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Modelling the Challenges of News Media Engagement in Community Flood Disaster Management: Preliminary Research Evidence from Yobe State, Nigeria

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Abstract

In a time when the devastating effects of climate change are undeniably experienced in communities across the world, multifaceted means of mitigating those effects are nowadays much sought after – and news media (both traditional and new) have been identified as one of those means. Because of its apparent inevitability, flood disasters have become a phenomenon that many communities in Yobe State experience virtually on an annual basis. Even though the literature has shown that effective engagement of news media especially before and after the rains could help manage flood disasters, this may not have yielded effective results – a situation that suggests the existence of factors hindering the effective engagement of the news media in the management of flood disasters in Yobe State. If yes, what are those factors? How could the challenges be overcome? This study seeks to answer these research questions to close the research gap. A qualitative research method of key informant interview was employed to collect first-hand information from experienced people and experts. A total of 19 participants were interviewed including relevant journalists from notable media organisations in the state, relevant staff of Yobe State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA Yobe), and those of other disaster management agencies in the state including Nigerian Metrological Agency (NMA). Atlas.ti version 8 software was used to analyse the data. The study yielded a bi-thematic model with four internal (predicting) factors and external (moderating) factors in each of the model's two themes as the preliminary results. The internal factors are news characteristics, funding, unprofessionalism and profit orientation, skilled labour and funding all impact the active participation of the media in flood risk reduction while the external factors are the lack of information, mistrust, inadequacies on the part of government and citizens and community perception of media's role in flood disaster management. This study which is limited to descriptive methodology recommends that key stakeholders should prioritise media relations during pre-rainy season period and prioritise pre-disaster management strategy.

Keywords: community engagement, flood, risk disaster management, media engagement, media relations, news media.

1. Introduction

The frequency, magnitude, and scale of destruction of flood in the recent time have been a source of concern to stakeholders. It was agreed that collaboration of stakeholders can reduce the risk of flood (Aronu et al., 2014; Ganiyu et al., 2017; van Niekerk, Nemakonde, 2017; Yaji, Daura, 2010). However, research suggests that the relationship between journalists, disaster management

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organisations and other stakeholders need improvement (Adekola, Lamond, 2018; Adekunle, 2018). Media and disaster management organisations play a crucial role in disaster management. Both disseminate information to the public about natural and artificial disasters (Aronu et al., 2014; Lamond et al., 2019). Ganiyu et al. (Ganiyu et al., 2017a, b: 152) opine that, *In Nigeria, flooding displaces more people than any other natural disaster with an estimated 20 % of the population at risk. This perennial problem consistently results in death and displacement of communities. The number of flood-related fatalities has varied significantly from flood-to-flood with the percentage of displaced versus killed persons not conclusive in the literature. Flood is a result of many conditions working singly and in synergy. These conditions are mainly natural and anthropogenic.*

Natural causes of flooding are generally a result of heavy rain and downpour (Ganiyu et al., 2017 a,b; Mashi et al., 2019; van Niekerk, NemaKonde, 2017).

Statistically, flood takes 83.3 % of all disasters that happened in Nigeria from 1990 to 2014 and 84.4 % of deaths recorded during the same time. Similarly, 99.8 % of economic issues from disasters are due to flood (Ganiyu et al., 2017 a, b; Mashiet al., 2019). These show that there is urgent need for collaboration of stakeholders to reduce flood disaster risk and save the nation. This study aims to identify and proffer solutions to the problems that are affecting Nigerian news media's involvement in disaster risk reduction in Yobe State (Mashi et al., 2019; van Niekerk, NemaKonde, 2017).

In 2012, rivers burst their banks and submerged vast swaths of land in 30 of the country's 36 states, killing over 400 people and displacing an additional 1.3 million (Mashi et al., 2019). The disaster caused \$17 billion in damage, according to the Nigerian National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA). In 2019, floods affected 277,555 people, killing 158 people. The number of people affected by floods increased to 2,353,647 in 2020, according to Muhammadu Muhammed, NEMA's former head, at the unveiling of the 2021 annual flood outlook, resulting in 69 deaths (NHSA, 2021).

A report on flooding in Yobe in August 2021 by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (OCHA, 2021a) shows that 2,899 households (17,394 persons) living in lowland communities across 11 local government areas (LGAs) in the State were affected by severe flooding. The affected LGAs are Gulani, Damaturu, Fune, Gujba, Bursari, Karasuwa, Nguru, Jakusko, Fika, Nangere and Tarmuwa. There are fears of increased flooding and inundation of more communities in the days to come as more rains are expected. The State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) has verified and provided some emergency food support to 42 % of the affected households. The Executive Governor of Yobe State, Mai Mala Buni directed the Ministries of Environment, Humanitarian Affairs, and the State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA) to liaise with vulnerable communities to relocate them to safer locations to ensure their safety. There are warnings from the Nigeria Meteorological Agency (NIMET) indicating heavy rainfall with massive floods that will affect some states including some parts of Yobe state. Furthermore, OCHA (2021b) report shows that on 21 July 2021, over 200 families were affected by heavy flooding which destroyed more than 100 homes in Jakusko LGA.

The paper presents the preliminary findings of a study which aims to identify and recommend solutions to challenges militating against news media and disaster managers "performing their roles in disaster risk reduction in Yobe State, Nigeria." The study aimed to answer these research questions: what are the factors hindering the effective engagement of new media in flood disaster management in Yobe State? How could the challenges be overcome?

Yobe State is located in the North-East part of Nigeria that lies in the desertification frontline of the country. although rainfalls are limited, heavy rains in the peak months of July and August give rise to "a lot of flood disaster in several towns and villages in the state" (OCHA, 2021a, b).

2. Materials and methods

A qualitative, key informant interview (KII) was used to select 19 key participants (aged from 25 to 54 years; 11 men, 8 women). KII provides the researcher with the leverage to select and interview important participants that are relevant to the study and that have the requisite knowledge of the research problem (Wimmer, Dominick, 2013). The participants are 5 journalists and relevant editorial management staff from each of Yobe Broadcasting Corporation (YBC), Yobe State Television (YTV), and NTA Damaturu as well as the head of disaster risk reduction department of Yobe State Emergency Management Agency (SEMA Yobe), and those of four other

disaster management organisations based in the state namely, the Nigerian Security and Civil Defence Corps, Yobe State Command, Nigerian Metrological Agency, and Yobe State Fire Service. The interviews were analysed using Atlas.ti version 8 software.

3. Discussion

The preliminary findings of the study are concisely discussed in this section, which answer the two research questions mentioned at the end of Section 1.

Internal Factors: In this section, the key internal (predicting) factors that militate against the “effective media engagement in the management of flood disasters in Yobe State” are briefly discussed.

News characteristics:- News is one of the major outputs of the media. It is an essential content that attract people to news media: newspapers, magazines, television, radio, and other form of media of mass communication. The informants gave insight into this present state by citing the nature of news which thrives on suddenness, destruction, drama, shock among others as the push factor that make coverage of disaster during its occurrence a staple food for media. “These elements are lacking at pre-disaster stage”, according to Participant A5. Participant C1 also complains that “the media often puts temporary, narrow interest under the guise of ‘news characteristics’ above its contribution to sustainable development which disaster risk reduction presents.” The participants further complain that disaster managers do not supply disaster risk reduction materials to the media; people are overtly interested in tragic and current incidents; government fails to take determined steps to prevent flood and stop it from being a perennial problem and its reportage routine stories for the media.

However, participants stressed that Governor Mai Mala Buni’s Administration is successfully on top of the situation by empowering SEMA and revolutionising it with the appointment of Dr Mohammed Goje as its head.

Unprofessionalism and profit-centredness: Journalists and media practitioners as professionals have ethics and rules guiding their profession. Ethics guides best professional practices and enhances quality service delivery. However, participants identified “unprofessional attitudes and commercialisation” as one of the hindrances to media involvement in flood disaster risk reduction. But it is instructive to note that both disaster managers and media practitioners accused each other while identifying these hindrances.

Skilled workforce: Skilled workforce refers to the number of competent workers available for a task. The views of participants on the negative impact of workforce on media participation in flood disaster risk reduction shows that “the media organisations employ professionals” to gather, process and disseminate news and other editorial materials to mass audience through their media. However, “the dwindling economic situation, selfish interest, and private media owners’ desire to maximise” profit and other interests “have been affecting quality and quantity of journalists available” to cover events and present news professionally. But participants are of the opinion that the Mai Mala Buni Government can overcome this teething challenge.

Financing:- News is the primary commodity of news media (Rachel, Efrat, 2022; Simonov, Rao, 2022). News production and distribution are a process that costs a lot of money just like many other media activities (Obaje, Ebinuwale, 2022; Oberiri, 2016; Ryfe, 2021). Most of the participants identified financing as a critical challenge to media participation in flood disaster management, stressing that, “with the media-friendly Government of Governor Mai Mala Buni, the news media in Yobe, especially state government-owned ones will face lesser funding challenges to cover and report flood disaster risk reduction.” Participants also believed that since the creation of Yobe State 30 years ago, no government has ever prioritised disaster management as Governor Mai Mala Bunis’ Government. Participants cited “the transformation of Yobe SEMA by Dr Mohammed Goje as unprecedented” who has been “the cynosure of attention to all international NGOs, CSOs, and media” in the state. Some of the media expert participants identified that “it costs more to produce disaster risk reduction stories than cover response disaster stage stories.” While response stage stories are mostly visible and ready-made stories, disaster risk reduction stories involve investigation and follow ups. It costs money and other resources.

External Factors: In this sub-section, preliminary findings on external (moderating, or mitigating) factors that pose challenges to effective media engagement in the management of flood disaster in Yobe State are discussed concisely.

Information deficiency: Media thrives on the availability and quality of information at its disposal. Media content such as news, programmes and features are generated from verifiable sources. The hindrance posed by lack of information, according to the participants, is largely blamed on disaster managers especially the Federal Government's NEMA. According to the participants Yobe SEMA is doing its best with the support of Governor Mai Mala Buni but NEMA's aid is a bit far away from the ordinary people's reach. Nonetheless, the participants believed that 'complementary' role the North-East Development Commission (NEDC) plays in cushioning effects of disasters in Yobe State may cover the inadequacies of NEMA.

Mistrust: Trust is one of the ingredients of good relationship. Partnership requires honesty, trust, teamwork, mutual understanding, and other positive attitudes. Participants alleged "others of distrust, dishonesty, dubious character, corruption, conflict of interest" and operation among other constraints to effective relationship.

Inadequacies of government and people: Apart from disaster management agencies and media organisations, there are other stakeholders whose actions and inactions could promote or hinder disaster risk reduction campaign. Government, people in the disaster-prone and non-disaster-prone areas, experts, scholars, CSOs, NGOs, and others are crucial to flood disaster risk reduction. Participants identified "the failure of other stakeholders to act proactively, implement policies that will reduce flood, desist from attitudes that trigger flood, prioritise media relations during pre-flood periods," among others as a major impediment.

Community perception of the role of the media:- Supported by the 2015 report of Associated Programme for Flood Management (APFM) (APFM, 2015: 15-16), the findings indicate that when there is a natural disaster in a community, such as flooding, the community has certain expectations about the kind of information that should be provided by the media, especially during an emergency. People usually look for news that has the following characteristics.

- Constantly and promptly updated, especially during or immediately after a disaster.
- Clear and unambiguous – although they may convey inaccurate content, audiences often prefer unambiguous and even absolute language because it is easier to understand and sets some standards for dealing with unfamiliar and complex issues.
- Relevant to their needs and preferences – during an emergency, for example, people want to know if, when and where they should be evacuated, if their relatives and acquaintances are among the scattered people, when the flooding will end, etc.
- Accurate - for example, the names of the flooded streets and places, the exact number of victims and the exact date when they can return to their homes.
- Accurate and trustworthy – over the years, "the media has been heavily criticised for allegedly distorting information or favouring certain theses or parties in public debate."

Society expects the media to report facts and figures neutrally and leave the judgement to the recipients. When opinions are expressed, they should be attributed to their authors and reproduced verbatim (e.g., APFM, 2015; Asad et al., 2021).

In line with these requirements, community members usually select media on the basis of the quality of the information, the way it is presented and its immediate availability. These selection criteria put pressure on the media to gather as much news as quickly as possible, even though they are constrained by the need to sell their products in a highly competitive and crowded market. According to the principles of the political economy of the media and commercial rules, the only special obligation of journalists is to satisfy media consumers as effectively as possible, resulting in broader social benefits, guided by the "hidden hand" of the media market (e.g., APFM, 2015).

Journalists and other media professionals, on the other hand, often see themselves in a social role, a moral obligation to "serve the public good", as public informants, minority advocates, critical watchdogs or open forums for the expression and exchange of opinions. This self-perception challenges the notion that the relationships between the media and their audiences are self-regulating because the demands of society are the ultimate measure of performance. On the contrary, for communicators this can pose a potential threat to their autonomy and professional standards, especially when audience satisfaction may conflict with their integrity and code of conduct (e.g., APFM, 2015; McQuail, Windahl, 2015). These considerations should lead flood managers not to underestimate the work and capabilities of the media and to assume that they are always motivated by materialistic economic goals. Irritation and impatience with journalistic issues should give way to a willingness to cooperate in the interest of the community as a whole (e.g., APFM, 2015).

3. Results

Analysis of the informants' responses revealed two major themes: internal factors and external factors. Internal factors are largely predicting factor and they are "news characteristics" (Participants A3, B1, C6), "funding" (Participants A5, C1), "unprofessionalism" (Participants A1,3,6, B4,6, C1,6), and "profit orientation, skilled labour and funding" (Participants A6, B1,4,6, C2-4) all impact the active participation of the media in flood risk reduction. External factors, on the other hand, are largely moderating barriers imposed by entities other than the media. These are "the lack of information" (Participants B4,6, C4,6), "mistrust" (Participants A1-6, B6, C7), "inadequacies on the part of government and citizens" (Participants A3, B3-5, C6,7), and "community perception of media's role in flood disaster management" (Participants B4-6, C1, 6-7).

Based on the data analysis, a model was created that includes all factors, as shown in [Figure 1](#).

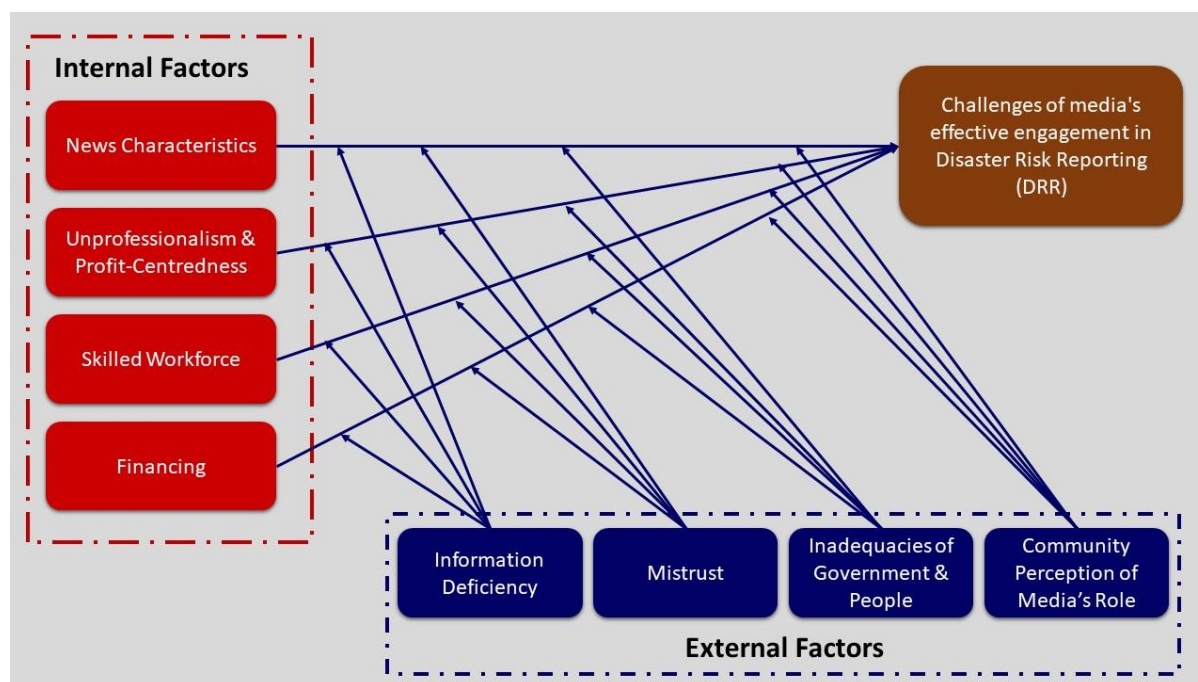


Fig. 1. Factors hindering media participation in effective reporting of disaster risk in the pre-disaster phase

5. Conclusion

This study examined pressing problems affecting media participation in disaster risk reduction in Yobe State. Findings show that the duo interact less before disaster occurrence while relationship during and after disaster occurrence is largely fraught with distrust, tension, fighting, blaming and another crisis. There is inadequate coordination, collaboration and communication among journalists and disaster managers before disaster occurrence. Some of the problems identified are within media organisation while some lie with disaster management organisations and other stakeholders. By creating disaster risk awareness through disseminating information on the likely disaster and educate people on how to be adequately prepared and avoid activities that would make them vulnerable, media will be playing its role. It should de-emphasis reporting numbers of people that died, property destroyed, human misery, tragedies and other attendant challenges brought by flood. It is time for media and other stakeholders to be conscious of how many lives and property could be saved through effective reportage and involvement in disaster risk reduction. Journalists need to see themselves as critical stakeholder in disaster risk reduction and collaborate with other stakeholders actively.

One of the critical external factors is the community's perception of the role of media in the management of flood disasters. This factor can make or mar the whole management effort depending on how it is handled. The community's perception of the role of media must be taken into consideration when deploying journalists and other media practitioners to cover flood disasters, especially in rural and semi-urban communities. If, for instance, the media perceives any unfavourable attitude toward it by the community, strategic media community relation techniques

must be harnessed well before embarking especially by engaging community influencers such as traditional ad religious leaders, youth pressure groups' leadership, herders and farmers' unions, etc.

Furthermore, the media needs to be effectively cultivated by Yobe State Government and "other stakeholders as one of the critical publics of disaster management organisations in the state." Media too should see itself as a stakeholder not an ordinary participant. A functional relationship with the media before flood disasters occur would be of great benefit to stakeholders both at the state and national levels.

Limitations and Future Research Directions: This study is limited to a qualitative study methodology, key informant interview only, future research should adopt a mixed-method or quantitative approach. Another key limitation is a focus on media (or, partially, news media). Future research should investigate the engagement of specific categories or types of media (e.g., broadcast – radio, TV, the print – newspaper, magazine, new media – social media, etc.). Focusing on community-related flood disaster management only is also a key limitation. Future research should explore urban flooding as well. Focusing on pre-disaster phase only is another limitation and future research should explore examining both pre- and post-flood disaster management. Apart from the mass media, dialogue and community engagement are some of other forms of communication media (communication for development C4D) that are largely based on face-to-face negotiations and engagements. This study did not cover that aspect. Future research should explore the application of C4D in flood disaster management during both pre- and post-disaster phases with emphasis on the pre-occurrence stage.

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