

## Assessment of sources and geographical focus of forestry-related news in two Nigerian Newspapers

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of forests, forest management and related information to human sustainable development cannot be overemphasized. This paper reports the analyses of forestry-related news source and their geographical focus in Guardian and Tribune Newspapers in Nigeria between June, 2009 and May, 2014. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the two National dailies because both have column for environment issues, they are available and their continuous existence for the period of the research, circulation and accessibility were guaranteed. Data were collected from the editions on the days these newspapers have slot for environmental columns and were analysed using descriptive such as percentage, frequency and charts as well as chi-square inferential statistics at  $\alpha_{0.05}$ . Guardian reported 76.9% of the articles while Nigerian Tribune reported 30.1% articles. The columnists had the highest percentage as the news source of forestry related issues reported with 29.1% of the articles. Also, the highest percentage of the articles reported was the Global focus on forestry issues with 38.1%. There was a significant relationship between the newspapers and the sources that reported the issues. There was however no significant relationship between the newspapers and the geographical focus of the issues that were reported. It was concluded that there will be a reduction of public attention on forestry news since they are more of global issues than immediate concern. Also, since forestry news were more from columnists, there was likely to be a professional gap, which needed to be filled.

**Keywords:** News source, Geographical focus, Newspapers, Forestry-related articles

### INTRODUCTION

The forest is an ecosystem that serves as an habitat for native wildlife, including birds, mammals, marsupials, amphibians, reptiles, insects, plants, as well as moss, fungi, micro-organisms and non-living things such as water, soil and air interacting within the same area. This area called ecosystem has also been characterized with its ability to supply multiplicity of goods and services. The variety of goods produced by the forest include but not limited to goods such as timber, non timber forest products such as berries, mushroom, resins, medicines, chewing stick and fuelwood, while services such as water protection, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and storage, spiritual function and aesthetic functions are also associated with forests. Invariably, the importance of forests to man cannot be overemphasized and by extension, the need for news about the art and science that sees to the management of "forestry".

Generally, awareness of human impact on the natural environment was reported by El-Hinnawi and Hashmi (1987) to have grown rapidly since 1980 resulting in countless conferences, meetings, publications, and debates. The authors also observed news media and non-governmental organizations as instrumental to the promotion of increasing environmental awareness. The latter observation was supported by Cohen (1963) who submitted that the press may not be successful

always, in telling people what to think, but it is stunningly successful in giving its readers premises for thought. Klapper (1974) also reported a strong influence of mass media on opinions and attitudes concerning new issues, which may not correlate with existing attitude clusters. In their studies, Adekunle *et. al.* (2011) submitted the lack of information as one of the factors responsible for the degradation and reckless use of the forest ecosystem. They also reported implications of the abuse as the resultant significant negative externalities such as loss of biodiversity, elevated risk of erosion, food insecurity, decrease in agricultural productivity, floods and lowered water tables, and increased release of carbon into the atmosphere associated with global climate change.

Underscoring the immense importance of information to sustainable development in African society was reported by Kofi Annan (Quoted in Steiner, 2006). Steiner (2006) also perceived knowledge as power, information as liberation and education as the premise of progress, in every family and society. However, given the present circumstances under which Africa is operating in the global village, there is no time for the traditional approach to education viz: training new generations of teachers, to train new generations of students. This may explain why Brown (cited in Detjen, 1990) suggested the communications industry as the only instrument that has the

capacity to educate on the scale needed and in the time available.

Nigeria is endowed with a large expanse of land and harbors different vegetation types. In 1970, the forest area was 93,420km<sup>2</sup> covering about a total of 10% of the total land area and this decreased to 46,542km<sup>2</sup> in the 1990s (FORMECU, 1999). Studies by Cronholm and Sandell (1981) and by Ostman and Parker (1986) discovered that people prefer newspapers to television as important source of environmental knowledge despite the former being associated with high level of literacy, which negate it (newspapers) as important information source. However, information in newspapers are brought closer to those with access to radio (A veritable information source in Africa) through some radio programmes. In spite of several newspapers in Nigeria, there seems to be no change in the attitude of the people towards forestry related issues and there has been continuous decline of the forest. It is the argument of this paper that the way an issue is reported and perceived will definitely affect the manner it is reacted or responded to. This necessitates getting information on the news source and geographical focus of forestry news.

## METHODOLOGY

Purposive sampling technique was used to select national daily newspapers. The Guardian and Nigerian Tribune were the two newspapers selected because both have column for environment issues, are available, accessible and in continuous circulation for the period of the research. The newspaper editions for the study were selected purposively based on the days these newspapers have slot for environmental columns. Data were collected from the newspaper editions of each newspaper on the sources and geographical coverage of identified forestry related article contents. Geographical focus refers to the article being local, state, national, regional or global news. Source refers to the news source ranging from Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs), research institutes, international organisations, government officials, university scientists, columnists to experts.

The Data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The descriptive statistics involve the use of percentage, frequency and charts. Inferential statistics such as chi-square test of independence and association was used for this study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Reported forestry related information in the selected newspapers from 2009-2014

Table 1 shows the frequency of forestry-related articles reported in the selected newspapers. Guardian newspaper reported 206 forestry-related articles representing 76.9% of the reported articles by the two newspapers under study while Nigerian Tribune reported 62 (30.1%) articles. From the foregoing, the Guardian newspaper paid more attention to reporting forestry-related issues than Nigerian tribune.

Even, the reportage of 268 forestry related information between a five year period is an indication of low reportage compared to other issues like sanitation, waste disposal, pollution and so on. The rationale behind such poor reportage was suggested by Makanjuola (2002) who observed inadequate financial gain as a disincentive to the reportage of agro-related news items. In the same vein, McGeachy (1987) also observed high reportage of energy resources management in the 1980s at the detriment of some issues such as the environmental movements. Howenstine (1982) also reposed the apparent domination of economic issues over environmental news stories like protection or degradation of the environment.

**Table 1: Frequency distribution of reported forestry related information in the selected newspapers from 2009-2014**

Newspapers	Frequency	Percentage
Guardian	206	76.9
Nigerian Tribune	62	30.10
Total	268	100

### Sources of forestry related articles in Guardian and Tribune Newspapers

Analyses of forestry related articles sources (Table 2) revealed that while columnist had the highest number of forestry-related articles in The Guardian, the highest number of forestry related articles in Tribune was credited to international organizations. Government officials were the next most important sources of forestry-related articles in the Guardian Newspapers (18.45%) followed closely by international organizations (17.96%). However, in Tribune Newspaper, while Government officials were next to international organization as sources of forestry-related article sources (24.19%), NGOs are next to Government officials in order of frequency (19.35%).

This is similar to the findings of Yankah (1994) in the study titled "covering the environment in the Ghanaian media", which observed sources of environment-related news as columnist, NGOs and international organizations like United Nations agencies. According to Faridah *et al* (2011), news

sources are paramount in the determination of the accuracy of facts that are being reported. Faridah *et al* (2011) cited Gans (1980) that news sources are of two types viz. known and unknown. The known sources include elites and official sources, namely heads of government, ministers and deputy ministers, official spokespersons usually the public relations practitioners, leaders of NGOs, experts, celebrities and the like. Generally, journalists rely on known sources as more suitable, more reliable,

more trustworthy, more authoritative and more articulate than unknown sources (Adenekan, 2001).

The findings from this study suggest that the sources of these forestry articles are reliable because they are known sources, but the professional touch is limiting their fidelity. Thus, it can be concluded that there is a gap between experts of forestry field and the reporters of forestry related issues, which itself is an issue.

**Table 2: Frequency distribution of sources of forestry related articles in Guardian and Tribune newspapers**

Identified Sources	Guardian			Tribune		
	Frequency	%	Mode	Frequency	%	Mode
NGOs	30	14.56		12	19.35	
Research Institutes	8	3.88		4	6.45	
International organizations	37	17.96		25	40.32	International organizations
Government officials	38	18.45	Columnists	15	24.19	
University Scientists	7	3.40		0	0.00	
Columnists	76	36.89		2	3.23	
Experts	10	4.85		4	6.45	
<b>Total</b>	<b>206</b>	<b>99.99</b>		<b>62</b>	<b>99.99</b>	

**Geographical focus of forestry related information in Guardian and Tribune Newspapers**

Table 3 shows that forestry-related issues that were reported were more of global focus represented with the percentage of 37.9% in Guardian newspaper while forestry issues that were reported in Nigerian Tribune were also more of global focus represented with the percentage of 38.7%. Generally, geographical coverage of forestry-related articles were in the order Global (38.1%)>National (35.8%)>State (19.8%)>regional (6.0%)>Local (0.4%). However, most of forestry-related issues that were reported in the period under

study were more of Global focus with 38.1%. This implies that reportage of issues that are of global concern in forestry was given priority in the two selected newspapers. This has implication for participation in forestry development activities at the local level by educated elites within local communities in Nigeria who source information from newspapers (Azeez, 2006; Azeez and Okafor, 2013). Emphasis on global issues is not likely to interest them as it does not directly impact their livelihood (Azeez and Onyema, 2013). This had earlier been voiced by Murch (1973) that when the mass media concentrate on national rather than local issues, people are likely to regard such issue as a national instead of a local-level problem.

**Table 3: Frequency distribution of geographical focus of forestry related information in Guardian and Tribune Newspapers**

Newspapers		Geographical Focus					Total
		Global	Regional	National	State	Local	
<b>Guardian</b>	Count	78	12	75	40	1	206
	% within newspaper	37.9%	5.8%	36.4%	19.4%	0.5%	100.0%
<b>Tribune</b>	Count	24	4	21	13	0	62
	% within newspaper	38.7%	6.5%	33.9%	21.0%	0.0%	100.0%
<b>Total</b>	Count	102	16	96	53	1	268
	% within newspaper	38.1%	6.0%	35.8%	19.8%	0.4%	100.0%

**Relationship between newspapers, sources and geographical focus**

Chi-square analyses (Table 4) of the relationship between sources of forestry-related information in

the two newspapers shows that a significant relationship existed between the sources of forestry-related information in the two newspapers under study ( $\chi^2 = 33.397^a$ ,  $p = 0.000$ ). However,

similar test reveals that no significant relationship was established between the geographical focus of forestry-related information in the newspapers under study ( $\chi^2 = 0.485^a$ ,  $p = 0.975$ ).

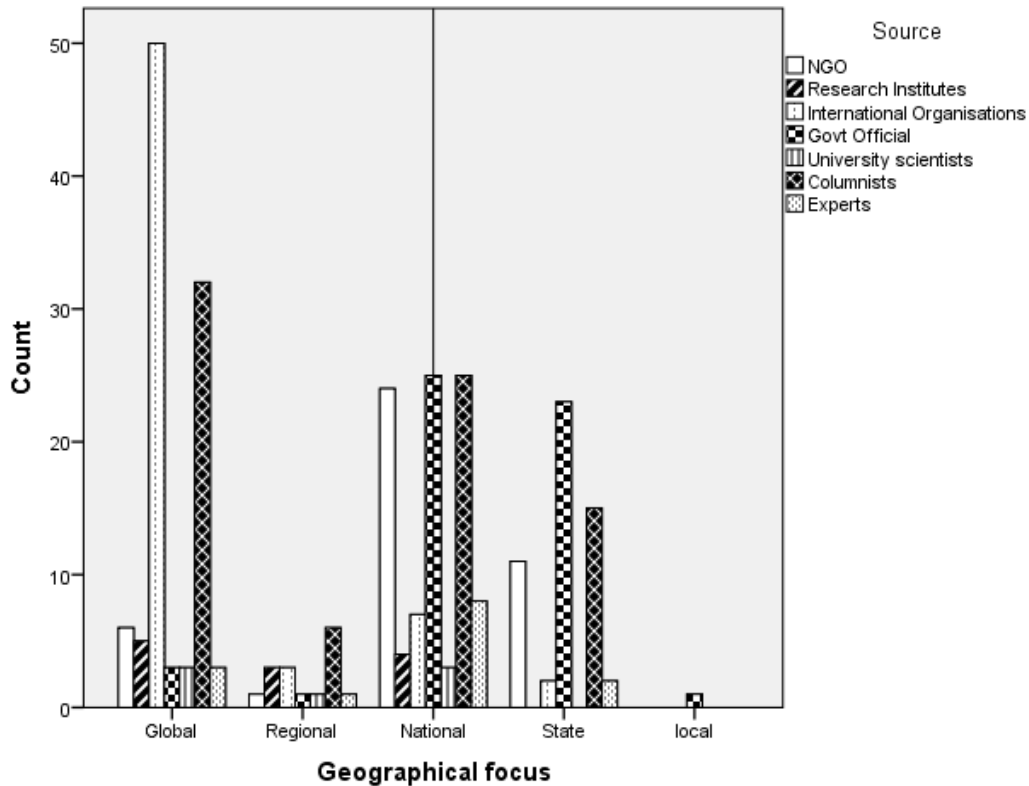
**Table 4: Chi-square Analysis showing the relationship between newspapers, sources and geographical focus**

Variables	$\chi^2$	df	p	Remarks
Sources	33.397 <sup>a</sup>	6	0.000	Significant
Geographical focus	0.485 <sup>a</sup>	4	0.975	Not Significant

**Geographical focus of forestry articles in relation to the source**

From Figure 1, it is evident that International Organisations were the highest source for forestry-related news, which are of global focus. Columnists were the modal source of forestry-related news of regional focus, government officials and columnists were the highest sources for forestry-related news of national focus while columnists were the highest source of forestry-related news

with emphasis on state and local issues. That a significant relationship exists between the sources of forestry-related information in the two newspapers under study implies that the sources of forestry-related information in the two newspapers are newspaper dependent and may be different in the two dailies. This may be ascribed to the gate keeping theory, which empowers editors to determine which articles to publish and from what source(s). In this case, it is important for editors to understand the professional implication of their choices as the empowerment already assumes that editors have very robust experience. If the gate keeping is not limiting however, it is imperative that sources of forestry-related information be robust to accommodate better informed personnel and local information sources. On the other hand, that no significant relationship was forged between the geographical focuses of the two newspapers under study implies that the geographical focus is not dependent on the newspapers.



**Figure 1: Frequency distribution of geographical focus of forestry articles in relation to the source**

**CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings of this study show that the Nigerian newspapers under study focused on global forestry-related issues. This obviously will have impact on the attention the Nigeria public who are not likely to be better informed on forestry issue that are not of immediate value to them since it does not have to do with their immediate environment. It was also observed that majority of forestry news reported news source were columnists and not forestry experts in the field that are well knowledgeable about the field. This shows that there is gap between forestry experts and reporters of forestry issues. The training of editors handling forestry issues in Nigerian daily newspapers cannot be overemphasized. This will enhance the better reportage of forestry issues. Individuals in the field of forestry should also endeavour to write opinion articles, editorials, and letters to the-editors on forestry issues.

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