

## **“Community Newspapers Underreporting the Environment.” The Case of *The Times* and *The Sun* Newspapers in The Midlands Province of Zimbabwe.**

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### **Abstract**

*Community media ought to be vehicles for development yet community newspapers in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe seem to be lagging behind in terms of environmental reportage. The researchers contend that the media are underreporting environmental issues thereby failing to contribute meaningfully to the overall climate change discourse. The research concentrated on stories that were carried in **The Sun** and **The Times** during the years 2008 to 2010. The research was carried out using interviews and documentary evidence. From the actual stories, the researchers found that community newspapers tend to cover natural disasters mostly. Man-made environmental problems such as land degradation, deforestation and veld fires are not given much prominence yet they are factors that contribute to climate change. Interviews with editors and journalists from the two media houses yielded lack of resources such as transport, staff shortages, lack of adequate training for journalists in environmental reporting, fear of political reprisals as well as the relatively low salience that is placed on environmental stories as the biggest factors hampering environmental reporting. The Environmental Management Authority was also castigated for not doing enough by not carrying out campaigns to educate the public about caring for the environment. On a comparative scale, **The Times** had more environmentally related stories but in terms of depth of coverage of issues, **The Sun** scored better. In as far as community newspapers fail to highlight pertinent issues regarding the environment, they are doing a disservice to the communities they report to by failing to provide information that empowers the same communities. For instance, newly resettled farmers continue to fell trees and cause land degradation, thereby affecting sustainability of their activities. From a political economy perspective, the researchers recommend that community newspapers diversify their sources of income in order to reduce their susceptibility to external influence, political or otherwise. The researchers also recommend components of environmental reporting in training institutions as well as refresher courses for practicing journalists.*

**Key Words:** Environmental Reporting, Community Newspapers, Climate Change, sustainable development

## Introduction

Despite the uncertainties of potential climate change, a scientific consensus is emerging that increasing concentrations of atmospheric carbon dioxide could alter global temperatures and precipitation patterns (Matarira et al, 1995). Cutting down of trees and emission of carbon dioxide in the air are said to be the major cause of climatic changes whilst droughts result from imbalances in the ozone layer which in turn affects the welfare of communities. The research is an investigation of how two weekly community newspapers *The Sun* and *The Times* are handling issues of environmental concern as a way of assessing their contribution to the climate change discourse.

The major objective of the study is to assess whether community newspapers are playing a social responsibility role of educating the community of the dangers of cutting down trees, land degradation, and emission of carbon dioxide into the ozone layer. The research also seeks to identify and evaluate possible measures that can be taken by journalists as a way of making sure that they cover environmental issues as well as to highlight the consequences and implications of climate change on communities.

Zimbabwe's agricultural sector currently represents the largest force driving the country's economy. Agricultural production processes, particularly plant growth, are dependent on climatic conditions. This makes agricultural activities extremely vulnerable to climatic changes (Matarira et al, 1995). Thus, it is essential for reporters to inform and educate people about potential effects of climate change on the agricultural sector and to examine ways in which the sector can adapt in order to minimize the negative socioeconomic impacts of these changes. The water supply situation in Zimbabwe depends entirely upon climate conditions; any decrease in precipitation could be most significant for the irrigation water available to the crops. Considering the large temperature increases anticipated due to climate change and their potential effect on evapo-transpiration, this implies water shortages, particularly in the sites that are currently in low rainfall areas like the Midlands province.

The reduction in mean seasonal precipitation under climate change conditions implies that the water available for irrigation purposes would also be affected accordingly. This will reduce the effectiveness of irrigation as a strategy to combat

the effects of climate change (Matarira et al, 1995). More importantly, broad-scale shifts in agricultural capability due to climate change would affect rural livelihood and the national economy. This implies that all vulnerable groups are threatened by climate change through the ripple effects that diminish the resource base and increase the possibility of resource conflicts and tensions between the agricultural and industrial sectors (Matarira et al 1995).

McQuail D (1995) pointed out that community newspapers democratise the structure and discursive practices of modern communication systems and in so doing, support popular participation in public discourse. He further commented that community newspapers role is to promote social integration and community cohesion with geo-cultural communities and to sustain local forms of cultural expression. According to Howley K (2005:343)

Community newspapers are locally oriented, participatory media organisations that provide groups and individuals whose voices and perspectives are excluded from mainstream media with access to the tools of media production and distribution. Individuals dedicated to promoting local cultural expression, civic engagement and social integration take turns to participate in the production and distribution of community newspapers with no commercial imperatives at heart.

This research is premised upon the fact that community media are media for development and thus should empower their communities with information that enables them to make informed decisions regarding their welfare. To come up with an analysis of how the community newspapers cover environmental issues, it should be realised that there are many factors which influence the way the news come out in the two newspapers, *The Times* and *The Sun*.

In terms of the Alternative Development paradigm, culture-specific communication strategies for development are advocated, based on the common agreement about the unsuitability of the western development models (Boafo and George 1992:137). The underlying assumption of this development approach is that there are no fixed definitions of development. Increased attention is being paid to the people such as in ecology and participatory democracy. According to Melkote (1991) the media in this case act as a vehicle for people's self-expression or serve as a tool for

diagnosis of community problems. For Mda (1993:39), it should rather be described as a process bringing about social change in order to improve the living standards of the people. The question to be answered is whether *The Times* and *The Sun* in their coverage of environmental issues correspond with the new thinking.

The research also has to be understood in terms of the agenda setting role of the press. Lazarsfeld refers to agenda setting as the power to structure issues. An example would be when the press set out to convince the people over what they deem to be the salient issues. This is an essential part of advocacy and attempts at influencing public opinion. It is not the event that is being reported that becomes important but the point of view and perspective which the press hopes to develop in the public becomes important. In this case it means that *The Times* and *The Sun's* reportage is the one which is supposed to set the agenda for the community.

Lang and Lang (1983) expand the concept of agenda setting into agenda building which they broke into steps where:

The press highlights some events or activities and makes them stand out. Different kinds of issues are given different kinds and amounts of news coverage to gain attention. The different events and activities in the focus of attention must be framed. The language used in reporting such events and issues is designed in such a way that it affects their perception and importance (Lang and Lang, 1983). The media link activities that become the focus of attention to secondary symbols whose location on politicians' landscape is easily recognised. This is because people need a basis for taking sides on an issue. There is a selection of well-known and credible individuals who begin to speak out an issue.

The concept of community newspapers is based upon McQuail's (1987) Democratic Participant Media theory. The democratic participant theory requires media which are closely related to social life and accountable to the needs of their audience and offering opportunities for access and participation on terms set by their user. In this approach the media are also decentralised and exist primarily for their audience in the recognition of the assertion that 'communication is too important to be left to professionals' (McQuail 1994:123).

In this case, *The Times* and *The Sun* are supposed to be accountable to all their audiences in Gweru Urban and peri-urban, meaning that even the environmental issues should be given prominence as a way of protecting the climate and welfare

of the future generations.

The role of the mass media then is to act as catalyst in change rather than to solve the problem. The community newspaper should highlight the problems faced. Schramm (1977:3) summarized it succinctly 'communication can build itself into the social structure, it is going to show any real hope of extensive results only when the media channel can mix with interpersonal channels and with organizations in the village, are you going to have a kind of development you will like (Melkote 1997:203).' The theory for communication for development is important to this research in that it shows the relevance of communicating at grassroots level. The question that needs to be answered in this project is whether the community newspapers correspond to new thinking. The model will be extensively used in the discussion when analyzing the content of the two newspapers and what they ought to do.

The political economy of the media sets to show how different ways of financing and organising cultural production have traceable consequences for the range of discourses and presentations in the public domain and for the audiences to access them.

As noted by Golding and Murdock (1996) among other functions the media serve and propagandise on behalf of powerful societal interests that control and finance them. The representatives of these interests have important agendas and principles that they want to advance, and they are well positioned to shape and constraint media policies. This case is vigorously argued in Herman and Chomsky (1988) in their seminal text *Manufacturing consent: the political economy of mass media* They develop what they call a propaganda model of American news arguing 'the powerful are able to fix the premise of discourse, to decide what the general populace is allowed to see, hear and think about and to manage public opinion by regular propaganda campaigns'. They are partly right in that the government and the business elite do have privileged access to the news, large advertisers do operate as a latter day licensing authority selectively supporting some newspaper and television programmes and not others and proprietors can determine the editorial line and cultural stance of the paper they own. With this in mind, the political economy of the media approach will help the researchers to find out who really is behind the operations of community newspapers.

According to Boyd-Barrett (1995) political economy looks at the process of

consolidation, diversification, commercialisation, and internationalisation. The working of the profit motive in the hunt for audience and its consequences for the media and media content is a focal question for political economy of communications in an effort to investigate how changes in the forces which exercise control of cultural production and distribution, limit or liberate public sphere. The contribution of the political economy approach to this debate is to analyse how and in what ways the commercialisation of the media have consequences for the range of expression and ideas in the public arena. With regard to this research project political economy is used in its simplest and commonest form to refer to a study that draws on economics and politics in order to understand how political institutions, the political environment and the work capital influence each other in ways the constantly shapes and reshapes allocations of resources.

### **Methodology**

The researchers utilized a multiple method strategy in research design commonly known as triangulation. According to Jensen (1991) this 'helps to uncover unexpected dimension of the area of inquiry'. Jensen and Wester 1996 describe four types of triangulation, triangulation of data, the investigator, the theory and the method. The researchers used triangulation of theory as they approached the field of study of climatic change using theoretical perspectives originated from mass communication research. Finally the project is characterized by triangulation in that different methods of data collection and analysis of the community newspapers were employed.

### **Unit of analysis**

The unit of analysis is the actual stories that were carried in the two papers over the period in question.

### **Sampling procedure**

The research was conducted in Gweru urban and peri-urban. Two prominent newspapers community newspapers in Gweru were sampled out; *The Times*, a publicly owned newspaper and *The Sun*, a privately owned newspaper. 106 publications of *The Times* that were published between January 2008 and May

2010 were analyzed whilst for *The Sun* newspaper which was publishing erratically during the economic crisis period and whose newspaper filing system is poor, only 52 publications could be found for the same period.

Structured interviews were conducted with the journalists, the editors and environmentalists. The researchers used purposive sampling to come up with the people to interview. Purposive sampling can be very useful for situations where the researcher needs to reach a targeted sample quickly and where sampling for proportionality is not the primary concern. With purposive sample the researcher is likely to get the opinions of the target population, but there is also likely danger to overweight subgroups in the population that are more readily accessible. In this case the chances of overweighing sub-groups were limited since they are very few journalists in both publications. Interviews were carried out with the editor of *The Times*, Mr Vincent Rangwe and the editor of *The Sun* newspaper, Mr Willie Muponda and a single journalist from each stable, given that the two newsrooms usually have one permanent journalist apart from the editor with the rest being interns on attachment. The rest of their news is sourced from correspondents or from wire sources and online sources. Interviews were also conducted Mr Nyoka from the Environmental Management Authority offices in Gweru. The researchers also used convenience sampling to come up with the general public to interview. Though the method is less preconceived and directed, it is more of the product of expediency, chance and opportunity. The researchers used these methods to identify the readers of the two community newspapers by interviewing 30 people at the point of buying the two weeklies. Questionnaires were administered to members of the public who read *The Times* and *The Sun* as a way of appraising the paper's coverage of environmental issues in general and climatic change in particular.

### **Data Gathering Techniques**

The researchers employed both content analysis and response analysis. Content analysis is used primarily to interrogate the content of the actual stories in the newspaper.

Qualitative content analysis aims at exposing the ideology of the reality of the constructing process. This research method was used to examine some linguistic features in the texts of *The Times* and *The Sun*. The interest was whether or not the text in any of the papers promoted environmental issues. Content analysis was

defined by Grossberg et al (1988) as a systematic and objective method of describing the manifest or surface content of the text. The above indicates that content analysis focuses on the content which could be viewed as the physical text of the message in print, sound or pictorial images.

### **Discourse Analysis**

The researchers made use of critical discourse analysis to analyse the power relations in the writing of stories and who has the final say in the construction of the actual words we get to read about in the media. Wodak (2001:2-3) defines Discourse Analysis as being 'fundamentally concerned with analysing opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of dominance, discrimination, power and control as manifested in language. Critical discourse analysis is a meaningful tool to understand the ways information and communication increasingly shape our lives.

### **Quantitative content analysis**

Quantitative content analysis was also used to come up with the findings to determine the levels to which community newspapers were writing about environmentally related issues. This is where column inches devoted to different types of newspaper content are measured and findings quantified in subject categories. The focus was on the content of the whole newspaper for the period of two years and give average figures illustrating the news trend in both newspapers.

### **Research Findings**

#### **Coverage of environmental issues by *The Times***

A cross section of the stories to do with the environment carried by *The Times* over the past three years shows stories like "IOM visits villages affected by floods" (01 – 06 February 2008); "Heavy rains to affect yields" (08 – 14 February 2008); "Environmental service learning project launched" (August 29 – September 04, 2008); "Veld fire prevention is everyone's responsibility" (opinion piece, May 02 – 08, 2008); "Traditional leaders urged to champion fire fighting cause" (May 16 – 22, 2008); "EMA holds an environmental workshop in Gweru" (10 – 16 October 2008); "Residents urged to conserve trees" (14 – 20 November 2008); "Silobela roads impassable" (01 – 06 February 2008/ 16 – 22 January 2009); "Farmers urged



not to use harmful substances" (05 – 11 June 2009); "Sino should compensate Whawha farmers" (28 August – 03 September 2009); "Traditional leaders urged to form fire fighting committees" (04 – 10 September 2009); "Ban says China takes important measures to reduce emission" (18 December 09 – 07 January 2010); "Francis Nhema applauds environmental reporters" (27 February – 05 March 2010); "Horticulture solution to climate change" (expert opinion piece, 01 – 07 May 2010).

What these findings illustrate is the fact that environmental stories are rare in *The Times*. The study yielded the fact that for the whole of 2008, out of 52 issues, *The Times* only carried thirteen (13) environmental stories and in 2009, they only carried seven (7) stories. The research also found that some stories are perennial, appearing year after year, such as "Heavy rains to affect yields" and "Silobela roads impassable" or the one on traditional leaders spearheading fire fighting causes. It was also noted how none of the paper's editorial comments had anything to do with environmental issues during the period in question. Further, the paper's reportage of the environment is limited to quotations of what a prominent person like the Governor would have said; as in "Traditional leaders urged to champion fire fighting cause" or "Residents urged to conserve trees" when the Forestry Commission would have said so or "Sino should compensate Whawha farmers" when the Member of Parliament (MP) for Chiwundura said so. What this means is that the reportage is limited to reporting what authoritative figures would have said but the paper itself fails to take a stance on issues to do with the environment. For instance, on the Sino issue, after the MP highlighted the fact that communal farmers within the vicinity of Sino risked their cattle dying due to consuming cement-contaminated grass, the paper should have followed up with an investigative report of its own over the issue. The research also noted how the paper is timid in tackling environmentally related issues with no stories being carried that are bold enough to point accusatory fingers at the people that are damaging the environment in the Midlands by causing land degradation such as gold panners and newly resettled farmers that continue to fell trees as well as ordinary people that continue to cause veld fires. This is in spite of the fact that there is a demonstrable link between deforestation and increased reflection of heat which translates into heat waves and overallly, climatic change.

In as far as *The Times* is failing to take a stand on this issue, as the largest circulating paper in the Midlands, it is the researchers' contention that the paper is failing to carry out its mandate in fostering development by literally 'turning a blind eye to evil'. The researchers also argue that the paper is abdicating its social responsibility

by failing to take an advocacy role on an issue as important as that of climatic change, espoused under the Agenda Setting Theory of the press. The researchers do concede however that *The Times* from time to time does carry opinion pieces by individual journalists or correspondents who will be giving their personal reflections on issues to do with the environment. As one of the stories from the selection above illustrates, when the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) conducts workshops to appraise journalists of some of these issues, sometimes the best story that *The Times* can come up with as illustrated above is “EMA holds workshop in Gweru” such that it baffles the mind as to whether the fact that EMA held a workshop was the most striking thing about workshop. The researchers put it that the reason why *The Times* ‘plays it safe’ on issues of environmental concern by shying away from contentious issues is to be located in the political economy realm. *The Times* is owned by Community Newspapers Publishers (CNP), a subsidiary of New ZIANA which in turn falls under the Ministry of Information. Accordingly, *The Times* is part of the Ideological State Apparatus and so cannot discharge their duties in such a way that they criticise prevailing state policies. Thus if it is resettled farmers that are causing deforestation, despite the fact that it is in the public interest to highlight that fact for the common good of stymieing climate change, they are powerless to do that.

### **Coverage of environmental issues by *The Sun***

*The Sun* is a privately owned community newspaper based in Gweru owned by one individual, Willie Muponda that purports to cover Midlands and Bulawayo. A cross – section of stories carried by *The Sun* regarding the environment include, “Zimbabwe to establish eco – tourism” (06 – 14 December 2009); “EMA, Agritex, creating awareness on forest conservation in Chirumanzi” (08 – 15 2010); “Climate change a threat to agriculture” (25 – 30 September 2010); “Veld fires on the increase in Midlands” (25 – 30 September 2010); “Climate change a threat to agriculture” (03 – 09 December 2010); “Rains spoil maize crop” (20 December 2010 – 02 January 2011).

The findings indicate limited environmental reporting prior to 2010, which the researchers took to indicate a commitment to profit making or rather, commercial imperative versus the need to inform. Further, they also took it to be indicative of the lack of qualified reporters with a leaning towards environmental reporting. From around April 2008 to about November 2009, *The Sun* was staffed by the Editor and student interns only and during the economic hardships experienced in 2008, it could go for weeks without publishing. That having been said, it needs

to be noted that *The Sun* then attracted the services of the deputy editor of *Ilanga News*, a community newspaper based in Matabeleland in December 2009 who was to change the face of environmental reporting at *The Sun*. The lady in question holds a Bachelor's degree in Natural Resources Management and Agriculture from MSU and so has an understanding of the environmental issues at stake as evidenced by the quality of her reporting as illustrated by the stories above. Generally, journalists in the community newspaper sector are holders of journalism diplomas from either the Harare Polytechnic's division of Mass Communication or from the Christian College of Southern Africa (CCOSA). Some, including the two editors of the papers in question would have benefitted from in-house training programmes at media organisations like ZIANA whilst others would be holders of either Media Studies degrees from local universities or English and Communication Studies degrees. Needless to say, despite the array of qualifications that the journalists may have, a common uniting factor for them is the fact that these journalism qualifications all emphasise on teaching someone 'how to write a good story'. A good story is supposed to meet the following news values: accuracy, fairness, prominence, timeliness, balance. More often than not, controversy is also a very central element. To that end therefore, political stories, business stories, sports news often fulfil these elements in a very exciting manner and thus journalism graduates are much more drawn to those beats than others.

*The Sun*, as evidenced above, is also guilty of recycling stories such as "Climate change a threat to agriculture". Quantitatively, *The Sun* takes a beating from *The Times* in terms of covering environmental stories in as far as *The Times* cover more stories though in terms of the depth of coverage, *The Sun* is better. *The Sun* also takes a beating in terms of lacking a proper system of filing of their own newspaper as evidenced by the fact that they could not locate enough back copies of their own newspaper despite repeated appeals by the researchers, thus the limited selection, arguing that their paper usually gets sold out.

Based on that limited selection, however, that *The Sun* has dedicated page seven (7) of its issue to farming news where the lady in question gets to write farming stories and environmentally related stories as they relate to farming. The researchers left out the strictly agricultural stories out of the selection like those on cauliflower production and so forth, as they had no bearing on the study. However, the researchers noted that in each issue there is one or two stories on the farming news page, one of which may be environmentally related in loose terms such as "Rains

spoil maize crop". As this research had to do with measuring how community newspapers are faring in highlighting the issue of climate change, *The Sun* is the one that openly carried an article on climate change, though they ran it twice one year as noted above, but in as far as they tried to create awareness of the issue, they fared better than *The Times*. And even that point is debatable, given the fact that *The Sun's* circulation is much lower than that of *The Times*.

They also carry articles that highlight the benefits of reforestation albeit in the context of reporting what EMA or Agritex would have said. The researchers did not find evidence of any articles being based upon what politicians like the Governor would have said as was the case with *The Times*; rather, there was evidence of heavy reliance on expert opinion regarding environmentally related issues. For instance, to juxtapose the way issues are covered by the two newspapers in September 2009, *The Times* carried a story on "Traditional leaders urged to form fire fighting committees" whilst *The Sun* carried "Veld fires on the increase in the Midlands" highlighting the issue at hand and providing insightful comments on why veld fires are not very desirable. The researchers note the fact that *The Sun* scores better in environmental reporting not on terms of merit as such but on the technicality of having employed someone with a sound background in environmental issues rather than that of journalism per se.

### **Challenges in environmental reporting for *The Times***

An interview with *The Times* staff yielded the fact that they lack adequate resources such as transport. For example, they can only cover outlying areas like Chiwundura if a politician is going there and needs coverage, gives them transport. Further, environmental news is of relatively low worth compared to political reporting in as far as it sells the paper and gets a reporter noticed by bigger newspapers like *The Chronicle* and *The Sunday News*, which are national papers. In other words, in terms of career development, environmental reporting ranks lowly compared with political and business reporting, for instance. Staff shortage is also a challenge for environmental reporting for *The Times*, having only one full time reporter and the editor such that they mostly rely on students on internship from the Midlands State University departments of Media and Society Studies as well as English and Communication Studies. These interns are not salaried and rely on resources from their parents and per diems from attending workshops in a phenomenon known throughout journalistic circles as "workshop journalism".

When they are not looking for money, the students would rather be writing political or entertainment news that could enable them to get employed by bigger publications upon completion of their studies or alternatively networking with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) again in search of future employment. Further, individual journalists revealed that the rewards are small in environmental reporting in comparison with writing on politics, entertainment or business, where one can come across 'juicy bits' that one can use to extort money out of the concerned party, for instance, one can come across evidence of a prominent person having a 'small house' and be paid in order to suppress such news but when taking the environmental beat, such opportunities rarely arise. More to that, it should be noted that most journalism schools do not teach environmental reporting as a stand-alone module such that unless the students took Geography in high school, they might not be aware of some of the issues worth writing about, and hence the "EMA holds workshop in Gweru" type of reportage which lacks any analysis whatsoever.

### **Challenges faced in environmental reporting by *The Sun***

*The Sun*, just like its compatriot *The Times* is also plagued by poor remuneration and its attendant problems of workshop journalism, staff exodus and inability to retain skilled and experienced staff. Its position is worsened by the fact that as a privately owned newspaper with little other sources of income, it can at best be described as 'struggling'. Unlike *The Times* which benefits from state patronage and traditional advertisers like Trevor Dollar and CC Sales, *The Sun's* financing is rather precarious, at best. Whereas *The Times* can afford to charge 5 Rand for a copy and charge less than half of what other private newspapers charge for advertising, *The Sun* as its nearest competitor suffers. *The Sun* sells for \$1 per copy in order to try and make ends meet and tries to differentiate its product by focusing on coming up with 'cutting edge' news. As such, their environmental reporting is a cut above that of *The Times* in as far as they are more commercially oriented. They write in order to sell whereas *The Times* writes to inform as a public service, *The Sun* has the profit motive in mind. In other words, *The Sun* wants to write good stories as a niche over its competitor so that audiences can buy, despite the fact that *The Sun* costs twice what *The Times* costs. If they are able to retain a captive audience on that basis, it follows that they will be able to attract advertisers. Their circulation however is very low and the actual figures could not be ascertained and distribution of the paper is also poor, with the organisation having to rely on interns mostly distributing the paper on foot compared with *The Times* which has vehicles that can enable it to go beyond Gweru alone.

That having been said, the columnist for *The Sun* Farming News, cited her challenges

as being the fact that environmental reporting doesn't sell the paper and that such stories never make it as lead stories, always being buried somewhere deep in the paper. She also pointed out that most people hardly read environmental stories such that it is disheartening to write stories week after week that 'no one gets to read' because people prefer political stories and other human interest stories. She also lamented the fact that EMA is not very proactive; their visibility is simply limited to the observance of days like the World Environment Day, National Fire Week and such days but in between, they are not very visible. She pointed out they could be carrying out anti-litter campaigns, veld-fire campaigns as well as monitoring the City Council who are failing to cut grass and collect refuse from residents. She also pointed out that in other countries, it is an offense to litter the environs and to burn grass without sanction and thus attacked City Council for failing to enforce its own by-laws which provide for the bringing to book of perpetrators.

The researchers then sought for an explanation from the Environmental Management Authority over the fact they are not providing leadership within the environmental management awareness area, such that had it not been for the Anti-Paper bag campaign, the public would not know of them. EMA were adamant that they are doing an adequate job, counter-accusing the journalists and members of the public of apathy instead. They pointed out that they distribute posters to stakeholders like schools and local authorities but people rarely pay attention to the posters and simply throw away brochures that they would have been given. Further, as the environmental officer whom the researchers interviewed intimated,

"Some of the causes of climate change are sensitive issues in that they are sources of people's livelihood. You are aware, of course, that climate change is caused by human activities which upset ecosystems? For example, we cannot overemphasize on the issue of forest clearing which causes deforestation; neither can you overemphasize on stream bank cultivation because people will be trying to earn a living. The same with gold panning, we know that gold panning increases the reflection of heat causing heat waves and seasons shifting but because it's a source of people's livelihood, we can only say so much".

Again, the researchers contend that this attitude on the part of EMA can be explained in much the same way as that of *The Times*, the patterns of financing and control which ties it to the state and renders it useless to speak against certain practices which the state sanctions. Of interest is the fact that the mandate of EMA is to exercise general supervision over the natural resources to ensure their sustainable utilisation, and monitor the state of the environment in order to produce the state of the environment report after five years.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The research showed that indeed, community newspapers are underreporting issues to do with the environment and thereby failing to contribute meaningfully to the overall climate change discourse. The study also illustrated a marked lack of relevant expertise in the area of environmental reporting fuelled by the inability of community newspapers to attract and retain skilled and experienced staff and thus, the poor quality reportage. As such, it can safely be argued that community newspapers are training grounds with little remuneration to offer and hardly the impetus for one to develop a career in environmental reporting. The journalists also view environmental reporting as limiting in terms of career development since such stories rarely get noticed and rarely make it as lead stories such that it becomes difficult for one to make a name for themselves through writing environmental stories.

Because of the precarious financing of community newspapers, it is imperative that journalists and community newspapers ingratiate themselves with certain persons or institutions in order to ensure their livelihood. The impotency of EMA in protecting the environment was also noted. The research also indicated ignorance on the part of the public on issues to do with protecting the environment as evidenced by the wanton burning of grass and cutting of trees in favour of urban agriculture. The failure by City Council to enforce its own by-laws was also noted as it fails to arrest members of the public that burn grass and practice stream bank cultivation. On a comparative note, the research found that though quantitatively *The Times* had carried more environmentally related stories from 2008 to 2010, qualitatively, *The Sun* wrote better stories, though fewer.

In light of the above arguments, the researcher thus recommend that the Environmental Management Agency (EMA) be much more proactive and not limit its activities to observing certain days but they should be visible throughout the year. In much the same manner as their influence is being felt in the Anti – Paper bag Campaign, their influence should also be felt in Anti – Veld fire Campaigns, Anti – Land Degradation campaigns and Anti – Deforestation campaigns providing leadership for the drive against climate change. In short, the Environmental Management Agency needs to be more effective than it has been so far.

Non – Governmental Organisations (NGOs) like Environment Africa should not limit their interventions to coming up with awards like The Environmental Reporter of the Year only, but if they could actually sponsor an Environmental Watch page in community newspapers, it would go a long way to encourage journalists to develop a career in environmental reporting.

Community newspapers need to be innovative enough to diversify their sources of income in order not to rely too heavily on either state funding or commercial imperatives. If they increase their finances, it follows that, they will then be able to better remunerate staff and thus retain skilled and experienced staff and thus do away with the stigma of being a 'departure lounge' or a 'training ground'.

Journalists need to be creative when covering issues to do with the environment in order to make them interesting reads so that audiences pay attention to their articles. For instance, adding the human element to an article makes people pay attention in as far as they want to read about stories that touch on their lives not 'far – fetched' references to the ozone layer which they cannot visualise. People need to own processes that ensure their own development, so rather than prescriptions for development, they should be aware of their own role in changing things.

Local authorities also need to play their role of ensuring that residents do not just burn grass wantonly by strictly enforcing their own by-laws. They should also take a firm stance against residents that practice stream bank cultivation as a way of guarding against river shrinkage. They also need to cut grass in order to guard against veld fires. Such measures would certainly go a long way to protecting the environment.

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