

Journal of
Tropical
Forest Resources

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FORESTRY ACTIVITY ARTICLES IN SELECTED NIGERIA NEWSPAPERS

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ABSTRACT

Reportage of forestry activities in Nigeria newspapers had been given little attention over the years, despite the importance of forestry sector to national development. This study examined press coverage of forestry activities with the view to establishing the roles played by the press in the development and preservation of forest and forest products in Nigeria. Data were obtained from four (4) the national newspapers with wide coverage and high readership ratings. Through content analysis multi-stage sampling technique produced 63 articles from the newspapers. On yearly basis, year 2010 had the highest frequency of forestry article reportage activity articles. In all the newspapers, the newshole allotted to forestry articles are usually small and many of the articles were placed on non-prominent pages. Furthermore, forestry activity articles were reported more during the wet season having a total of 73.02%, while dry season had 26.98% of the reported forestry activity articles. Also, 46.03% of reported forestry activity articles had no accompanying pictures. There were no observable differences in the level of reportage of forestry activities in the selected Nigerian newspapers. Thus, it is recommended that the Nigerian Press Council should encourage their members to give more attention to the reportage of forestry activities, so as to increase the level of awareness about the importance of forestry and its contribution to National development.

INTRODUCTION

Forests are important to environmental, economical and social well being. They provide wood and non -wood products such as recreational opportunities, watershed protection and carbon sequestration, and they also provide habitats for fauna thereby playing a vital role in the conservation of biodiversity.

Forests are located mostly in the rural communities and they contribute substantially to improve the livelihood of rural people (Kio 2002). Forestry activities are predominantly in the rural area, and its sustainability is of utmost importance in rural economy.

Print media are important conveyors of information on agriculture and forestry and possess the potential to shape attitude towards forming perspective about issue. One of the primary functions of the newspaper is to objectively report news situation or events in all fields of human endeavour. Reportage of forestry activities in Nigeria newspapers has

been given little attention over the years, despite the importance of forestry sector in the national development.

Soola (2003), reported that crime, politics and violence makes new report catching and some media owners are in business to make profit, and crime, politics and violence enable newspapers to sell fast. Foods and Agricultural Organization, F.A.O 2007, noted that deforestation in Africa are taken place at an alarming rate of about 3.4 million hectares per year, making the continent the region with the second and the highest net annual loss of forest between 2000 and 2010. This is due to low level of awareness because rural people are not aware of contribution of forestry to environmental protection. Nigeria had 23 million hectares of forest, but today only 9.6 million hectares remains, that is less than 10% of the total land area in Nigeria.

There is need to create awareness about contribution of forestry activities to the livelihoods of both rural and urban dwellers so that forest resources can be sustainably managed. The print media are capable of legitimizing and popularizing forest management techniques among a wide spectrum of the potential users of such information.

METHODOLOGY

Time Frame of the Study

January 1, 2005 through December 31, 2010, was chosen as the time frame for the study. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO, 2007) it was stated that the rate of deforestation and degradation has been doubled between 2004-2009 and has reached an alarming rate of 3.5% per year translating to a loss of 350,000-400,000 hectares of forest per year and this has in part led to the present environmental predicament being observed.

Sampling Technique

A multistage sampling technique was used. The first stage involves the identification of newspapers in Nigeria. The Nigeria Press Council (2010), Media Reach (2005) reported that there are 173 newspapers in Nigeria, out of which about 57 daily newspapers and several weekly newspapers. Four newspapers namely, Nigeria Tribune, Punch, Vanguard and Guardian were purposively selected for the study from the daily categories of the Nigerian newspapers based on national coverage popularity rating readership rating and large extent of positions on national issues.

Selection of Newspaper Editions

Editions of newspapers that reported forestry and forestry related news were identified, and these were used for analysis.

The population of the study amounted to sixty-three (63) articles. Because of the small amount of reportage of forestry activity articles in all the selected Nigeria daily newspapers (Guardian, 15 articles, Nigerian Tribune 14 articles, Punch 17 and vanguard 17 articles all the forestry activity articles were coded (Inter Coder Reliability Coefficient=0.95). The unit of analysis for this study was the individual forestry and forestry related news in the selected Nigerian daily newspapers.

RESULTS

Table 1 Frequency distribution of reported forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian daily newspapers from 2005-2010

| Newspapers | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------|------------------|-----------------------|
| Guardian | 15 | 23.81 |
| Tribune | 14 | 22.22 |
| Punch | 17 | 26.98 |
| Vanguard | 17 | 26.98 |
| Total | 63 | 100 |

Results on Table 1 showed Punch and Vanguard had seventeen (17) forestry articles with 26.98% each while Tribune had fourteen (14) forestry articles with 22.22%. The four selected newspapers had sixty three (63) forestry news articles. The results indicate a low coverage of forestry news. Previous content studies relating to agriculture reported low coverage of agricultural news. A study conducted by Olowu (1990) assertion that Nigerian newspaper editors place more importance on (perceived) revenue generating content than agricultural subject matter in which forestry is a sub sector.

Reasons adduced for the poor performance of the print media in this regard include; financial and space constraints, illiteracy and language barrier, lack of participation, poor revenue generating potential, personal values and belief of the editor, advertisers and media owners (Nwachukwu, 2005). Despite the fact the researchers mentioned above had revealed that agricultural news were not reported like other news such as crime, sport, entertainment etc in the newspapers, it is difficult for the newspaper to give due attention to forestry activities which is a sub sector of agriculture.

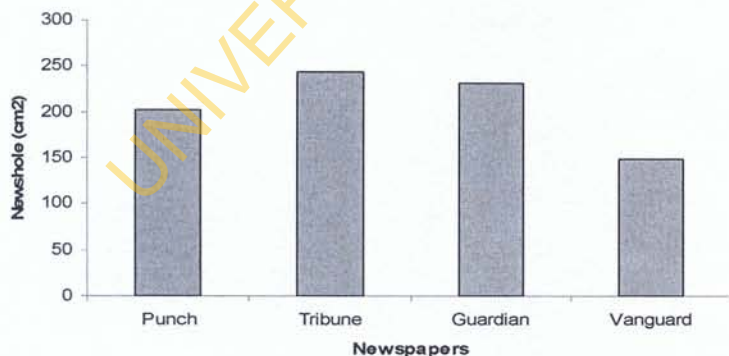


Figure 1: Newshole allotted in cm² different reported forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian daily newspapers.

The results show that Nigerian Tribune newspaper allotted the highest newshole of (250cm²) 29.5% to the reported forestry articles while Vanguard allotted the least newshole of 18% (150cm²), and this is presented in figure 1. A research carried out by Olowu (1990) showed that 2% of the total newshole was devoted to agricultural subject matter. Based on this study, it appears that Nigerian newspaper editors place more importance on the revenue generating content than agricultural subject matter.

Also, the frequency of distribution of newshole allotted to forestry activities was determined on a yearly basis, and this is presented in figure 2. Between year 2005 to 2010, it was observed that the newspapers allotted highest newshole of 254.5 cm² (21.79%) in the year 2009, while the newspaper allotted lowest amount of newshole of 148.5cm² (11.86%) allotted to forestry activity articles in year 2006.

The reason why forestry articles had highest amount of newshole in the year 2009 in the selected Nigerian newspapers could be related to the fact that all newspapers investigated in the year 2009 reported almost the same amount of forestry activity news. Some pressing forestry issues like forestry management, desertification problem, and tree planting campaign were reported.

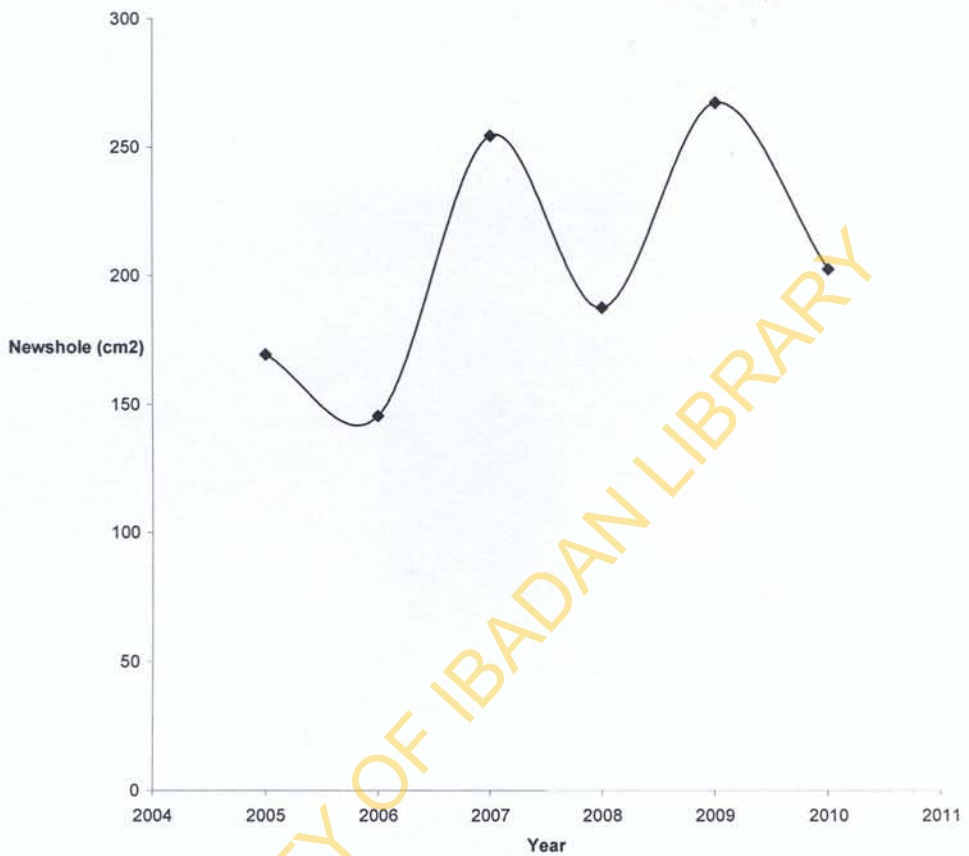


Figure 2: Newshole allotted to forestry articles on yearly basis for all newspapers

TABLE 2: Placement of forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian daily newspapers

| Newspapers | Priority Other pages | Percentages (%) |
|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| Vanguard | 17 | 26.98 |
| Punch | 16 | 25.4 |
| Nigerian Tribune | 15 | 23.81 |
| Guardian | 15 | 23.81 |
| Total | 63 | 100 |

Table 2, shows that the selected Nigerian daily newspapers placed all reported forestry activity articles in their other pages which are not prominent. Makanjuola (2002) reports that issues placed in the front pages are more important to the editors. For the period of

six years in which forestry activity articles were reported it was noted that none of forestry activity articles was placed in the front page while issues placed in the front page are vital to the print media.

This finding is consistent with that of Fawole and Olowu (1997) which reported that agricultural news are mostly placed on non-prominent pages. This result shows that the selected Nigerian newspapers are not important to placement of forestry activity articles.

Table 3: Season of reportage of forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian daily newspapers

| Newspapers | Season of Reportage | |
|-----------------|---------------------|-------------|
| | Wet | Dry |
| Punch | 15 (32.61%) | 2(11.76%) |
| Tribune | 8 (17.39%) | 6(35.29%) |
| Guardian | 12 (26.09%) | 3(17.65%) |
| Vanguard | 11(23.91%) | 6(35.29%) |
| Total | 46(73.01%) | 17 (26.99%) |

The results presented in Table 3, indicated that Punch newspaper reported 15(32.61%) of forestry articles in the wet season, and Nigerian Tribune which reported the lowest forestry articles of 8(17.39%) during the wet season The reportage of forestry activity articles were highest in the wet season 73.01% as against 26.99% which were reported in the dry season.

In addition, Figure 4, shows that forestry articles were given highest reportage in the wet season and in the year 2010 this was due to the fact that most forestry news were based on tackling environmental challenges , planting of trees and depletion of forest reserve.

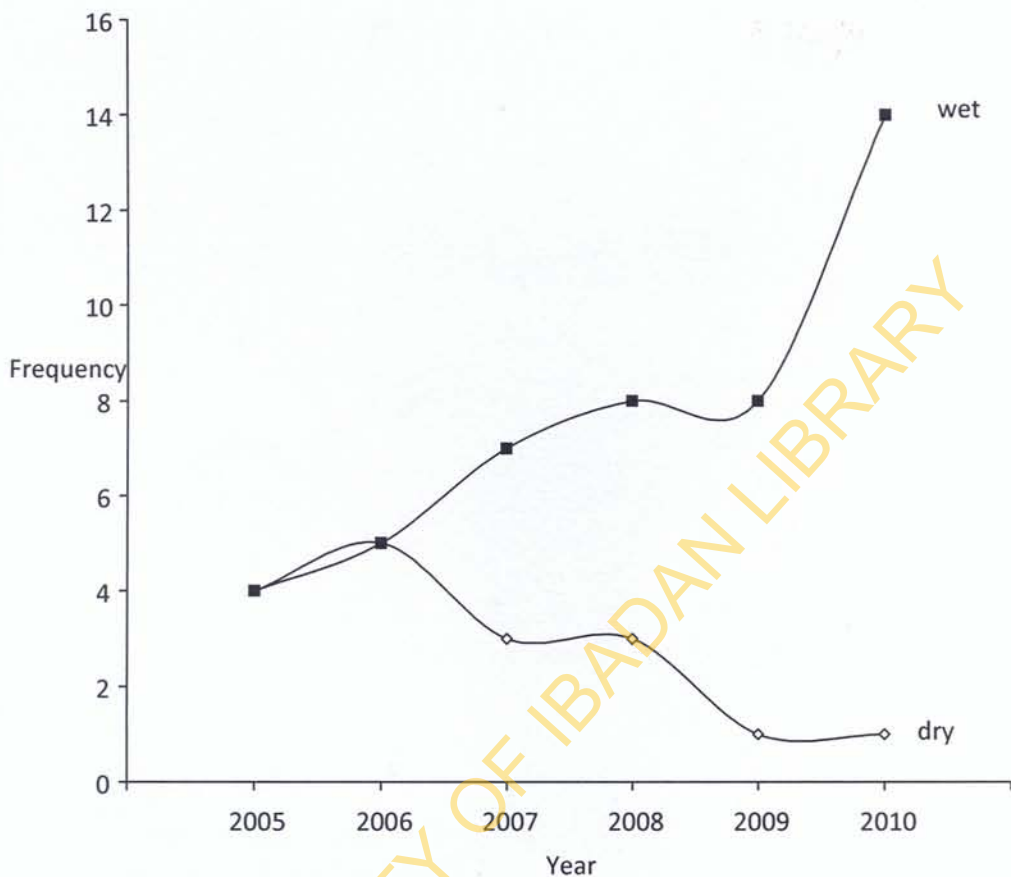


Figure 4: Frequency distribution of reported forestry activities across season

Table 4: Pictures depicting forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian newspapers

| Newspapers | Forestry articles | Relevant Pictures | Pictures not relevant | No Pictures |
|--------------|-------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| Vanguard | 17 | 3 | 3 | 11 |
| Punch | 17 | 6 | 2 | 9 |
| Guardian | 15 | 7 | 2 | 6 |
| Tribune | 14 | 9 | 2 | 3 |
| Total | 63 | 25 (39.7%) | 9 (14.3%) | 29 (46.03%) |

Table 4 shows that out of the 63 forestry activity articles it was noted that a total of 29 (46.03%) forestry activity articles had no pictures that captioned reported activity, a total

of 9 (14.3%) forestry articles had no accompany pictures that captioned reported forestry activity articles but not relevant. It can be seen from this study that newspapers editors had not been given attention to pictures that captioned the reported forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian newspapers, and pictures serve the purpose of holding reader's attention after glancing through the content of the story and preventing them turning immediately to other news.

Result of Hypothesis Testing

The result shows that there is no significant difference in the reportage of forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian newspapers. This implies that selected Nigerian Newspapers reported same number of forestry activity articles within the period under the study, and the newspapers got information from the same source with respect to forestry activity articles.

Table 3: Analysis of difference in the reportage of forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian newspapers

| sv | df | ss | ms | f | p-level | decision |
|-----------|----|-------|--------|--------|---------|-----------------|
| Newspaper | 3 | 1.12 | 0.3750 | 0.3719 | 0.7745 | Not significant |
| Year | 5 | 7.370 | 1.4750 | 1.4628 | 0.2595 | |
| Error | 15 | 15.13 | 1.0083 | | | |
| Total | | 23.62 | | | | |

CONCLUSION

Based on the frequency of reportage of forestry activity articles in the selected Nigerian daily newspapers, two (2) newspapers, Punch and Vanguard reported more forestry activity in their newspapers. More columns were assigned to the reportage of forestry activity articles by Punch and Vanguard respectively.

Nigerian Tribune allotted more newshole to the reportage of forestry activity articles and the study showed that on yearly basis, especially in 2009, more newsholes were allotted to forestry activity articles.

The study revealed that the reportage of forestry activity articles was more prominent during the raining season which invariably gives the impression that forestry activities largely take place more during the raining season. This study has also revealed that the wrong usage of pictures in the reported forestry activity articles has further created poor attention on would be readers and invariably low awareness status.

The study further revealed that the selected Nigerian Newspapers did not place forestry activity articles in the prominent pages.

The selected Nigerian newspapers studied revealed that forestry activity articles were given low reportage and even when reported, they were not properly placed. This clearly

has a direct effect on attention paid by the public on the activity reported. Little attention was placed on the role of forestry in ameliorating climatic change which today has become a global issue that has often been clearly misconceived. The uncontrolled logging activities of timber poachers and wanton unrestricted hunting of wildlife has resulted into conversion of our forests into deserts has not caught the attention of the print media which would have generated public discourse leading to promulgation of laws to combat this menace.

The study has thrown more light to the fact that the print media needs to pay a more careful attention to the frequency of reportage, newshole, and placement of reported forestry activity articles by Nigerian editors, reporters, forestry research institutes, law-makers and all stakeholders.

There is the need for training and re-training of Journalists on Agricultural and related discipline in the coverage of news or articles in the forestry sub-sector. The role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO's) in assisting journalists in the reportage of forestry activity articles cannot be over-emphasized as they serve as a social media in propagating news of their activities to the print media.

Creation of forestry extension unit, (departments) in Ministries or Departments of forestry is hereby recommended. They serve as an essential link between the farmers, Government and the print media industries.

Sponsorship of more space/newshole by NGO's, Ministries of Forestry, Forestry Research Institutes and all stakeholders in the forestry sectors in the print media on a regular basis.

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