



The Role of Broadcast Media in Creating Awareness on Environmental Pollution and Advancing Sustainable Development in Osun State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Background: Environmental pollution poses a significant challenge for industrialised societies, including African nations like Nigeria, where the Osun River faces severe contamination threats. This river, vital for the economic and agricultural sustenance of millions and integral to the Osun-Osogbo sacred grove, is impacted by lead poisoning from mining activities. **Objective:** The review is set to explore the role of broadcast stations in communicating Osun River pollution arising from lead poisoning in the state. **Methodology:** The study adopted theoretical frameworks of Social Responsibility and Development Media theories to examine the role of broadcast media in communicating Osun River pollution and its implications for sustainable development. The qualitative research design and in-depth interviews of 12 broadcast media professionals from federal, state, and private stations were used in the collection of data and analysis. **Results:** Findings revealed that while media serve informational, educational, and entertainment functions, environmental news receives minimal attention. Coverage of environmental health issues, particularly Osun River contamination, is sporadic, limiting public sensitisation and behavioural change communication. Additionally, the study established that broadcast stations prioritise political, economic, and entertainment content over environmental health, underutilising their platform to amplify critical pollution issues. This gap hinders public awareness of the health risks posed by the river's contamination. **Conclusion/ Recommendations:** By leveraging their social responsibility role, media outlets can enhance public understanding of the advantages and drawbacks of environmental pollution, fostering greater awareness and action toward sustainable development in Osun State and beyond. The study recommends that broadcast media intensify coverage of environmental issues, produce special programmes to educate the audience on the Osun River's pollution, and highlight the health implications and broader environmental impacts.

Keywords: Environmental health, Pollution, Social responsibility, SDG 14: Life below water

Introduction

Nigeria's sustainable development for environmental protection is on the rise as Africa's largest nation, with increased economic progress and population growth, as evident in statistics

published by the United Nations Environmental Protection (UNEP) report. The rise of huge industries and the consumption of vast quantities of coal and other fossil fuels have led to unprecedented amounts of air pollution, and the

magnitude of industrial chemical emissions contributed to the growing burden of uncontrolled human wastes. Urbanisation and population growth are causing an increase in human economic and industrial activity, which in turn is causing an increase in environmental deterioration and pollution. This has sparked an industrial revolution that has resulted in environmental contamination (Efobi et al., 2018).

Pollution of the environment is associated with incorrect, ineffective, and unclean disposal of waste items as its routes. Some studies and study findings have also revealed that households produce a significant amount of garbage each year, including paper, waste glass, damaged automobiles, non-cyclable and scrapped autos, and their parts (Asongu, 2018a; Asongu, 2018b). In order to understand the difficulties encountered when attempting to implement SDG environmental protection measures in various nations' operations, a solid study on environmental degradation is crucial. This will make it easier to identify the laws and regulations that promoted compliance with higher environmental standards. A growing body of research has also shown that the increased climate change and environmental changes brought on by human activity will have the biggest effect on African countries (Efobi et al., 2018).

According to data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), pollution causes more preventable deaths than contaminated water or child starvation and has the potential to produce health and climate crises like those in China and India. More people die prematurely each year as a result of poor air quality than from dangerous conditions, starvation, or poor sanitation (Ogunyombo & Odunlami, 2017). According to estimates, the number of yearly fatalities caused by ambient particulate matter pollution (APMP) increased by 36% on the continent of Africa between 1990 and 2013. Water is an essential resource for human health, well-being, and survival, according to Titilawo et al. (2018).

Sustainable growth will be nearly impossible without freshwater, a limited resource, in sufficient quantity and quality. Because of the rise in human activity and natural processes such as erosion, precipitation inputs, weathering of crustal materials, and surface water deterioration, most aquatic marine life is no longer suited for its multipurpose use. Metallic elements having relatively high densities are referred to as "heavy metals," and even at low quantities, they are typically poisonous. The elements that are most frequently found in water and biotic ecosystems include lead (Pb), zinc (Zn), copper (Cu), iron (Fe), and the platinum group. Their presence may be due to natural or Sustainable growth will be nearly impossible without freshwater, a limited resource, in sufficient quantity and quality. In 2005, the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site. The Yoruba-speaking people, who are the majority in southern Nigeria who worship Osun highly regard it for its cultural and religious significance. However, pollution from waste disposal and other human activities puts it at risk constantly. This is especially true for the dozens of illegal gold miners operating throughout Osun State, whose runoff is poisoning the sacred river with toxic metals. Aside from the region's lax enforcement of environmental laws, some people also use the river as a disposal site, further contaminating it

(<https://www.voanews.com/a/nigeria-s-osun-river-sacred-revered-and-increasingly-toxic/6708178>, 10 August 2025).

The social role of communication is served by environmental communication to inform, convince, educate, and alert others on practical and, in fact, important actions aimed at safeguarding the environment from pollution and degradation. To ensure that the environment is well protected, environmental communication is also used to organise, disagree, reconcile, and negotiate with one another. Environmental communication, it should be emphasised, refers to the planned and strategic use of communication processes and media products to promote successful policy making, public

involvement, and project execution directed towards environmental sustainability through the SDG goal. As a result, environmental communication includes campaigns for environmental advocacy and education, the media's participation in environmental concerns, public relations efforts related to environmental issues, and environmentally friendly goods (Adekola et al., 2017). All members of our extremely divided society can relate to the notion that television is "our own culture's bard" and that it has become centralised (Omoera, 2010). Broadcast media, then, appear to serve as a social ritual that transcends individual differences with its collective self. In actuality, television is the most widely seen art form worldwide. Its creative, socio-political, and social roles can only develop and flourish, and its popularity must follow suit. Due to the television medium's great adaptability and potential, both terrestrial and satellite television have been used in many nations to raise awareness of important human issues like environmental pollution. The primary objective of this article is to explore the role of broadcast media stations as a platform in communicating Osun River pollution and its profoundly significant sustainable development as well as how the SDG on environmental protection was giving the media attention on how the people should be well informed about the risks of environmental pollution arising from lead poisoning in the state.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Environmental pollution control in Nigeria

There are three primary forms of environmental pollution that affect the physical environment: air pollution, water pollution, and contamination of the soil. Air pollution is the presence of contaminated or polluted chemicals in the atmosphere that do not effectively disperse, hence interfering with human health or welfare or producing other environmental impacts that lead to poor ambient air quality. Adekola et al. (2016) posited that air pollution is caused by the harmful contamination of the atmosphere, which

lowers the quality of the air that humans breathe. Both natural and man-made factors can contribute to air pollution. Natural disasters such as earthquakes, whirlwinds, and volcanic eruptions are a few examples. While the human-made causes include improperly disposing of solid waste, gas flames, oil exploration, production, and use, industrial pollution, and many other such factors that also have detrimental effects on both aquatic and terrestrial life. In Nigeria, there are three main sources of ambient air pollution: energy production, industry, and transportation, all of which rise with population and economic development while producing a wide spectrum of air pollutants in homes, businesses, and industrial settings. The World Health Organization (WHO) refers to the "classical" pollutants as additional pollutants that should be routinely monitored for better air quality. These include the airborne mixture of solid particles and liquid droplets known as ozone particulate matter; lead suspended particulate matter (SPM), nitrogen dioxide, carbon monoxide, and water vapour.

Role of the media in awareness creation on environmental pollution

There are many different forms of mass media, including television, radio, newspapers, magazines, news organisations (Ogunyombo, 2017), the Internet, movies, mobile devices, video games, etc. As a watchdog and component of the political system's checks and balances, the media is required to perform this function. This is stated in Section 22 of the Constitution of the Federal Republic of 1999, which states that "the press, radio, television, and other agencies of the mass media shall at all times be free to uphold the fundamental objectives contained in this Chapter and uphold the responsibilities and accountability of the government to the people." McQuail (1978) argues that the media must adopt and carry out constructive developmental tasks in accordance with internationally recognized principles. Economic goals and societal development requirements should not be a barrier to media freedom. Due to its negative

effects on development and increased mystery surrounding humanity, environmental pollution is a serious issue that demands attention. The majority of businesses and non-profit organizations today place a high priority on the protection of the environment, sanitation, and waste management in their strategies for corporate development and survival. International agencies have issued (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2001) warnings that the environment can no longer be taken for granted and suggestions that deliberate concrete actions should be taken by individuals and corporate organizations to conserve, protect, renew, and maintain a healthy environment for ongoing human survival, growth, and sustainable development, this global trend or focus on the environment draws attention to the numerous regrettable consequences that result from human and corporate neglect or abuse of the environment.

In Nigerian cities, massive piles of household debris are frequently seen in public areas and along main highways. When there are trash collection stations, they are sometimes left to overflow for months. Mabogunje, cited by UNICEF & FMOH in Ojebode & Adegbola (2010), laments the terrible physical state of Nigerian cities in his writing. The obvious characteristic of Nigerian cities is the deteriorated condition of the houses and surroundings in which most of their citizens, particularly the poor, have to live. Basic drainage is absent from most streets, and when it is there, trash frequently clogs the drains. The majority of the waste that is produced is left behind. Despite the fact that residents clean their immediate surroundings, the local governments' incapacity to remove the many piles of trash scattered throughout the city serves as a stark reminder of the extremely low standard of administration in Nigerian cities. The impoverished must therefore live with and deal with filth on a daily basis because it is a ubiquitous aspect of most Nigerian cities.

In a developing nation like Nigeria, the Federal Environmental Protection Agency [FEPA] and

other state environmental sanitation or waste management agencies were established with the goal of reorienting people, organizations, and corporate entities toward the achievement and maintenance of a healthy environment in the nation at all levels. The reality remains that environmental degradation required public knowledge, opinions stated with government choices made public, and behavioral change attitudes from all social classes, companies, unions, and so forth. This was true for every country.

History and development of broadcast industry in Osun State

The creation of the new state by the administration of former military leader General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida marked the beginning of the development of the Osun broadcast media. In 1991, the first publicly owned radio station, Osun state Broadcasting Corporation (OSBC), began broadcasting using transmission equipment brought over from the previous Oyo state. The Broadcasting Corporation of Oyo State had radio and television transmission facilities at Ile-Ife, Iwo, and Obokun prior to the creation of the state. During the years that BCOS was in existence, the equipment assisted in providing live and recorded broadcast services to the people of the Osun region. A number media organization including radio and television stations, that are either privately owned or controlled by the two tiers of government make up Osun State's broadcast media sector. This includes:

1. Federal Government-owned media stations:

- a. NTA Oke Pupa, Osogbo
- b. FRCN Gold FM 95.5 at Ilesa, both Federal owned

2. Osun State Government-owned media stations:

Osun State Broadcasting Corporation with Six Channels spread across the 3

Senatorial Districts namely:

- a. 89.5 FM Orisun at Ile – Ife, and
- b. RRS Radio and TV Services, Iwo
- c. 104.5 FM Radio, Oke Baale, Osogbo

- d. Channel 32 UHF TV, Oke Baale, Osogbo
- e. Channel 22 UHF TV, New Dawn, Ibokun
- 3. *Privately-owned media stations:*
 - a. AIT TV, Oke Pupa, Abere – TV station
 - b. Ray Power FM, Oke Pupa, Abere – radio station
 - c. Unique FM 103.1, Ilesha – radio station
 - d. Freedom TV at Ilesha – TV station
 - e. RAVE FM 91.7, Osogbo – radio station
 - f. Crown FM 101.1, Ile-Ife – radio station
 - g. Oodua FM 99.1, Ife. – radio station

Professionalism and social responsibility of broadcast media

The social responsibility function of the media offered professionals the statutory power to describe, explain, and monitor every institution of society. The environment is a critical sector that needs attention so badly due to environmental pollution and its resultant effects. This is achieved by their news coverage, which features recognising excellent achievements as well as exposing wrongdoings such as corporate and political corruption, as well as creating awareness on sensitive issues and crimes against humanity. Media professionals are expected to live up to specific expectations by setting the agenda for sustainability issues, influence positive change in the public's perception of issues which affect the majority of people, and prioritize the environment in order to raise awareness and maybe save lives and society as part of their social responsibilities in line with ethical standards (Akinrosoye & Abiola, 2022). But recent events have increased these expectations to cover forum discussions, watchdog roles, agenda setting through positive headlines and news stories, and other emerging media identified issues. Particularly as regards environmental issues like air pollution, waste management, the depletion of groundwater resources and water pollution in various communities in Osun State. The broadcast media is expected to play a critical role in raising awareness. Particularly in places where access to digital media is restricted, radio continues to be a potent medium for public education.

Government-owned radio stations should provide an affordable and culturally relevant medium for spreading environmental awareness, especially regarding the growing problem of plastic pollution, among residents of Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, Nigeria. The programmes can combine entertainment and education can be used to engage a wide range of listening demographics. Thus, it positioned it as one of the most significant elements that can be used in influencing how people become aware of environmental hazards. The majority of people are interested in learning about ecological concerns via programs they may access on radio and television, thus they watch or listen to the corresponding programs covering environmental topics. Weekly or biweekly components of environmental talk shows can include professionals, representatives of local governments, and members of non-governmental organisations talking about plastic trash, its effects, and ways to mitigate it. For instance, the "Eco-Health Hour" campaign effectively increased public awareness of environmental health concerns. "Plastic Alert and other interactive phone-in programs will increase engagement by enabling the public to call in and share concerns or ask questions." These initiatives encourage citizens to take local action and demystify technical waste management challenges. Ghana's GBC Radio Central plastic campaign employed a similar concept and found that adding feedback segments enhanced listener action. "Your Voice on Plastics: Green Voice." Young People-Oriented Radio Dramas The emotional, practical effects of plastic pollution can be communicated through dramatic storytelling in both Yoruba and English. For example, Kenya's "Shujaaz FM" initiative effectively used serialised drama to educate young people about civic issues (Sparks, 2016). The views of local leaders and traders on the problems with plastic garbage can be captured by recording a radio broadcast called "The Change Begins" from local markets like Owode-Ede or Oja Oba in Osogbo. This is in line with participatory models that have been shown to

work in community radios in Tanzania and Sierra Leone.

The social responsibility theory of the media

Dennis McQuail developed the Social Responsibility Theory of the Media in 1987 under the premise that the media has a responsibility to society to uphold high standards of impartiality, balance, accuracy, and truthfulness. The foundation of social responsibility theory is the idea that the journalists should behave responsibly (Ogunyombo & Odunlami, 2017). Press accountability is required since it holds a privileged position inside the government. The approach exhorts media professionals to make sure that every aspect of society is represented. This means that journalists have a responsibility to uphold their good reputation in society and should consider it part of their job to cover all topics of human interest, such as the SDGs for environmental pollutions.

Media should promote moral, open, and socially helpful content in the public interest, according to social responsibility theory. This means raising awareness and educating listeners about environmental contamination through radio broadcasts. Information about SDG-related environmental issues, such as the health effects of air pollution (SDG 3) or climate action (SDG 13), can be spread via radio, which can help people understand and modify their behavior (Peter, 2024). SDG 10 can be addressed via radio by exposing government and corporate shortcomings in pollution control and by airing programs that elevate the voices of those who are disproportionately impacted by pollution.

Radio has the ability to democratize knowledge, but thorough coverage is necessary for it to be effective. Radio in particular has been quite successful in raising awareness of environmental health issues in Nigerian cities. This could be as a result of urban people's easier access to the media. About 60% of Nigerian urban households possess a radio, and 90% of urban households have one, according to a survey. This suggests that there is a strong probability that residents of

urban regions will have easy access to environmental health information disseminated by radio media. However, the mass media should have a presence in the rural areas where a greater number of Nigerians reside in order to effectively raise awareness of environmental health issues among the general public. As radio becomes more widely used, environmental health professionals and other environmental organizations have more possibilities to educate the public.

It is expected that the public will be strongly influenced and motivated to act, which will hasten the process of change when special radio programmes, and information are focused on waste management, sanitation practices, control of water pollution, etc. with a socially responsible broadcast media.

Materials and methods

In-depth interviews, qualitative research, was adopted in this study due to its flexibility and reliability in gathering nuanced data with transcriptions of the videos for analysis. This study used purposive sampling to select twelve broadcast media reporters from radio and television stations in Osun State for interviews, based on their specialised knowledge and study relevance. The transcribed video recordings for gathering qualitative insights. The criteria for their selection include specialised knowledge of environmental issue of pollution and related matters in the study.

Discussion of the Findings

In alignment with the finding in Sunday & Idakwo (2018) study, major findings in this study also revealed that broadcast media coverage of environmental issues in Osun State encounter various challenges in communicating environmental health risks, such as pollution, as result of other competing news priorities, cultural influences, and limited engagement from environmental health professionals. These barriers hinder public awareness and informed action on critical issues like water pollution (e.g., lead poisoning in the Osun River), air quality,

and waste management, which are essential for sustainable development and environmental protection. Invariably, environmental health stories, such as the lead poisoning of the Osun River, are often overshadowed by more attention-grabbing topics like politics, economics, and social issues, which dominate news cycles (TVC correspondent, 2023; Fresh FM reporter, IDI/Personal Communication, 2023). Thus, it reduces the priority given to environmental health risks in the programmes transmitted for public awareness.

In most responses, inadequate staffing and financial resources were cited as one of the factors making it difficult to prioritise investigative reporting on complex environmental health issues (Fresh FM reporter, IDI/Personal Communication, 2023). This constraint had an impact on coverage of critical topics like waterborne diseases and air pollution. Also, cultural beliefs, such as mystical views held by Osun worshippers, diminish the perceived urgency of environmental issues like river pollution (TVC correspondent, IDI/Personal Communication, 2023). Additionally, political pressures from government and industry stakeholders suppress reporting on environmental health issues that could reflect negatively on their operations (Orisun FM reporter, IDI/Personal Communication, 2023). It was observed that environmental health professionals and academics are not proactively engaging with media through events like conferences or workshops to amplify critical issues (Orisun FM reporter, 2023; Gold FM reporter, IDI/Personal Communication, 2023). This limits the availability of expert insights to simplify complex topics for public understanding. The scientific complexity of environmental health topics, such as water quality and climate change impacts, poses challenges for journalists in creating accessible narratives, leading to underreporting (TVC correspondent, 2023; OSBC senior producer, IDI/Personal Communication, 2023). Most editors give preferences to political or business stories

(editors often prioritize short-term, trendy stories over long-term environmental concerns) over environmental health stories. This accounted for the low coverage of pollution, waste management and climate change, which have gained global attention as issues of SDG goals (Rave FM reporter, 2023; Fresh FM reporter, IDI/Personal Communication, 2023).

There were under coverages of environmental health risks, such as water and air pollution, undermining efforts to inform communities about sustainable practices and the health impacts of pollution, which are critical for achieving environmental protection goals that could raise public awareness, encourage community action, and pressure policymakers to address issues like water quality, waste management, and deforestation.

Conclusion

The study explored Osun State's broadcast media role in tackling environmental pollution to support sustainable development, emphasising their duty to create public awareness. Effective radio content should connect pollution to broader goals like clean energy, fostering dialogue among communities, businesses, and policymakers, as seen in Lebanon's Agenda 2030 programs. However, data showed that broadcast professionals lack resources to cover critical issues like environmental pollution such as Osun River lead poisoning that portend greater health risk in the affected communities in Osogbo, Osun State. These stations gave priorities to political, economic/business and entertainment contents over critical coverage of SDG goals of environmental and health protection of the people.

The study has contributed to behavior change communication by pointing out the challenges of broadcast media coverages. The need to bring together media professional and researchers in the environmental ecosystem to strengthen the adoption of global goals in sustainable development for meaningful action. To counter worsening environmental issues, Osun's broadcasters should act as watchdogs, delivering

clear, culturally relevant educational content to raise awareness and drive social change, aligning with government and organizational efforts in Nigeria.

Recommendations

In order to enhance environmental health communication across Osun State's broadcast stations, the study recommended the following.

- ❖ Specialized reportage training programmes should be organized to equip journalists with the requisite skills in the coverage of environmental issues such as pollution, degradation, deforestation and climate change-related issues.
- ❖ Longitudinal research should be conducted to evaluate audience perception and information seeking habits on environmental health matters.
- ❖ Additionally, there is urgent need to establish interdisciplinary collaborations with environmental health experts so as to broaden and enrich reporting perspectives.
- ❖ Public advocacies and awareness initiatives should be intensified to inform communities about pollution risks, aligning with sustainable development goals which aligns with various government policy of integrating actionable plans with media agenda setting and social responsibility roles.

Professional implications of the study

- ❖ *Enhanced training for media professionals:* The study underscores the need for targeted training programs for broadcast media professionals on environmental issues, enabling them to effectively report on pollution and raise public awareness.
- ❖ *Increased collaboration with environmental experts:* Media outlets should foster partnerships with environmental scientists and organisations to ensure accurate

dissemination of information regarding environmental health and pollution.

- ❖ *Development of specialised environmental programmes:* The research highlights the necessity for broadcast stations to develop dedicated segments or programs focusing specifically on environmental issues, particularly concerning local water bodies like the Osun River.
- ❖ *Strategic content planning:* Media organisations must re-evaluate their content priorities to allocate more airtime and resources to environmental news, thereby facilitating informed public discourse and action.
- ❖ *Promotion of health awareness campaigns:* Broadcast media can play a pivotal role in promoting health awareness campaigns that educate the community about the health risks associated with environmental pollution, particularly related to contaminated water sources.
- ❖ *Utilization of innovative communication strategies:* The study suggests the adoption of innovative storytelling techniques and multimedia content to engage the audience more effectively on environmental issues.
- ❖ *Measurement of audience impact:* Media professionals should develop metrics to assess the impact of their environmental coverage on audience awareness and behaviour, allowing for adjustments in strategy based on feedback and effectiveness.
- ❖ *Advocacy for policy changes:* The findings encourage media professionals to take on advocacy roles by informing public opinion and influencing policymakers to prioritise environmental sustainability and health regulations.
- ❖ *Community engagement and feedback*

mechanisms: Finally, broadcast media should establish feedback mechanisms to engage the community in discussions and obtain local input concerning pollution issues, ensuring that the content reflects the audience's concerns and fosters action.

Limitations to the study

- ❖ *Sample Size*: The study's reliance on in-depth interviews with only 12 broadcast media professionals may limit the generalizability of the findings. A larger sample size could provide a more comprehensive view of media practices across different organisations.
- ❖ *Geographical focus*: The research is focused solely on Osun State, Nigeria, which may not fully represent the media landscape and environmental communication practices in other regions of the country or continent. Variations in local media policies and practices may influence how environmental issues are reported.
- ❖ *Qualitative nature*: The qualitative research design may introduce subjective biases, as the interpretation of data depends heavily on the researchers' perspectives. This could affect the reliability of the findings.
- ❖ *Limited scope of environmental issues*: The study primarily emphasises contamination of the Osun River due to lead poisoning, but does not explore other forms of environmental pollution or additional factors affecting sustainable development. A broader examination could yield more comprehensive insights.
- ❖ *Temporal context*: The timing of data collection may impact the findings, as media discourse and public awareness of environmental issues can fluctuate based on current events or crises. Changes in environmental policies or events occurring after the study may alter the relevance of the findings.

- ❖ *Media ownership and control*: The study does not account for the influence of media ownership and corporate interests on the coverage of environmental issues. Different ownership structures may affect the editorial choices made by broadcast stations.

- ❖ *Public engagement*: The study does not assess public engagement with the media or how audience perceptions influence the effectiveness of environmental communication. Understanding the audience's role could provide insights into how to enhance media strategies for environmental awareness.

- ❖ *Resource limitations*: The capacity of broadcast media to produce and disseminate environmental content may be constrained by financial and human resources, which may not have been fully explored in the study.

Ethical consideration

Ethical approval was gained from broadcast (radio and television) media reporters and professionals identified to have reported news on environmental pollution of the Osun River, lead poisoning stories. They were assured that the information provided would be treated with utmost confidentiality. We sought broadcast journalists because television and radio news are often selected and identified as setting the agenda for public discussion.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest

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