

## **The Coverage of Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta by Nigerian Newspapers**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The Niger Delta with all its economic importance faces constant environmental degradation. A cursory observation suggests that adequate attention has not been paid to the region's environment, in terms of improving it. This lack of attention could be attributable to lack of awareness of the environmental degradation in the region among Nigerians. As one of the media of mass communication in the country, newspapers have the ability of informing the general public of the devastating environmental situation in the region. As a result, the main objective of the study was to find out the extent to which newspapers in the country have contributed to public awareness of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. Five newspapers were studied, three of which were privately-owned dailies while the others were dailies owned by the Niger Delta States. The research techniques used in the study were content analysis and survey. Simple percentages were used. The study revealed that the five newspapers collectively published 0.56 item on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, representing one such item in two days. This is incapable of creating awareness on environmental degradation in the region among Nigerians. It also revealed that newspapers in the country lack the ability of investigating on their own, cases of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. Among others, the study recommended that journalists working with newspapers in the country should be given special training in Environmental Science while reporters should embark on investigating environmental situation in the region.

### **INTRODUCTION**

The Niger Delta is a geopolitical zone in Nigeria with a population of over 31 million. Sayer et al (1992:231-232) state that the Niger Delta is a geographical location which is associated with the coastal region of the Atlantic Ocean, the wetland and the swamp forests. It is because of its location that the region is more vulnerable to environmental degradation. What is known as the Niger Delta today, was known as Oil Mineral Producing States. The commission that was constituted by the Babangida administration to oversee "the development" of these states was known as **Oil Mineral Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC)**. The present Niger Delta reflects a mere change in nomenclature and some re-organization.

The present Niger Delta comprises Abia, Akwa Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo, Imo, Ondo and Rivers States, with 185 local government areas and a combined population of over 31 million. It has about 40 ethnic groups who speak about 250 dialects and is spread across 5000 communities (NDDC, 2003:18).

## **THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE NIGER DELTA TO THE NIGERIAN NATION**

The Niger Delta is uniquely positioned by nature and blessed with a good number of natural resources which have contributed to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria. The economic resources of the Niger Delta include fishing, farming, lumbering and oil and gas. The waters and the tropical rain forests of the region provide the country with fish and wood for domestic consumption. The Niger Delta accounts for more than 90 percent earnings from oil and gas and about 60 percent of federally distributed revenue. It also accounts for oil reserves of about 30 billion barrels and gas reserves of about 160 trillion cubic feet (NDDC, 2003:18).

## **CURRENT ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES IN THE NIGER DELTA REGION**

Owing to its terrain, the wetland is susceptible to being submerged. Where few roads are constructed, they hardly last long before falling into a deplorable state and the forests in the region are threatened by excessive lumbering.

The discovery of oil in the Niger Delta region seems to add to the environmental problems of the region. Cases of oil spill are often reported in the region which worsen its environmental conditions. Between 1999 and 2004, 2,200 oil spill sites were discovered in the Niger Delta (*National Environment* 2004:1). Akintola (2003) cites a report from the Department of Petroleum Resources which agrees that 95% of such spills are not recovered. The meaning of this is that the spills affect marine life, while fishing and farming activities are also affected. This leads to adverse economic fortunes for the people of the region.

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The poignant environmental degradation in the Niger Delta does not seem to have received public attention. Where there seems to be awareness, a thorough analysis leaves one in doubt as to whether there is sincerity or not. Public awareness which this study sees as the first step towards improving the environmental situation in the Niger Delta is paramount, hence the research to find out newspapers' contribution towards such public consciousness. The major concern of this study is the extent to which newspaper reportage in the country has contributed to public awareness on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. The problem may thus be stated as follows: How have Nigerian Newspapers covered environmental degradation issues in the Niger Delta?

## **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The study attempts to answer the following research questions:

- (i) To what extent have newspapers in the country relayed information on the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?
- (ii) To what extent has newspaper coverage in the country aimed at drawing government's attention to the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?
- (iii) What suggestions do newspapers offer for the prevention of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?

- (iv) What barriers militate against newspaper coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Theories used in the study are: Agenda Setting theory, Social Responsibility theory and Development Media theory.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF THE NIGER DELTA REGION**

Wetson (2004:313) avers that the underlying, if not central, purpose of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is to provide decision makers and the public, with a systematic, comprehensive and objective assessment of the environmental consequences of an action. He notes that the assessment is to show significant adverse environmental effects and to allay public fears over the consequences of such effects, based on known methods of handling the effects.

Apart from these key issues, Ansu-Kyeremeh, (1998:2) wonders what prevents such companies from employing the services of the traditional newsman (the town crier) who would use the people's language and his expertise to inform them of the impact assessment? In a rather forceful manner, Wilson (1990:283) argues that such communication has the power to mobilize the people at the grassroots level towards community development and national consciousness. It is however, very likely that many people (the educated inclusive), in the region, do not know what "Environmental Impact Assessment is all about.

#### **ROLE OF THE NEWSPAPER IN A MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY**

As a medium of mass communication, the newspaper has a great role to play in any given society. One of such roles is creating public awareness on issues of public interest. This role of the newspaper as well as other media of mass communication agrees with the Agenda Setting Theory, which forms the basis for this study.

McQuail (1977:71) sees one of the roles of the media in their ability, in some respects to inhibit as well as promote change. Newspapers being one of the mass media can be used in a multi-ethnic society to either promote or inhibit a change. While agreeing with Hierbert et al, Mboho (2003:6) observes that one of the functions of mass media is to serve as instruments for public persuasion.

Newspapers are a veritable medium of helping to improve the environmental status needed. Perhaps this is why Tunde Akingbade, an environmentalist, faults both the Nigerian government and the media for not evolving measures to inform people of environmental hazard. He avers that if Nigeria is to avoid a little proportion of what looks like *tsunami* that took place in South-East Asia on December 26, 2004,

the media in the country should be able to keep the citizens environmentally alert (AM Express January 4, 2005).

However, whatever role the media play, is a reflection of the entire society as Murdock and Golding (1977: 15) have noted that mass media (including the newspapers) play a key role in class inequalities which are very conspicuous in a multi-ethnic society as Nigeria. This is even worsened by the fact that the right of access to information cannot be totally unqualified ( cf Udoakah (1993:90).

## **METHODOLOGY**

Content analysis and survey were used. As instrument for the survey, interview was used.

## **THE POPULATION OF THE STUDY**

The newspapers and journalists in Nigeria formed the population of the study.

## **SAMPLE**

Since there are no federal government owned newspapers in the country, and because the objectives of the study mainly concerned newspapers' contribution to the Nigerian public awareness of the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, only privately-owned newspapers that circulated across the country were purposively sampled for the study. Also, newspapers owned by states, especially Niger Delta States, were represented. Following these considerations, out of about 45 newspapers privately-owned in Nigeria, three, namely: *The Punch*, *The Guardian*, *Vanguard* were sampled. Out of about 22 newspapers owned by states, among which about seven are owned by Niger Delta states, *The Tide* and *The Observer* were sampled for the study. The five newspapers were of general publications. Issues of the newspapers published between June 1, 2000 and May 31, 2001 and those published between June 1, 2004 and May 31, 2005 were sampled for the study. A total of 676 issues of the five newspapers were actually studied

On the interview, the purposive sampling technique was still used as selected editors, reporters and feature writers who were interviewed based on their kind of job, were expected to provide answers to the questions asked.

The timeframe was chosen to reflect the two tenures of the Obasanjo democratic government in the country upon which the study was based. It was very much impracticable to study all the issues of the newspapers published since the six years of the administration in the country. The periods specified in the study were carefully chosen because they were periods during which one could presume that newspapers' attention was not drawn principally towards politics.

The first tenure of the Obasanjo administration began on May 29, 1999 and terminated on May 28, 2003. The second tenure began on May 29, 2003 and ended on May 28, 2007. It was therefore, presumed that the year allowance after May 29, 1999 was used to clear all political hangovers. Therefore, as from June 1, 2000, newspapers' attention would be less of predominantly political issues. The second

tenure which began on May 29, 2003 started with political campaigns, at least, a year before and more of political activities in the election year (2003). One-year allowance was given for all political hangovers. Therefore, the period between June 1, 2004 and May 31, 2005 was considered appropriate for the study, as less political activities should give newspapers adequate coverage of essential issues such as environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

Each of the periods was expected to produce 365 issues of each of the newspapers. That is to say that each newspaper was expected to have a total of 730 issues (weekend or Sunday editions inclusive), yielding a grand total of 3650 issues of the five newspapers.

Wimmer and Dominick (2000:92) argue that determining adequate sample size is one of the most controversial aspects of sampling. They state that sample size required for a study depends on the following factors: project type, project purpose, project complexity, amount of error tolerated, time constraints, financial constraints and previous research in the area. However, Stacks and Hocking (1992: 183) while agreeing with Meyer, argue that in every 3000 population size, a sample size of 341 (11.36%) at 95 percent confidence level should be selected. Thus a sample size of 20% selected for this study was representative enough and was not affected by the casualty figure of 54 (7.4%). The outcome of this was that 73 issues of each of the newspapers were analyzed in each of the chosen periods. In all, each newspaper produced 146 issues for analysis and a total of 730 issues of the five newspapers within the two timeframes.

To conduct appropriate content analysis, the researcher provided a constructed month, which helped in a systematic picking of the dates on which the issues of the newspapers were analyzed. The constructed month facilitated the sampling of exact 73 issues (20%) of each of the five newspapers for analysis, per timeframe.

#### **UNITS OF ANALYSIS**

The units of analysis of this study comprised editorial, news stories, feature articles, letters to the editors, advertisements.

#### **CONTENT CATEGORIES**

The following were studied: Pollution, Health hazard, Erosion, Flood, Deforestation, Landslide and Acid rains.

**POLLUTION:** This is the presence of contaminants in the environment at a level of nuisance such that the environment cannot be used for intended purpose. For the purpose of this study, data on pollution such as: air, water, noise, gas flaring, oil spills and inappropriate dumpsites/waste disposal, were analyzed.

**HEALTH HAZARD:** The tropical nature of the Niger Delta makes the region vulnerable to epidemics. It is a conducive habitation to mosquitoes which

infect people with malaria, as well as tsetse flies which cause sleeping sickness. The occurrence of these and other environmental diseases were studied.

**EROSION:** Erosion takes place when the land surface is washed away either by rains or wind storms. Inhabited areas and farmlands are often washed away by erosion. Usually, gully erosion affects crops, roads and buildings in the Niger Delta. The region is erosion-prone.

**FLOODING:** The region is the worst hit by floods because it lies low and there are two major causes of flooding in the region. One, the region has the highest amount of rainfall in the country. Besides, rivers in the region overflow their banks and cause flooding which is often injurious to lives, buildings, roads and plants.

**DEFORESTATION:** Naturally, the Niger Delta falls within the rain forest belt. But the forests have started to diminish because of lumbering, opening of new towns, laying of pipelines oil exploration, power lines and bush burning. This seriously affects wildlife habitation.

**LANDSLIDES:** Landslides take place when portions of land, mountain or rock start to cave in. Landslide usually affects farmland, plants, building, roads and even lives. Sometimes, landslides can be the result of soil texture and occasionally as a result of erosion.

**ACID RAINS:** Acid rain is the product of hydrogen chloride and sulphur dioxide which produces oxide of nitrogen in atmosphere. Acid rain can fall in solid or liquid form. Excesses gas flaring can cause acid rain. Acid rain causes Westerbin (a German word meaning destruction of vegetation or dead trees). It can also cause destruction to the roof of a house.

**TABLE: I CONTENT TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION COVERED BY THE FIVE NEWSPAPERS BETWEEN 2000 AND 2001**

NEWSPAPER	Causative	%	Effect	%	Preventive	%	Management	%	Total	%
THE OBSERVER	19	26.39	16	32.65	8	38.09	20	23.53	63	27.75
THE TIDE	21	29.17	11	22.45	2	9.52	38	44.71	72	31.72
THE PUNCH	4	5.55	0	0	4	19.05	5	5.88	13	5.73
THE GUARDIAN	8	11.11	6	12.25	4	19.05	8	9.41	26	11.45
VANGUARD	20	27.78	16	32.65	3	14.29	14	16.47	53	23.35
TOTAL	72	100	49	100	21	100	85	100	227	100

The table shows that out of 227 items on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta published by the five newspapers in the first slot, 72 (31.72%) were on the causes of environmental degradation. There were 49 (21.86%) items on effects of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. Items on prevention of environmental degradation were 21 (9.25%), Items on management of environmental degradation were 85 (37.44%).

NEWSPAPER	Causative	%	Effect	%	Preventive	%	Management	%	Total	%
THE OBSERVER	20	51.28	8	26.67	3	27.27	31	42.47	62	40.52
THE TIDE	12	30.77	10	33.33	2	18.18	32	43.84	56	36.6
THE PUNCH	2	5.13	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	1.31
THE GUARDIAN	3	7.69	1	3.33	4	36.37	9	12.33	17	11.11
VANGUARD	2	5.13	11	36.67	2	18.18	1	1.36	16	10.46
TOTAL	39	100	30	100	11	100	73	100	153	100

**TABLE II: CONTENT TYPES OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION COVERED BY THE FIVE NEWSPAPERS BETWEEN 2004 AND 2005.**

Table II shows that out of 153 items on environmental degradation published by the five newspapers in the second slot, 39 (25.49%) were on the causes. Within the same period the five newspapers published a total of 30 (19.61%) items on effects of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. Items on prevention of environmental degradation published by the five newspapers were 11 (7.19%). Items on management of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta published by the five newspapers were 73 (47.71%).

Both slots show the following percentages as they relate to each content type: *The Observer* – 35.14%; *The Tide* – 29.72%; *The Punch* – 5.4%; *The Guardian* – 9.91%; *Vanguard* – 19.82% (CAUSATIVE). *The Observer* – 30.38%; *The Tide* – 26.58%; *The Punch* – 0%; *The Guardian* 8.86%; *Vanguard* – 34.18% (EFFECT). *The Observer* – 34.38%; *The Tide* – 12.38%; *The Punch* – 12.5%; *The Guardian* – 25%; *Vanguard* – 15% (PREVENTIVE). *The Observer* – 32.28%; *The Tide* – 44.31%; *The Punch* – 3.17%; *The Guardian* – 10.76%; *Vanguard* – 9.49% (MANAGEMENT).



**TABLE: III SUMMARY OF THE UNITS OF ANALYSIS**

	Editorials	%	News Stories	%	Letters to the Editor	%	Feature Articles	%	Adv.	%	Total
The Observer	6	30	69	26.44	0	0	50	54.35	0	0	125
The Tide	11	55	75	28.71	1	100	32	34.78	1	16.67	120
The Punch	1	5	12	4.6	0	0	2	2.17	0	0	15
The Guardian	1	5	35	13.41	0	0	5	5.44	2	33.33	43
Vanguard	1	5	70	26.81	0	0	3	3.26	3	50	77
Totals	20	100	261	100	1	100	92	100	6	100	380

The table above shows that of the 380 items on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta published by the five newspapers within the two slots, editorials were 20 (5.26%), news stories 261 (68.69%) letter to the editor 1 (0.26%), feature articles 92 (24.21%) and 6 (1.58%) advertisements. The common trend depicted by the table is that all the newspapers depended on news stories much more than any other units of analysis.

**TABLE: IV COMPERATIVE SUMMARY OF NEWSPAPER COVERAGE OF ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION IN THE NIGER DELTA**

	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2000 - 31 <sup>st</sup> May 2001	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2004 - 31 <sup>st</sup> May 2005
	No of Issues	No. of Issues
Niger Delta State Newspapers:		
The Observer	63	62
The Tide	72	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>135</b>	<b>110</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>67.5</b>	<b>55</b>
Privately Owned Newspapers:		
The Punch	13	2
The Guardian	26	17
Vanguard	53	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Mean</b>	<b>30.67</b>	<b>14.33</b>

N = 380

The table summarizes and compares the total and the mean of the coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta by the two sets of newspapers analyzed. The table shows that in the first slot, the two newspapers owned by Niger Delta States published a total of 135 items with a mean of 67.5. In the second slot, the two newspapers published a total of 110 of such items, with a mean of 55.

On the other hand, the privately owned dailies published 92 items on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta in the first slot, with a mean of 30.67. In the second slot, the privately owned dailies published 43 items on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, with a mean of 14.33.

### INFORMATION SOURCES

Five categories of information sources were identified. These were community, government, corporate body, individual and independent investigation by the newspaper. Out of 380 sources for the two slots, 51 (13.42%) came from communities, 138 (36.32%) came from governments, 70 (18.42%) came from corporate bodies, 68 (17.89%) came from individual citizens while 53 (13.95%) came from investigations carried out by the newspapers.

### INTERVIEW

The 21 journalists comprised editors, feature writers and reporters. They were mainly journalists with the Niger Delta State owned newspapers, State correspondents of some national newspapers as well as some who reside in Lagos where most newspapers had their headquarters.

Of the 21 journalists, interviewed, 20 (95%) reported that their newspapers covered environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. However, a feature editor with the *Pioneer Newspaper* stated that the newspaper did not deliberately cover environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

On how often the newspapers cover environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, 4 (19.04%) either said regularly or often, 2 (9.52%) said daily, 3 (14.28%) said very often, 3 (14.28%) said as often as environmental degradation events occurred, 2 (9.52%) said monthly, 1 (4.76%) said weekly, 1 (4.76%) said four days in a week, 1 (4.76%) said three times in a week, 2 (9.52%) said not often, while 3 (14.29%) did not know what to state.

On why it is necessary that newspapers in the country should give coverage to the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, 12 (57.14%) said that it was to create awareness even beyond the country. The other 9 (42.86%) saw a remedial role for media in the country in regard to the Niger Delta environment.

On the intention of newspapers' coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, 15 (71.43%) journalists agreed that through highlighting the plight of the Niger Delta people as a result of environmental degradation, awareness could thus be created and government and international community's attention attracted. Four subjects (19.05%) said that the intention was to sustain the Niger Delta environment. Out of the 21 journalists, 1 (4.76%) said that the intention of his newspaper was to ensure international standards in environmental sustainability. However, 1 (4.76%) said that his newspaper did not have any deliberate intention, while 1 (4.76%) did not say anything in response to that question.

On whether or not the newspapers offered preventive measures to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, 18 (85.71%) agreed that their newspapers suggested preventive measures to environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, 3 (14.29%) said their newspapers did not suggest preventive measures, while 9 (42.86%) were able to state the measures offered by their newspapers. These measures ranged from writing on the importance of Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA), the need to prevent pollution, identifying environmental problems and proffering solutions, deliberate writings that aim at checking deforestation, checking erosion menace and reinforcing embankment of the Niger Delta sea shores, to deliberate writings that aim at making oil firms change rusty pipes so as to prevent oil spills. Five subjects (23.81%) rather stated how their newspapers offered the preventive measures. The means of doing this included editorials and feature articles, news stories and letters to the editors. However, 7 (33.33%) offered no opinion.

Of the 21 journalists polled, 18 (85.71%) stated that they were guided by editorial policy in their coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, while 3 (14.29%) said that their newspapers were not guided by editorial policy in their coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

On how often the journalists visited environmental degradation sites in the Niger Delta, 9 (42.86%) said that they did so whenever the need arose, 7 (33.33%) said they did so regularly. The "regularly" was not defined. Two (9.52%) said occasionally, 1 (4.76%) said when there were major crises, 1 (4.76%) said on a

daily basis, 1 (4.76%) said "we have the highest number of correspondents in the zone (much more) than any other" while 1 (4.76%) said "I have never, I don't know about others".

On the sources of their coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, out of the 21 journalists, 8 (38.1%) attributed their sources to communities, corporate bodies and governments, 3 (14.28%) said that their sources were the affected communities only, 2 (9.52%) attributed their sources to the communities and corporate bodies, 2 (9.52%) to corporate bodies only, 2 (9.52%) attributed their sources to individuals and research carried out by the newspapers while 5 (23.81%) offered no opinion.

## DISCUSSION

### RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

*To what extent have newspapers in the country relayed information on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?*

Two of the perceived traditional functions of newspapers are dissemination and education. The environmental degradation situation in the Niger Delta requires significant information dissemination and the education of many Nigerians on the danger faced by the region. This therefore would help to create awareness among Nigerians and the need for the environmental degradation to be addressed.

Unfortunately, from the data presented in this study, newspapers in the country have not done much significant awareness-creating work to bring to the fore the environmental dangers faced by the region. In a situation where no newspaper in the country publishes up to one item on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta per day, on the average, the awareness-creating function of the newspapers on environmental degradation is grossly lacking. For example, if *The Observer*, a newspaper owned by a Niger Delta state is the one that publishes the highest number of issues on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, yet such publication is one in every five or six days, then the basis for creating awareness is lacking.

At the other extreme is *The Punch*, which is one of the most widely read newspapers in the country, publishing an average of one item on environmental degradation in every fifty days. This glaringly shows that if the newspapers' functions of educating and informing are real, Nigerian newspapers have failed in according the Niger Delta environmental degradation the attention it deserves from such functions. On the whole, the five newspapers published a daily average of 0.56 items on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. This translates into one such item every two days.

Udoakah (1992:101-103) sees one of the fundamental reasons for the mass media as the desire for political power. He also sees it as a myth the traditional view of the functions of the newspapers: to inform, educate and entertain the public without deriving some benefit in return.

It then means that perhaps carrying out information dissemination and education of the public on the environmental degradation may not be in the interest of the newspapers even though the public needs such information and education.

Mboho (2003:1) sees management of information for community development as posing two social frames of reference – information supply and what happens in the lives of members of the community. This goes a long way to suggest that if Nigerian newspapers truly acknowledged the extent of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta, vital information on this, which the Nigerian public needs, would have been supplied. As far as environmental degradation in the Niger Delta is concerned, the Agenda-setting role of the newspapers is lacking.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION TWO**

*To what extent has newspaper coverage in the country aimed at drawing government's attention to the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?*

In the first place, the newspapers in the country are lacking in their ability to create public awareness on the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. The percentage of the few publications on environmental degradation in the region can hardly attract the attention of the government. Another is that the data above show that newspapers in the country depend chiefly on the government as their source of information on the Niger Delta (36.32%). This is followed by corporate bodies (18.42%). Coupled with government's propaganda, it may not be very easy for government's attention to be attracted to the environmental degradation in the region by the newspapers as 54.74% of their sources comes from both government and corporate bodies.

Another issue to look at is that only 20.79% of publications on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta are concerned with effects. It is the effects that would normally aim at drawing government's attention to the environmental degradation in the region. The reality, however, is that management of environmental degradation which predominantly resides with the government, takes the chunk of the coverage. This is as high as 41.58%. This agrees with Udoakah and Batta's (2004) finding, as well as Batta's (2004) finding that Nigerian newspapers and newsmagazines respectively, give more coverage to environmental management than any other kind of environmental coverage.

It is true, as the journalists interviewed have stated, that the Niger Delta has a difficult terrain, which hinders them from visiting sites of environmental degradation. This, of course, is coupled with administrative hiccups which, if removed, could lead to a more serious investigative coverage of the environmental degradation in the region. This is the whole essence of the social responsibility of the media and the development media theory. Ashong (1996:133) avers that newspapers in the country are capable of drawing the attention of the government to issues like environmental degradation in the Niger Delta if they are more committed to creating awareness.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION THREE**

*What suggestions do newspapers offer for the prevention of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?*

From the interview with the 21 journalists, 42.86% were able to suggest the various preventive measures "they supposed" their newspapers could proffer for the prevention of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. However, their rich suggestions did not reflect the low emphasis (8.42%) obtained from the content analysis. In a practical sense, suggestions offered by the newspapers through their editorials, news stories and feature articles were insignificant.

Here, the newspapers do not really have to be entirely indicted. Environmental matters need expert analyses. The newspapers are only the media through which these analyses can be simplified for public consumption. Therefore, it requires the joint function of the environmentalists who would seek media assistance in getting the suggestions across to the public. This agrees with Dunu's (2005:198) view that "environmental management should be a collective effort" of the government, environmentalists, the media and the general public.

So much has been said about the wealth in the Niger Delta but so little has been said about what to do to prevent the attendant adverse effects of the wealth. If the government, NGOs and multinationals operating in the region were so committed that environmental experts were commissioned to study the environmental conditions in the region, proffer solutions to them and make them public, one feels that newspapers, especially those owned by the Niger Delta states would do more than they have done to offer measures for the prevention of environmental degradation in the region, a form of social responsibility and development media theory.

### **RESEARCH QUESTION FOUR**

*What barriers militate against newspaper coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta?*

The 21 journalists interviewed expressed the various issues that served as barriers militating against newspaper coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. These barriers are grouped as follows:-

- (1) Lack of editorial policy on the coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta
- (2) Inaccessibility to information
- (3) Poor terrain and transport problem
- (4) Lack of media commitment and
- (5) Government interference.

These are all the issues that also affect Research questions one and four.

For instance, Ezeala (NTA Newline, 14th August, 2005) agrees with non-enforcement of environmental protection standards as he says that many laws on

the protection of environment have not been heeded and that some law enforcement officers in the country are ignorant of the laws.

More than these issues stated above the concern for the Niger Delta is a factor. Environmental degradation has led to diminished fauna and flora in the region (Udoessien, 2003:84). The newspapers may not really be interested in the development of the Niger Delta. Ethnic affiliation may be one of the reasons why newspapers fail to carry out adequate enlightenment on the environmental conditions of the Niger Delta. These could be additional barriers that militate against newspaper coverage of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

### **CONCLUSION**

- In conclusion, this study has shown that newspapers in the country have not contributed significantly to the creation of awareness on environmental degradation in the Niger Delta. This is worse among the privately-owned newspapers in the country. Newspapers owned by the Niger Delta states have done much better than the privately-owned newspapers. The newspapers owned by the Niger Delta states however have the problem of limited circulation. For this reason, their contribution to nationwide awareness creation becomes impeded.
- In spite of the stated deficiencies, if newspapers in the country rise up to their agenda-setting, social responsibility and development media roles, it is not too late for them to bring to the knowledge of a greater number of Nigerians the damage environmental degradation has done to the different lives, vegetation and waters of the Niger Delta region. May be, through this way, many people everywhere would better appreciate the environmental predicament of the Niger Delta people.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Having known how much the region has contributed to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country, yet the inhabitants of the region persistently complain of the environmental degradation, as their social responsibility, newspapers in the country should make efforts to send their reporters to investigate the environmental situation of the region.
- Privately-owned newspapers should show more commitment to the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta by increasing the frequency of stories related to the matter.
- Newspapers in the country should give more coverage to causes, effects and prevention of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta than management of environmental degradation.
- Newspaper journalists should look beyond oil exploitation activities as the causes of environmental degradation in the Niger Delta.

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