



The Economy of Ghana Network (EGN)

Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER)

Policy Brief

26th November, 2015 No.12

Breaking News and Disaster Coverage in Ghana

INTRODUCTION

Disasters in Africa can be caused by natural and technological or human factors. Natural disasters may come in the form of earthquakes or floods. According to Norris et al. (2002), disasters are acute, traumatic events with a sudden onset that are collectively experienced. They can be caused by natural, technological or human factors. Natural disasters include events such as earthquakes and floods. Technological disasters are unintentional events such as an oil spill, industrial accidents or fire outbreak; and Human-caused disasters include intentional events like terrorist attacks or other forms of mass violence. From the statistical viewpoint, 794 disasters were registered between 2006 and 2014. These disasters collectively claimed 71,450 lives with 32 major disasters of that happening in Ghana (Centre for research on the epidemiology of disaster).

The presentation analyzed the June 3 'twin' disaster as a case study and brought key issues that were discussed by stakeholders and policy makers at the forum. This brief highlights the important issues that formed the core of the discussions at the workshop.

The June 3 twin disaster which occurred in Accra led to the loss of many lives and properties. In terms of the degree of loss and severity of agony in recent times, the June 3 fire-flood ranks topmost. It is estimated that about 46,370 people were affected (International federation of Red Cross, 2015). Some of the root causes are the spate of rapid urbanisation, poor disposal of garbage and choked drains and poor development planning

Disaster coverage of the June 3, 2015 twin disaster

The Ghanaian media after the June 3 disasters moved to provide coverage and serve as a conduit for the expression of concerns, worries, fears and opinions.

Key questions

- What sources were relied on in the coverage of the disaster?
- What frames were used in the media coverage?
- How these frames differ across the media under study?
- How did media attention shift over time in the coverage of the disaster?
- How were ethical and disaster coverage standards reflected in the Ghanaian media's coverage of the disasters?

A quantitative content analysis of two main Ghanaian newspapers namely; Daily Graphic and Daily Guide from May, 2015 to August, 2015 was carried out. This content suggests that there was more straight news, followed by Opinions, features and Editorials placed same with rejoinders taking last spot. On the tone of the disaster stories, with a sample size of 303 editions of the above newspapers, 201 editions for daily graphic and 102 for daily guide, "Journalist initiated" stories topped with a frequency of 93 representing 42.9%. This was followed closely by "Programs other than a press conference" with a frequency of 50 representing a percentage of 23.0%. Before the last is, "Press Release" with a frequency of 12 representing a percentage of 5.5. The last is, "Press conference (Seminars & workshops)" with a frequency of 5 and a percentage of 2.3%.

One the area of whether thematic or episodic, out of a percentage of 100, Daily Graphic recorded a percentage of 53.60 for episodic and 46.40% for Thematic. Daily Guide on the other hand, recorded a percentage of 62.50% for episodic and 37.50 for Thematic. It is clear that Daily Guide was more episodic with Daily Graphic being more Thematic.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on discussions, the following recommendations were made:

- The media must do more comprehensive reporting in terms of placing the issues into the appropriate setting and having the right analysis of the news.
- For the print media to live on, their focal point should be on the thematic view rather than the "Hard" episodic news.

- The media must be conscious in the coverage by placing more premium on the local territory as an alternative to the formal sources for data as the function of journalism is to work as the pillar that holds our society.
- Media houses were urged to establish a policy for disaster coverage.
- Organising of counselling sessions is critical for journalists covering such events.
- On safety, appropriate tools must be given to journalists before coverage.

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The policy brief is based on a workshop on the 26th November, 2015, on the topic
“Breaking News & Disaster Coverage in Ghana”. The opinions expressed do not
necessarily represent the opinions of the EGN or ISSER.

Published by

The Economy of Ghana Network

under the auspices of

The Institute of Statistical Social and Economic Research (ISSER)

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This brief is based on a workshop organized by the EGN.

Publication of this brief is funded by the ACBF.

