

FRAMING CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOLUTIONS JOURNALISM STORIES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF SELECTED NIGERIAN AND INTERNATIONAL MEDIA PLATFORMS

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Abstract

This study examines how climate change is framed in Solutions Journalism (SJ) stories published by selected Nigerian and international media outlets. It aims to identify dominant solution-oriented frames and to compare how different media contexts construct agency, resilience and responses to climate change. Using a qualitative design, twenty climate-related solutions journalism articles published between 2019 and 2024 were purposively selected and analysed through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Framing Theory provides the analytical lens for understanding how journalists emphasize particular aspects of climate change in shaping audience interpretation. Findings indicate that both Nigerian and international media consistently employed frames centred on adaptation and resilience, innovation and technology, governance responses, and community-based solutions. Cross-context differences emerged through systematic coding and comparison of themes across all articles. International outlets more frequently combined multiple sources, explicit evidence, and explanatory context, while Nigerian outlets more often foregrounded lived experiences and community-level actions. These differences were identified through repeated theme refinement and pattern comparison rather than impressionistic judgment. The study concludes that Solutions Journalism promotes constructive climate reporting by emphasizing responses and public agency. It recommends enhanced training in solutions journalism practices and greater emphasis on transparent, evidence-based storytelling in environmental journalism.

Keywords: Solutions journalism, framing theory, climate change, media comparison, resilience.

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INTRODUCTION

Climate reporting has become a central component of contemporary journalism as climate change increasingly shapes environmental, economic, and social realities worldwide. Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges of the 21st century, manifesting in rising sea levels, extreme weather events, biodiversity loss, and adverse public health outcomes (IPCC, 2021). These impacts are not evenly distributed; countries in the Global South, including Nigeria, experience heightened vulnerability due to existing socio-economic inequalities and limited adaptive capacity. As scientific evidence on climate risks continues to expand, the effective communication of climate knowledge through the media has become increasingly critical (Moser, 2016). The media play a pivotal role in mediating public understanding of

climate change by shaping perceptions of risk, responsibility, and response options. Through framing, journalists influence how audiences interpret climate threats, assess possible interventions, and engage in policy debates (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007). However, extensive scholarship shows that mainstream climate reporting has often relied on frames of catastrophe, fear, and inevitability. Such approaches, while drawing attention to the severity of climate change, may also generate apathy, disengagement, or a sense of powerlessness among audiences, thereby limiting constructive public response (Hansen, 2011; O'Neill & Nicholson-Cole, 2009).

In response to these limitations, Solutions Journalism (SJ), advanced by the Solutions Journalism Network, has emerged as an alternative reporting approach that emphasizes evidence-based coverage of responses to social problems,

including climate change (McIntyre, 2019). Rather than ignoring challenges, SJ foregrounds how individuals, communities, institutions, and governments attempt to address them, highlighting what works, under what conditions, and with what limitations. Research suggests that solutions-oriented reporting can enhance audience trust, improve information retention, and encourage civic engagement and adaptive behaviour (Feldman & Starbird, 2021).

Despite growing scholarly interest in Solutions Journalism, empirical research on its application in climate reporting within African media contexts remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on the United States and Europe, leaving a significant gap in understanding how SJ principles are adopted and adapted in Nigeria and other African countries (Nyabola, 2020; Okoro & Chukwu, 2018). This gap is particularly notable given Nigeria's acute exposure to climate-related challenges such as flooding, desertification, coastal erosion, and heatwaves. These conditions make Nigeria a critical site for examining how media narratives can support climate adaptation, resilience, and mitigation through solutions-focused reporting.

Furthermore, few studies have conducted systematic comparative analyses between Nigerian and international media, resulting in limited insight into the cross-cultural dynamics of solutions-oriented climate journalism. Understanding these differences is essential for assessing how local contexts shape the framing of solutions, agency, and evidence in climate discourse.

This study therefore examines the framing of climate change in SJ-oriented stories published by selected Nigerian media outlets—Solutions Paper, Prime Progress, Social Voices, and Nigeria Health Watch—and compares them with international platforms, including BBC Future Planet, The New York Times, Reuters Sustainable Switch, and Solutions Journalism Network Collaborative Hubs. By applying Framing Theory to solutions-focused climate reporting, the study seeks to illuminate dominant frames, thematic patterns, and representations of public agency across media contexts.

The study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the dominant frames used in solutions journalism coverage of climate change in Nigerian and international media?
2. How do thematic patterns of solutions journalism stories differ Nigerian and

international media outlets?

3. To what extent do solutions journalism-based stories promote resilience, community engagement in climate reporting?

METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research design utilizing thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to examine the framing of climate change. This approach allowed for both the systematic categorization of data and a deep interpretive exploration of the meanings embedded within the texts.

Sampling Strategy and Justification: A four-stage purposive sampling strategy was adopted to ensure the selection of information-rich cases. First, a temporal boundary was set between 2019 and 2024 to capture the evolution of climate discourse following the heightened global momentum of COP26. Second, platform selection focused on outlets with established reputations for Solutions Journalism (SJ). The Nigerian sample included Solutions Paper, Prime Progress, Social Voices, and Nigeria Health Watch, while the international sample comprised BBC Future Planet, The New York Times, Reuters Sustainable Switch, and SJN Collaborative Hubs. Third, articles were retrieved using keyword-in-context searches (e.g., "climate adaptation," "resilience," "environmental solution"). Finally, each article underwent a verification screening against the Solutions Journalism Network's Four Pillars: Response, Evidence, Insight and Limitations, to ensure they were substantively solutions Journalism-oriented rather than merely "good news" reporting. While the resulting sample of twenty articles (N=20) is numerically small, it is methodologically justified by the study's focus on "analytical transferability" rather than statistical generalizability. In qualitative framing research, a smaller and focused sample allows for the intensive, line-by-line scrutiny required to uncover complex metaphorical and ideological structures (Malterud et al., 2016). This sample size provided sufficient "information power" to achieve data saturation, where recurring patterns in framing became evident across both media contexts.

Drawing on Entman (1993), frames were identified through four functional elements: how the text defined the problem, diagnosed its causes, made moral evaluations and suggested treatments or remedies. This was complemented by Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) "interpretive packages," which focused on identifying signature elements such as recurring metaphors, catchphrases and

rhetorical tropes that structured the climate narrative. Finally, these were mapped against Solutions Journalism principles, specifically coding for "Response-Focus" (cantering the solution as the protagonist) and "Evidence-Based Reporting" (the use of data or qualitative proof to validate the effectiveness of a climate response).

Then, to ensure the credibility of the findings, the study employed several validation strategies. Intercoder Reliability (ICR) was addressed by having a second independent researcher code a 20% subset of the data using a standardized codebook derived from the operational definitions. Discrepancies were resolved through a reconciliation process that refined the coding definitions. Furthermore, researchers tried to mitigate potential biases, particularly regarding the interpretation of "agency" in different cultural contexts. Finally, a transparent audit trail was preserved, documenting every stage of the process from initial raw data selection to final thematic clustering, ensuring that all conclusions are directly traceable to the source texts.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is grounded in Framing Theory (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993), which contends that the selection, emphasis and contextualization of information by journalists play a decisive role in shaping audience perceptions and interpretations of social phenomena. Moving beyond a merely descriptive account of thematic patterns, the present research operationalizes Entman's (1993) four core framing functions, problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and treatment recommendation, as the analytical scaffolding through which Solutions Journalism (SJ) is examined. These functions are systematically mapped onto the central tenets of SJ to construct an integrated interpretive framework.

Within this model, problem definition is reconceptualised as the articulation of "contextualized climate risk," wherein the analysis interrogates whether climate issues are portrayed as insurmountable threats or as challenges amenable to intervention. The causal interpretation dimension shifts the analytic lens from assigning blame for environmental degradation toward identifying the "drivers of change"—the enabling factors that facilitate the emergence or replication of specific solutions. Moral evaluation is employed to assess depictions of agency and responsibility, determining whether actors are framed as passive victims or as

efficacious agents of change. Finally, treatment recommendation corresponds to the presentation of the "response," emphasizing technical, social, or governance-oriented strategies aimed at mitigating climate impacts.

At the core of this inquiry lies a conceptual distinction between the traditional crisis frame and the emergent solutions frame that underpins SJ. Conventional climate reporting has been dominated by crisis-oriented narratives that foreground catastrophe, vulnerability, and a pervasive sense of impending disaster (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007; Hansen, 2011). Such frames often operate through what has been termed a "spectacle of suffering," wherein dramatized portrayals of threat are mobilized to elicit public attention and concern. In contrast, the solutions frame—as theorized within the SJ paradigm—necessitates a paradigmatic shift across three analytical dimensions: locus of agency, temporal orientation, and evidentiary structure.

Whereas crisis frames tend to be retrospective or oriented toward catastrophic futures, solutions frames are inherently prospective, emphasizing ongoing interventions and their potential for scalability. Moreover, while traditional frames privilege the magnitude and immediacy of crisis, the SJ framework privileges evidence of impact, requiring narratives to be substantiated by empirical indicators or qualitative benchmarks that attest to a response's effectiveness (McIntyre, 2019). By conceptualizing these frames not as mutually exclusive binaries but as intersecting dimensions, this study interrogates how SJ reconfigures the climate discourse—from one dominated by affective appeals of fear and helplessness to one characterized by epistemic rigor and an emphasis on human and institutional resilience.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of 20 purposively selected articles reveals distinct framing patterns that differentiate Nigerian climate reporting from international counterparts. By applying Entman's (1993) framing functions, the study identified four dominant frames that structure the solutions-oriented narrative: Community-Based Resilience, Technological Adaptation, Governance and Accountability, and Human Agency/Hope.

1. Dominant Frames and Distribution

The distribution of frames across the sample highlights a shared commitment to Solutions Journalism (SJ) principles, though the specific execution varies significantly by region.

Community-Based Resilience emerged as the most prevalent frame, appearing in 90% of the articles (n=18). In Nigerian outlets, this frame defined the problem through the lens of local resource scarcity, prescribing "bottom-up" treatments such as the conversion of plastic waste into "eco-bricks" for affordable housing. Conversely, international outlets frequently applied this frame to "nature-based solutions," focusing on indigenous land management techniques in the Pacific Islands and sub-Saharan Africa.

Technological Adaptation (n=14) served as a second major pillar, though the complexity of the technology cited differed. Nigerian stories emphasized accessible, low-cost innovations such as solar irrigation and drought-resilient crop varieties. International stories, however, exhibited a higher frequency of "high-capital" solutions, including carbon capture technology and AI-driven environmental monitoring. Finally, the Governance and Accountability frame (n=9) exposed a clear regional divide. International reporting consistently mapped local solutions onto global regulatory frameworks and COP outcomes, whereas Nigerian reporting framed governance through the lens of institutional failure, positioning grassroots activism as a necessary substitute for state-led implementation.

2. Nigeria vs. International: Similarities and Differences

A comparative assessment reveals that while both media contexts adhere to the solutions journalism "Response" pillar, their approach to "Evidence" and "Insight" is shaped by local institutional strengths. A primary point of divergence is the locus of knowledge. Nigerian stories are heavily grounded in traditional and localized lived experiences. For example, reports on female-led agricultural adaptation in Osun State frame traditional farming techniques as the primary instrument of resilience. In contrast, international platforms prioritize scientific and data-driven evidence, often utilizing satellite imagery and expert verification to validate the efficacy of a climate response. Furthermore, the study identified a significant difference in how limitations and barriers are framed. When addressing the solutions

journalism "Limitations" pillar, Nigerian media focused on immediate socio-economic hurdles, such as funding shortages and cultural beliefs. International media, however, adopted a more systemic perspective, highlighting structural challenges such as corporate "greenwashing" and the inertia of global financial systems. Despite these differences, a universal "Narrative of Hope" was observed across all platforms, successfully shifting the tone from apocalyptic "crisis frames" to a discourse centered on human agency and youth-led progress.³ Implications for solutions journalism Practice. The findings suggest that SJ provides a robust framework for climate communication but requires regional calibration to maintain rigor. In the Nigerian context, the heavy reliance on grassroots resilience suggests deep engagement with community agency, yet a relative deficit in scientific evidence-sharing. For international media, the high level of technical and data integration enhances perceived authority but risks distancing the narrative from the human element of grassroots action. This disparity indicates that for SJ to reach its full potential, Nigerian journalists require greater access to data-storytelling tools, while international outlets could benefit from integrating more localized, indigenous perspectives into their technological narratives.

Comparative Analysis of Solutions Journalism Framing

The table below summarizes the systematic differences and similarities derived from the coding of the sample based on the integrated analytical framework.

| Category | Nigerian Media Platforms (n=10) | International Media Platforms (n=10) | Synthesis/Commentary |
|-----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Locus of Agency | Grassroots/Community; Youth-led initiatives. | Institutional/Global; Indigenous/State actors. | Universal focus on agency over victimhood. |
| Evidence Type | Qualitative; Lived experience and local success stories. | Quantitative; Scientific data, AI monitoring, and visuals. | International media shows higher technical "analytical depth." |
| Problem Definition | Immediate socio-economic vulnerability (waste, housing). | Systemic environmental risk and regulatory gaps. | Nigerian media frames climate as a daily survival issue. |
| Treatment/Solution | Low-tech/Adaptive (e.g., eco-bricks, farming). | High-tech/Mitigative (e.g., carbon capture, sea walls). | Solutions are context-specific and resource-dependent. |
| Governance Frame | Advocacy-focused; highlighting state failure/absence. | Policy-focused; highlighting regulatory frameworks. | Nigerian media focuses on activism over implementation. |
| Scientific Grounding | Minimal; focus on traditional/local knowledge. | Extensive; use of interactive visuals and experts. | Reflects differences in institutional resources/data access. |

Researcher's Computation, 2025

The international media outlets with whom the Qatar Museum of Civilisation agreed to collaborate, e.g. BBC Future Planet, Reuters Sustainable Switch, and The New York Times, were more likely to emphasise the theme of technological innovation, institutional reaction, and international cooperation. An example of this is the BBC Future Planet, which draws attention to such projects as massive mangrove replenishment in Indonesia and regenerative farming in Australia (BBC, 2022), which is a systemic, long-term solution supported by scientific evidence. These stories tend to have data visualizations, climate modelling, and policy references, which corresponds to the interpretative and explanatory type of journalism that Fink and Schudson (2016). On the one hand, in one of the articles in The New York Times, the analysis even goes into geopolitical factors, analyzing the impact of climate diplomacy on energy investments in developing nations, an engagement of the macro level that is usually lacking in media in Nigeria.

Even though the contexts differ, there are certain common themes in both the local and the international platforms. The former is a tale of optimism, which leaves behind the normal crisis-driven environmentalism. The frames applied in Solutions Journalism in Nigeria or other countries highlight small wins, survival strategies, and learning through mistakes to seek solutions that contravene fatalism. The second one is the emphasis on agency: the Nigeria stories feature local transformers and local leaders, whereas international ones usually feature scientists, innovators, and policymakers. Finally, there is experiential storytelling, which is based on actual and evidence-based solutions, that characterizes both media environments, but the degree of supporting evidence may differ significantly. Their greatest point of divergence is the level of involvement they have on policy and analytical framing. The international media tend to incorporate their solutions stories into a broader institutional context- citing intergovernmental accords, climate funding reports and IPCC evaluations (New York Times, 2022; Reuters, 2023). The stories assist in relating the micro-level experience to the systemic problems.

The differences are actually vivid with the view to the extent to which both sides delve into the policy and the manner in which they analyze. The international media will incorporate their reporting about solutions into the bigger

institutional context, relying on the intergovernmental systems, climate finance reports, IPCC evaluations (New York Times, 2022; Reuters, 2023). These articles are successful at integrating personal human-interest narratives with larger needs in the policy, which has both informative and governance-forming purposes. On the other hand, although Nigerian media are excellent at tying their platforms to the local realities and present community-based efforts, they tend to lack the information about the national policy, environmental regulations, or long-term effects. This structural context deprivation may affect their capacity to fuel broader political action, despite their capacity in influencing change locally. Furthermore, it was discovered that, in general, Nigerian sources were more centered on the themes of adaptation and community resilience, but the international media tended to be more focused on sustainability, innovation, and climate justice. There were very few stories about Nigeria that addressed environmental justice in the context of systemic inequality or intergenerational equity- which is the subject of international journalists when they are covering climate problems in the Global South. This lapse is not only indicative of various editorial decisions, but also of resource constraints, trainings, and access to long-term data in most of the Nigerian newsrooms. Nigerian and international stories all satisfied important SJ criteria when it comes to integrity, i.e. they presented strong evidence of effectiveness, minimal limitations, replicable models and systemic problems (Solutions Journalism Network, 2021). The graduate of journalistic rigour however was varied. International sources tended to provide evidence of their stories in academic sources and interviews with experts, whereas those of Nigerian chose to rely more on anecdotal evidence and personal observations. This discrepancy reflects the gap in the methodology that should be taken care of.

In conclusion, the study shows that the Nigerian social justice platforms are doing a wonderful job of providing the grassroots narratives of resilience and local ingenuity, which consequently increase community engagement and promotes civic activism. But they appear to fail in the area of linking these local solutions to larger national or international climate policies which would actually increase their effect. Conversely, the international forums are more likely to provide a more unified direction incorporating personal narratives alongside details on how the institutions are reacting. The above comparison also highlights the need to explore methods of hybrid storytelling

which involve combining the use of relatable storytelling with journalism that matters to policy, which can then lead to more successful climate communication in Nigeria and in other countries.

Conclusion and Implications

This study examined how Solutions Journalism (SJ) reframes climate narratives in Nigeria and international contexts by analysing 20 SJ-based climate stories published between 2019 and 2024. The analysis addressed three main objectives: to identify dominant frames, compare thematic patterns across national contexts, and evaluate the extent to which SJ fosters resilience, community agency, and policy discussion.

Findings reveal that Nigerian solutions journalism platforms such as Prime Progress and Social Voices, are strongly oriented toward community resilience and local innovation. Grassroots movements, especially youth-led and women-led initiatives addressing plastic pollution, deforestation, and sustainable agriculture, dominate these narratives. These stories shift the climate discourse from victimhood to agency by presenting citizens as creators of change. For example, Prime Progress's 2023 feature on eco-bricks in Northern Nigeria demonstrates how communities transform plastic waste into building materials, reducing flooding and environmental hazards—an illustration of McIntyre's (2019) argument that SJ should highlight how solutions work rather than merely what they are.

By contrast, international platforms such as BBC Future Planet, Reuters Sustainable Switch, and The New York Times tend to employ more technical and institutional frames. Their coverage emphasizes large-scale mitigation strategies, policy innovation, and scientific or technological responses—often accompanied by data visualizations, longitudinal analyses, and references to global climate agreements (Fink & Schudson, 2016). These outlets reflect a model of interpretative journalism that links climate action to systemic governance and evidence-based policy.

While Nigerian stories excel in highlighting local knowledge, community agency, and informal environmental activities, they generally lack policy engagement and reference to scientific research (Ufuophu-Biri & Idowu, 2019). This suggests a gap between grassroots storytelling and policy-level advocacy. Conversely, international stories often integrate local actions within the broader context of global climate governance but may risk privileging elite sources over lived realities on the ground (Wekesa, 2019).

Theoretically, this study contributes to media and communication scholarship by showing that SJ operates as a mediating frame between local innovation and global sustainability discourse. It reveals how SJ can bridge the gap between crisis-oriented reporting and solution-oriented narratives, reinforcing civic agency, collective hope, and community resilience (Boykoff & Roberts, 2007; Hansen, 2011). Furthermore, it supports Entman's (1993) framing theory and Feldman and Starbird's (2021) perspectives on multi-level policy communication—illustrating how SJ's interpretative depth can enhance public understanding of climate governance.

Recommendations

1. For journalists, there is a need for training in data-driven and policy-oriented storytelling, encouraging collaborations between local and international outlets to merge authenticity with analytical rigor.
2. For educators, journalism curricula should integrate SJ frameworks that emphasize both narrative construction and evidence-based policy analysis.
3. For policymakers and media funders, strengthening newsroom capacity through funding, access to climate data, and partnerships with research institutions will enhance the credibility and sustainability of SJ efforts.

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