenged the UN's view, saying that 'fluctuations in climate, produced by natural causes have been a constant feature of world history' (Giddens 2008: 6).

The second position, which is identified as mainstream because of its United Nations backing, asserts that climate change is a problem that needs our collective immediate attention and that, by 2020, specifically for Africa, 'up to 250 million people could be exposed to greater risk of water stress' (UNFCCC 2007: 5) and that human beings are the sole cause of this. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) (2007), cited by S. S. Hiles (2010: 1), 'climate models predict fiercer storms and floods, increasing heat waves and wildfires, water and food shortages, and an increase in human death and disease, as well as animal extinctions'. The mainstream stand most times is taken as the official and adopted by governments and donors. Commercial media tend to support this view because of the enormous influence and amount of money injected in advertising and the fear of being isolated on the losing side of the debate on climate change.

Even within the mainstream view, there are conflicting and opposing views, especially on which of the greenhouse gases is most dangerous. The debate holds that a rise in the following greenhouse gases – carbon dioxide (CO_2),

methane (CH_4) and nitrogen dioxide (N_2O) – somewhat causes a weakness in the atmospheric layer, and that instead of being reflected back into space the heat from these gases comes straight back on to the land (UNFCCC 2007) to burn life out of us. However, from that angle, the debate has deftly taken another tilt to exclude carbon dioxide as the first priority greenhouse gas. The argument now is that since there are changes in the frozen peat bogs in Siberia and Canada where the blanket covering over a great deal of methane has started to weaken (because of human action) and that a certain amount has already gone into space, methane is the most imminent greenhouse gas as it is 23 times more dangerous than carbon dioxide (Think Global Green 2011).

For more divergence, even the most eminent source of methane has contention. Another website, Time for Change (2011), argues that the global number of cattle is estimated at 1.5 billion more than double the number ten years back. 'The ruminant animals', the website continues, 'produce between 250 and 500 litres of methane gas every day' (2011). The argument rests on the fact that 80 per cent of food ingested in a cow's stomach, for example, comes out as waste or methane. Quoting the Journal of Animal Science, Time for Change notes that animal agriculture produces more than 100 million tons of methane a year and many environmentalists urge a vegetarian diet (eliminate the need for cattle) to help avert climate catastrophe. This cause of climate change, as the data show in the coming chapters, appears less in the coverage of climate change in Uganda's print media, yet it is by far, if true, the biggest contribution countries like Uganda are making. Data will also show that print media in Uganda leads its climate change coverage with carbon dioxide (mostly from Chinese and American industries). The above scenario indicates that media only cover what has been delivered to their doors and so help to spread some attributes of the mainstream view and in the end instill fear.

Between the above two views are the fundamentalists/extremists also known as radicals. They, among whom are authors and scholars, believe that the world is underestimating the dangers of climate change, that climate change poses an even greater danger than the mainstream view currently is admitting. In fact, quoting scientists like James Lovelock, Giddens (2008) argues that some of the proponents of this view believe that it is already too late to avoid dangerous climate change.

Similarly, there is a fourth emerging angle to the argument, militaristic in nature, which has joined the debate. For example, the green house gases that have been discussed predominantly as being caused by mostly developed nations are said to be a danger to Africa's livelihood and well-being. At a 2007 African Union summit, Yoweri Museveni, the President of Uganda, interpreted such an act of sending dangerous gases to Africa as an 'act of aggression' by the developed nations and called attention to a possibility of the aggressed (Africa) being compensated for such an irreversible damage (Brown et al. 2007). The militaristic view, although critical in nature, cannot be neglected, at least not by objective media.

In another angle of the militaristic view, there is an actual conflict that has been linked to climate change. A UNEP report, cited by O. Brown et al. (2007), suggested that since there has been a steady fall in the amount of rainfall in the Sub-Saharan nation of Sudan by 30 per cent and the fact that the Sahara has advanced by more than a mile annually, this has caused a disagreement between farmers and pastoralists over declining water-holes, which has in some way contributed to the Darfur military conflict (2007: 1143). Whether or not this is true is outside the scope of this article.

So far, the framing of climate change debate in the media carries the mainstream view as the consensus on climate change. And this view is concentrated on the following three characteristics of climate change given by the UNFCCC:

> Increases in average global temperature (global warming); changes in cloud cover and precipitation particularly over land; melting of ice caps and glaciers and reduced snow cover and increases in ocean temperatures and ocean acidity – due to seawater absorbing heat and carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.
>
> (2007: 8)

Most dominant in the local/Ugandan/global print media is the first characteristic (global warming), which has become synonymous with the term climate change (except among the very few who have access to the literature on climate change). This domination in coverage often refers to the mainstream view. None of the other views, for example the sceptics and/or the militaristic position, have been discussed in the local media, as the findings will show.

HOW MEDIA COVER CLIMATE CHANGE

In 1972, Anthony Downs suggested five steps in what was termed as the 'Issue-attention Cycle' through which an ecological (or any other) idea under coverage passes. At the issue's pre-problem stage, there is not much public attention of the same. One may conclude that media have not given it much attention for the public to classify it as important. Then at the second stage, there appears what Downs (1972) calls 'alarmed discovery and euphoric enthusiasm' when the public is conscious of the issue and there is a burning desire to solve it at all cost. There develops activism for the issue because everyone thinks they are able to get rid of the 'evil'. At the third stage, the curve begins to fall. There is an amount of cost attached to solving the problem. The major reason the author cites that may lead to public change of mind could be that the problem, if solved, could make millions of people lose out on an income.

One such 'evil' that comes to mind is climate change, which, if solved, could render so many people jobless, including environmental journalists, university students of environmental science, big business, climate change researchers, Conference of Parties (COP) beneficiaries and poor nations that receive millions a year for climate change-related cases. Therefore, the fourth stage will see a gradual decline of intense public interest because people are discouraged, threatened by the magnitude of the issue and bored (Downs 1972). There will be occasional rise of interest, brought about by pressure from the created institutions to solve the issue, a gradual fall, an increase again and then a fall. This suggests that when climate change is an issue, because of the creation of organs like the National Environment Management Authority (in Uganda), and a lot of issue-attention coming from the Prime Minister's office (also in Uganda), attention to the issue will be called back, which will be lost when the emergence disappears or because of the curve going back to the beginning on a particular attribute of the major issue.

Research on coverage of climate change rarely measures whether or not Downs' model applies to a given publication. Mostly, a lot of attention is put on the nature of issues, whether or not there is contention. In Uganda, though, the research on how media covers climate change is still minimal.

Internationally, for example, Hiles (2010) realized that Shanahan and McComas' 2004 study tried to analyse the issue of coverage in European and American papers. In a content analysis of a ten-year coverage (1987–1997) of *The New York Times* and *Le Monde* (France), the researchers realized that the Americans emphasized 'conflict between scientists and politicians' with a need to be objective by giving all sides. The French coverage on the other hand was focused on 'events and international relations' and was also found to be somewhat opinionated (Hiles 2010: 28). In two separate studies of the US media, M. Boykoff (2007) realized that between 2003 and 2004, coverage in the United States was a bit balanced but changed between 2005 and 2006 to slant more to the scientific argument that climate change was in fact a threat (Boykoff 2007).

Downs' Issue-Attention Cycle was found applicable in the US coverage, while in French papers the cycle was not followed. In Uganda, evidence in the coming sections shows that although the *New Vision*'s coverage does not strictly follow the Issue-Attention Cycle, it was close. *Daily Monitor* on the other hand followed the cycle. Below is a graphic representation of the Issue-Attention Cycle of Uganda's print media coverage of climate change.

This sort of coverage can be seen to be following a capitalistic model of a typical media business. When an issue is introduced, there is no guarantee that interest will be gathered by the public, but still media rank it as one of the most important. When issue importance rises, media are doing their job of informing the public. What needs more research in journalistic circles is why there is a fall of an issue that media thought to be important in the first place. Drawing on the claims of the agenda-setting theory (McCombs and Ghanem 2003: 67; Weaver 2007: 147), issues that top the media agenda also top the public's agenda. Therefore, when the public lowers climate change on the agenda, it

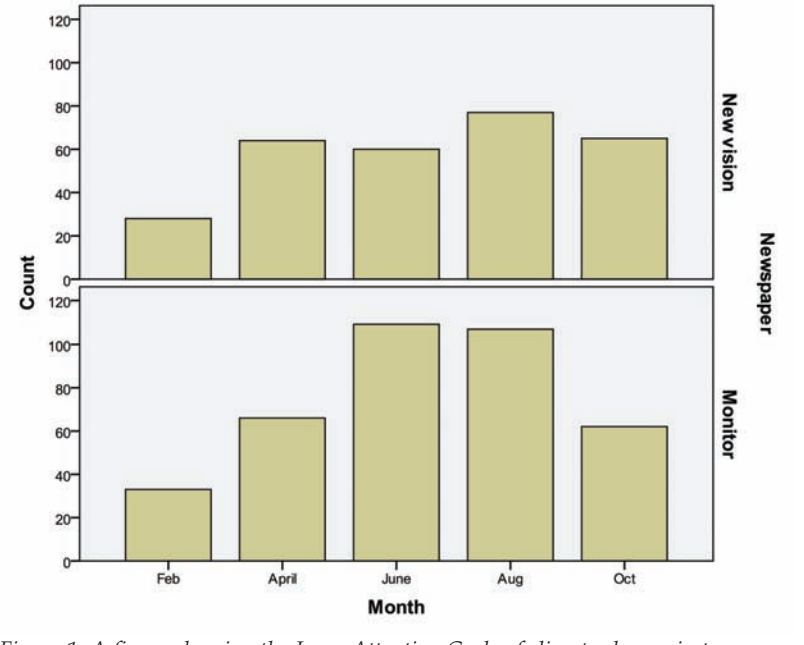

Figure 1: A figure showing the Issue-Attention Cycle of climate change in two Ugandan newspapers: New Vision and Daily Monitor, 2011. This figure comes from the data collected for this study.

means media too had it lowered on their agenda in the first place. At that time, media think the issue is too familiar and the public reaction is dwindling. This is not an issue that media want to keep talking about because, to keep advertisers on board, public reaction needs to be kept alive. In a move that shows lack of objectivity on issue importance, media give their space to something else that has picked momentum. By the time coverage of climate change in the papers started to decline, no other view had been given space. Indeed, what declined was coverage of the mainstream view about climate change.

OBJECTIVITY

In the midst of such divergent interests stands the media, a sphere where all existing views about climate change should be negotiated. To do this job well, media use objectivity as one of the rules for measuring perfection of their work. Since the media have a responsibility to inform others about what is happening around them on several issues including climate change, that job should be done, in L. G. Nassanga's (2008: 649) words 'truthfully and objectively'. As J.C.Merrill (1997: 119) has noted, the term objectivity has come to mean disinterested, fair and balanced.

E. Gilligan (2006) observes that objectivity is an umbrella term that covers a series of different but related ideas. By breaking the notion of objectivity down, the media may look at objectivity from a less abstract lens and find a way of tackling it by using the following strands as guidance.

- Quoting authoritative sources
- Balance
- Facticity
- Impartiality
- Neutrality
- Avoiding opinion in news writing
- Fairness
- Straight news writing
- Addressing criticism.

From the above list, this article measures objectivity in Ugandan media using: addressing criticism, neutrality, balance and quoting authoritative sources. This is not to say that other parts of objectivity are not important. However, in the interest of time and space, picking the most appropriate for this article is the logical thing to do.

Objectivity became popular in the twentieth century, around the 1920s (Kovach and Rosentiel 2001). It helped journalists to 'express their commitment not only to impartiality but to reflecting the world as it is, without bias or distortion of any sort' (Day 1991). In a more interesting way, D. Elliott (2005: 20) defines objectivity as a form of journalism in which all facts and people are equal and equally worthy of coverage. The same voice has been echoed by B. D. Itule and A. D. Anderson (2003) by quoting Mark Baker an American journalist saying that regardless of whether or not media agree with the sides of an argument it is incumbent on media to provide all sides. By judging a side as weak, stupid, biased, the media lose its track on objectivity (and this happens a lot).

Some scholars now agree that media have lost their claim to objectivity. Martin Bell (2005), for example, writes of 'bystanders' journalism' where campaigners and crusaders have taken over newsrooms. A. Belsey (2003) emphasizes the same point by arguing that lobbyists and publicity seekers have replaced objectivity. What media have lost is what G. Foreman (2010) terms as

the observer role. Journalists, in a way, have turned to participatory event coverage. Taking part in coverage would mean loss of credibility. More personally put by M. Kieran (2003), 'to accuse a journalist of being biased is to impugn his journalistic integrity in the deepest possible sense'. Let it be understood then that a media house that takes sides in coverage, whether knowingly or otherwise, is devoid of integrity and also a shame to society. Findings later show two Ugandan newspapers failing across the board on the issue of objectivity.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Framing theory

The idea of putting certain attributes of an object high on the agenda has been addressed by the framing theory. Sometimes referred to as attribute agenda-setting or second-level agenda-setting, framing explains how media, intentionally or not, dictate the salience of some constituent parts of an object (single story) in a way that makes the public believe that those top attributes on the agenda are actually the most important about an object (McCombs and Reynolds 2002: 10). In communication studies, the most significant groundbreaking work on the theory was done by Robert Entman (McQuail 2006: 511; Fairhurst 2005). On the definition of framing, Entman reaffirms his 1993 view of the process of framing:

> to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described.
>
> (2004: 391, 2008: 90)

By perceived reality, Entman refers to the audience's cognitive ability. This therefore requires media as sources of frames to choose attributes that are already existent in the minds of their target-audience, something that may force coverage to stick to the resonating frame. The climate change frame dominating Ugandan media is already a perceived reality. What media do in Uganda is to emphasize the attribute that climate change is a threat, as crafted by the UN scientists. In the end, the other views are framed out tactfully as if they did not exist. By not mentioning all sides on climate change, a practice that Tuchman (1976) and Gitman (1980) cited in M. Miller and B. P. Riechert (2003: 114) have called 'omitting words to signify non-facts', media frame out information that the public should have access to.

That sort of coverage misleads the public's understanding of the situation (Entman 2004: 396). To balance the frames, Entman has advised that between a resonating frame and the silent one, the media should strive to give alternative interpretations alongside what they have been fed with by expert framers (United Nations and local governments in the above case).

METHODOLOGY

Within Ugandan media, newspapers (especially *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor*) set the agenda. For example, each morning, all commercial TV and radio stations have a programme that analyses newspaper stories of the day. At the same time, newspapers act as a source of story ideas to the editorial teams of electronic media. Therefore, an analysis of newspaper content and key informant interviews with newspaper editors appropriately represents a general media picture of the country.

The study's evidence was gathered by analysing content of *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor*, two Ugandan English dailies that lead in terms of circulation. The five-month content covers February, April, June, August and October of 2011. These months were chosen to present a general picture of coverage across the year in the papers and they represent all seasons. In addition, ten interviews with journalists were done. These include two editors (one from each paper) and eight journalists (four from each paper) to give an insight into the coverage that had been analysed in their papers and also to fill the missing gaps in the data. While content analysis was useful in establishing how climate change was covered, key informant interviews on the other hand provided reasons behind the nature of coverage. Understanding why coverage was the way it was would have been almost impossible to deduce only by analysing content.

The choice of interviewees was restricted to climate change/environment reporters and narrowed down to those who covered hard news climate change stories in case a paper had only one climate change reporter. A joint effort of content analysis and key informant interviews supports this study's premise that in the coverage of climate change, Uganda's print media lack capacity to do their own investigations about the issue. Instead, media rely on information from expert framers. However, even in cases where information is obtainable at no cost, for example where alternative views are available online as information on the mainstream view is, coverage slants to the resonating frame, leaving the papers' objectivity hanging in balance.

PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The most prominent subjects in the media under which climate change was covered were: Land, freshwater, atmosphere, forests, biodiversity, wildlife, fisheries, waste disposal, wetlands, urban areas and disasters. In most cases, a story on the above subjects either implicitly or otherwise referred to climate change. Under land, for example, climate change was reported as a farming liability.

The newspaper coverage of the subject follows Downs' Issue-Attention Cycle. The study realized that coverage steadily increased during the first three months and continued the trend until there was a fall towards the end of the year. Climate change coverage was divided between *New Vision* and *Daily Monitor* at 294 (43.8%) and 377 (56.2%) mentions, respectively. In general, these mentions were divided among five months: February had 61 (9.1%) stories, April had 130 (19.4%), June had 169 (25.2%), August had 184 (27.4%) and then 127 (18.9) for October.

HOW COVERAGE WAS BROKEN DOWN IN THE STUDY

The concept of objectivity was broken down into two major units. The first was Emotional Appeal, which was further divided into fear, hope, nostalgia and guilt. Most of the articles that took an angle of accusing the individual as the major cause of climate change reflected *Guilt* (although guilt was also thought about from a point of view of which region was responsible for what) and then *fear* because they also stressed that man at the same time has not done enough to mitigate recurring negative changes of climate that he has caused. Within fear, the major view was that climate change is real and its impact is disastrous and that since it is part of us now we must learn to live with it.

Nostalgia on the other hand advocates for a return of the good old days. Nostalgia was considered present if an article made a comparison between what happened in a span of 30 years and what is happening now. The

Emotional appeal	Frequency	Percentage
Fear	400	59.6
Hope	256	38.2
Nostalgia	14	2.1
Guilt	1	0.1
No Threat	0	0
Total	671	100

Table 1: A table showing coverage of climate change in the two newspapers. The first four frame units reaffirm the mainstream view that climate change is a threat. The last frame unit represents coverage of the opposing view.

conclusion of such an article would have to be, however, that we can strive to regain what we lost.

Hope, also under Emotional Appeal, was considered from articles that gave solutions to climate change problems or, for example, where, under the category of law and policy, a committee was instituted to look into the reclaiming of forests, or a probe into the disappearance of the money meant to help draught victims. All articles under Emotional Appeal considered climate change a threat. On the other hand, to support the weak frame was the category of *No Threat*, which would mean that other climate change views receive coverage.

The other way to understand balance in coverage was by using the information sources of the stories. The resonating frame was seen through government sources and direct quotes from United Nations organizations. Since the existence of 'No Threat' articles was not seen throughout the analysis of content of both papers, the scientists or researchers as a source in this case also succumbed to the resonating frame. The position of the locals, members of parliament, district official sources, although not directly sought, can be explained by two factors: first is the absence of alternative form of coverage and then the framing theory, which says that the resonating frame will be the most influential. Since under the first level of agenda-setting media prioritize objects for us (Weaver 2007), then climate change and its fear attribute would be a major issue for the above sources. The table below indicates the breakdown of sources:

Main Actor	Frequency	Percentage
Government	377	56.2
NGO/SCO	51	7.6
UN	15	2.2
Researcher/Scientist	66	9.8
District leader	6	0.9
MP	13	1.9
Locals	138	20.6
Others	5	0.7
Total	671	100

Table 2: A table showing media's information sources on climate change.

NEW VISION AND *DAILY MONITOR'S* COVERAGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE

In *New Vision*, according to the Features Editor, 'coverage of climate change is guided by the overall editorial mission: Inform, educate and entertain accurately and openly for a better world'. The paper's policy is, as the Editor himself admits, 'advocacy' (Eremu 2011). This response reaffirms what the content analysis of *New vision*'s coverage shows above. It is difficult to do advocacy and be objective at the same time. The number of reporters on the news desk is fifteen. Only one of those has speciality in climate change reporting. In addition to lacking a technical team to handle the subject (which the paper handles nevertheless), the Deputy News Editor said that climate change is not a selling topic and therefore does not get the attention and space that, for example, a selling political story gets.

'Newspapers today target high sales and therefore search mainly for selling stories as a priority', says the Deputy News Editor. By that view, climate change suffers another blow by being sidelined, and when considered the attitude of the subject being 'non-selling' can do little to encourage hard work. In addition, the only journalist the paper has for the subject said that 'although Climate Change is one of the key issues that *New Vision* puts a lot of emphasis on, it follows the news value pattern i.e. impact, personality and who it affects'. The subject therefore is treated like any other news item. The editor's decision for space most times is based on news worthiness and frequency or severity of the climate change issue in question.

NATURE OF COVERAGE

However, the framing of issues, with an exception of the giveaway of Mabira, a forest in the central part of the country that the President wanted cleared (a big chunk of it) by an investor for sugarcane plantation, was, in Iyengar's (1991) words, episodic (Dimitrova et al. 2005). The episodic frames in news were covered in the form of passing events without following up on the issues. On the other hand, thematic frames would be more desirable in terms of coverage because such frames go beyond events to talk about issues.

This sort of coverage may be attributed to so many problems that the papers face. The journalists admitted that the subject is difficult and so tends to be abstract to them. This is complicated further by the fact that reporters have no special training. They are expected to use their general reporting skills to cover complex ideas like global warming, green house gases and other big terminologies, and yet English is only a second and official language. 'Even the editors' understanding of climate change is limited so they give priority to non-climate change stories' one *New Vision* journalist said.

Consequently, the 'big' words are interpreted as simple and meaningless that they stop meaning anything serious. About the big terminology problem, D. A. DiFrancesco and N. Young (2010) note that 'linguistic metaphors such as the "greenhouse effect" have proven too benign to resonate in the public mind'. This scenario would impact on objectivity as choice of subject, of words, of sources is determined on a 'what is easy for me basis'.

The media therefore resorted to coverage of weather forecasts simply because weather information may not need any editorial gate keeping. '*The New vision* puts a lot of emphasis on the beginning of the rainy season,

its middle and end', a journalist admitted. However, since most of the information received is raw, there is a dire need for interpretation, and when journalists seek the knowledge of some government experts they get a negative feedback.

The second newspaper, *Daily Monitor*, has over 80 staff reporters including retained correspondents. 'I think less than 10 of the 80 staff reporters cover climate change' the News Editor said. These specifically cover climate change except when climate change stories do not break news.

Daily Monitor faces several of the problems that face *New Vision*. The biggest challenge the paper's journalists pointed out too was that climate change stories do not appeal to the audience, which is why the subject was categorized under 'small stories'.

Drawing on the argument of the framing theory, media should get the attributes of climate change that are difficult for their audience to understand and give them salience. This can create a balance between attributes of other objects (corruption, governance and entertainment) and climate change. The subjective coverage that is currently practised is, among so many things, unethical. Reporters at both papers said that they only cover climate change when all other issues have been exhausted. As a matter of fact, one reporter said that 'climate change doesn't affect the paper in any way because there is a lot of attention paid to other issues'.

One *Daily Monitor* journalist said that 'When climate change is given priority, which is not all the time, it must be breaking news or the story has to have an angle of the inverted pyramid, which prioritizes only the first few details in favour of space'. Therefore, most climate change stories were given other story angles. For example, a storm that affects crops in a certain part of the country would be connected back to the man-made causes of climate change that may have led to such a calamity. Alternatively, ideas could be presented as a news story. This explains why climate change stories in the category of news were 54.7 per cent, far higher than the 23.7 per cent of features and commentaries combined.

The transportation problem that journalists said affected climate change coverage can be reflected in the quality of stories done. 'This means we can't contact some sources out of the capital for lack of time and economic power'. In the end, the information coming out in the paper will be less thought through. The other problem was that 'sources refuse to give information sometimes, especially if the story implicates government sympathizers', a journalist at *Daily Monitor* said. Another one added that 'the paper loses out on information from such political sources and yet they are the most credible sources available'. Another reason given for sources withholding information was the need to protect their lives.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE CHANGE COVERAGE

There was a disagreement from different journalists on what the target audience was for both papers. 'We only serve the elites who read English', one *New Vision* journalist said. Another one from the same paper said that 'we serve farmers. Elites don't read about farming since they mostly do service providing jobs'. The *Daily Monitor* journalists were not different in opinion on target audience except one who said that 'the paper's target audience is the whole country'. Another one said that the target audience is the farmers and business people who buy agricultural products.

There was also a suggestion that the paper targets policy-makers and researchers. When newspapers divide their target audience into policy-makers, researchers and other segments, they risk being subjected to serve only some of those particular divisions. In a media system where owners want more profits for the least capital used, there will not be enough resources to produce content that satisfies the needs of all segments in society.

Today, there is justification of such one-sided reporting with claims that being partial is the new objectivity. It is no wonder therefore that phrases like 'the media industry' have gained currency. Media workers are not concerned about how such economic labelling would affect objectivity. Instead, media capitalize on asserting their position as businesses 'in order to justify the rubbish they deliberately produce' (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). Uganda's print media's neglect of some sides in the coverage of climate change is reflective of global media traits. J. Olen (1998) admits that media covers what administration and major opposition sides say, but asks how often do we learn what socialists or libertarian party leaders have to say?

However, some have argued against objectivity saying that to be the fourth estate the media have to drop their ties to objectivity. P. Meyer (2007) gives an example of the reporters who decided to be objective on the issue that Iraq had acquired weapons of mass destruction. To be objective, a journalist would have to report the White House's view too, which later turned out to be a hoax. In Meyer's view, such 'White House reporters' were just parroting their sources, fearful of alienating them, which he also calls stenography, not reporting.

On climate change coverage, Meyer (2007) and S. Outing (2007) say that objectivity is said to be standing in the way of informing the world about the real dangers of global warming. The two scholars suggest that media should be judges of what is right or wrong in order to advise the public. The next part of this article suggests that the only solution to the objectivity dilemma is for media to adopt the scientific spirit as Walter Lippmann would argue. The solution, Lippmann said, lies in the scientific spirit (Kovach and Rosentiel 2001).

THE SCIENTIFIC SPIRIT

If we say that science is the quest for truth about nature, as P. Krishna (2010: 149) defines it, then it is easy for us to understand the scientific spirit. The scientific spirit, Krishna (2010: 152) continues, comes from using scientific techniques that require observation, honest documentation, measurement and recording. The scientific spirit, Ratner (1936: 104) argues, is based on giving value to previous observations that would stir hypotheses, theory and then verification. In contrast, the major method of knowing for Uganda's print media is authority without establishing whether or not the authority's claim to the scientific spirit is false. Citing Jay Gould (2003), Grosso (2010: 7) notes that reductionism (breaking down the observable phenomenon to its smaller parts) alone cannot solve all problems, especially the unique and unexpected ones. He advises that humanities and sciences should complement and learn from each other.

Since failure to be objective is easier than even trying, Lippmann thought we should create a unity of method. We can achieve similar experimentation of the variables we deal with under climate change so that it is possible to report

facts. These very words are echoed by another journalism ethics scholar, John C. Merrill (1997: 118), when he says that a combination of epistemology and semantics is unavoidable if objective journalism is to be attained. If, for example, the scientific findings, as the sceptics assert, do not lay credence to the claim that man has caused his own destruction, media should try to explore alternative questions to come to sensible conclusions. The journalism schools therefore need a shift from producing journalists who rely on dubious sources (like in the White House case) to emphasizing the production of evidence and verification (Kovach and Rosentiel 2001). Outside the newsroom, the scientific spirit should be emphasized by media partners who mostly sponsor training for practising journalists.

This is the only way media are going to be able to understand the difference between news and truth. News, as Lippmann argues, is used to give attention to an issue. This does not mean that there is an element of truth inferred in that account. On the other hand, he said that the function of truth is to bring to the light the hidden facts, to set them into relation with each other and make a picture of reality upon which men can act (Kovach and Rosentiel 2001).

CONCLUSION

Media coverage of climate change in Uganda, as evidenced by two newspapers, lacks objectivity. Out of the mainstream view that man-made efforts have caused global warming, and the sceptics' view that such a charge is absurd, plus two more other views, one from the radicals and the militaristic one, which comes from Africa, media emphasize the mainstream view. The coverage that follows the Issue-Attention Cycle is preceded by a general lack of interest and understanding of the subject in the newsroom. In the end, media resort to carrying ideas of the dominant forces as opposed to being a light for society on climate change.

To overcome this lack of objectivity, first of all, there should be special desks to manage the growing problem of climate change. In addition, training of journalists is important to handle some technical problems in the field. Otherwise, developing the scientific spirit, which bases reporting on evidence, is the best solution.

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