



A Study on the Communication between Environmental NGOs and the Media in Ethiopia

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Declaration

I, (Yoseph Berhane) hereby declare that this thesis, entitled “A study on the communication between environmental NGOs and the media in Ethiopia” submitted as partial requirement for the Master of Arts Program in Environmental Communication and Management, is my own work and to the best of my knowledge it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference has been made in the thesis.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of this Master thesis and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts degree in Environmental Communication and Management defined by Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences.

Signed

Date June 4, 2010

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—Yoseph Berhane

Abstract

This thesis examines how environmental NGOs and the media in Ethiopia communicate with each other, how they perceive each other, and what kind of challenges and problems do they have in their communication. I approach these questions through semi-structured interviews with some environmental communicators and journalists. The conceptual framework is based on the *concept of Environmental Communication*. According to the results, while both the NGOs and the media personnel say, they have a good communicative relationship with each other; their perceptions of each other vary considerably. I find that the different perceptions are correlated with the differences in their perspectives, objectives and agendas.

Based on the study it can be concluded that even though the communicative relationship between the two actors is two-way, strategic and collaborative much needs to be done to improve the role of the media and the ENGOS in influencing Ethiopian people's environmental awareness. The study concludes with suggestions and recommendations for the ENGOS and the media on how to improve their communication.

Keywords: Environmental NGOs, environmental communication, media, journalists, communication strategies, interviews

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1. Introduction

Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) usually communicate evidence information and knowledge in order to inform or influence policy, to achieve their own stated development objectives, or simply to make their own knowledge accessible and understandable to a wider audience (Hovland 2005, p.2). Publications, new projects, and high profile meetings or visits are all reasons an ENGO might try to make the news (Ibid, p.44). To ‘make the news’, ENGOS use different communication channels.

The media serves as one of the key channels for generating awareness about environmental issues. The media is important to ENGOS since public actions and attitudes toward environmental issues and problems are largely shaped and influenced by the media. ENGOS are aware of the power of the media and recognize that if they want to use the media in order to achieve their objectives they have to communicate with the media in a proper way. The media also needs the ENGOS. The ENGOS can offer journalists information and interesting materials on the environment for their reports. They can also explain specialized issues to reporters or provide the media with other information, e.g., recommend experts who have specialized knowledge to journalists.

In general, the ENGOS provide the media with accurate information about environmental issues and the media communicates that information to the public. This is the basis of their communication. Both the media and the NGOs are concerned with public interest. According to Cox (2006), the media has the duty to defend the public’s right to information, voice, expression, and participation. The media, then, has to “balance news stories with statements from all sides of the issue” (p. 199).

Communication is crucial in development work – whether in the form of dissemination, guidelines, prescriptions, recommendations, advocacy, promotion, persuasion, education, conversation, roundtables, consultations, dialogue, counselling or entertainment (Hovland 2005, p.1). In view of that, it is important to understand the communication between ENGOS and the media and critically analyze the main reasons motivating and challenging this communication.

Therefore, this paper will focus on the communication-taking place between ENGOS and Media in Ethiopia and explore the communication in more depth in order to show how this communication is working. I have some personal experience of the ENGO – media communication, which is one reason I am interested in the subject.

1.1. Background to the research

1.1.1. Environmental challenges in Ethiopia

Environmental degradation in Ethiopia ranges from very severe in rural areas to severe in urban areas. Soil erosion and degradation remains one of the most critical and far ranging environmental issues affecting the country. As a result of population increases, increased crop cultivation in marginal areas and increased livestock grazing pressure have also contributed to increased deforestation and soil erosion in the central highlands (McKee 2007, p.5).

In the forested areas of the South and South West, deforestation is occurring at a sustained rate with major forestry threats including resettlement, commercial farming and fire. In the eastern and southern lowlands, commercial agricultural investments, rangeland enclosures, resettlement schemes, charcoal production and the relentless expansion of very aggressive invasive alien species are having a profound and detrimental effect on the natural resources availability, the traditional rangeland management systems and institutions in place (Ibid, p.5).

Air quality has sharply declined in Addis Ababa and other major towns as a consequence of the drastic increase in new and second hand vehicles. In terms of water drinking quality, fluoride is the major problem in the country. Ethiopia has one of the lowest levels of sanitation coverage in the world, estimated by the Ministry of Health at less than 30% (McKee 2007, p.6).

The country was also until very recently a toxic hotspot in terms of obsolete pesticides accumulation. However, the insufficiently controlled expansion of the flower and horticulture industries and the concurrent use of unauthorized pesticides and fungicides in the country have brought the issue of pesticide regulations back onto the agenda (Ibid, p.6).

Despite significant achievements such as formulation of the Environmental Policy of Ethiopia (EPE), establishment of the Environmental Protection Authority (EPA), the implementation of the Conservation Strategy of Ethiopia (CSE) the promotion of various environment related policies have been characterized by significant gaps between policy and implementation and limited stakeholder participation, especially outside of the government (McKee 2007, p.6).

The elimination of the environmental problems needs time, commitment and professionalism. My brief work experience as a Public Relations officer for an ENGO working in the area of natural resources management in Ethiopia has thought me that the quality and rapidity of the solution of the problems depends partly on the interaction between government-ENGOS-media.

1.1.2. Media and environmental issues in Ethiopia

Environmental communication through the printed media, radio, television and lately the Internet is increasing rapidly in Ethiopia. The main approach to inform the public on environmental problems till now is the electronic media. The most frequently used means of obtaining information about the environment are radio and television. In the major cities of the country, the printed media, in particular newspapers are regarded as a main source of information on the environment. However, the space occupied by the environmental problems on the newspapers and television programs is relatively small.

For instance, the Ethiopian TV claims to reach 47% of the country. However, the station does not have regular environmental programs other than showing imported environmental documentaries now and then. Even though environmental stories are starting to appear in the front pages of some newspapers, there are only few regular columns in the printed media that have a little impact on the public (Demessie 2001). I have been following the media in Ethiopia for a while and I have noticed that some NGOs have bought a couple of columns in some private newspapers in which environmental stories appear weekly.

Environmental journalism is a new phenomenon in Ethiopia. Though it is a new phenomenon, I have observed that it has become a useful field of interest for the media and the media is increasingly acting as a link between the public and the ENGOS. In some cases, the media has started become a speaker for the ENGOS and the interested public on certain environmental problems, such as the damages to the forests and the urban green areas, the abuse of the natural resources, the pollution of the urban environment by domestic and industrial wastes, the quality, and quantity of the potable water, etc.

For instance, a group of 22 Ethiopian and international journalists who are a part of the Ethiopian Environment Journalists Association (EEJA) have recently started to prepare a new magazine on climate change called "Beyond the headlines". The magazine covers various topics across Ethiopia on climate change adaptation practices and is distributed to various government and nongovernmental organizations and individuals. EEJA was established in 2006 by individual journalists from private government owned and international media organizations (ECSNCC, 2009, p.1).

1.1.3. The role of environmental NGOs in Ethiopia

Environmental NGOs can play a major role in the management of the Ethiopian environment. Many observers agree that civil society in Ethiopia is maturing, demonstrated by its expanded reach into different areas of the country, increased capacity in service delivery, and emergence in areas of policy dialogue and monitoring (McKEE, 2007, p.58).

The number of NGOs in Ethiopia has increased in recent years, with an estimate of 900 international and local NGOs operating in the country in 2004 (Ibid, p.58). In the last two decades, an estimate of 30 environmental NGOs are created in Ethiopia. While many of them are based in Addis Ababa, they also work throughout the country to address local concerns.

Both local and international ENGOS have developed valuable experience with respect to environmental management, stemming from their work with local communities and institutions. Some NGOs have established links with regional and district government and have developed approaches that are being scaled up by regional authorities (Ibid, p.7).

However, these NGOs still represent a minority when compared with the broad group of mainstream humanitarian NGOs. The environmental civil society in Ethiopia is currently underrepresented and undervalued. They operate in a context characterized by aid and aid dependency. This constitutes a real challenge when it comes to the implementation of sustainable activities and methodologies, often involving maintenance and cost recovery systems (Ibid, p.7).

Currently, there are no periodical publications published by the ENGOS, except the publication of the magazine "AKIRMA" by Forum for Environment (FfE, a local ENGO) and the environmental newsletters published by Sustainable Land Use Forum (SLUF). While FfE has been publishing the quarterly magazine in Amharic language since 2005, mainly distributed to the general public, it has been difficult to estimate how many readers it has (FfE, 2010).

Even though the support of the ENGOS in Ethiopia is poor, I believe that their active involvement, support and recognition by the governmental structure of their role, is still important for the revival of the civil society participation in the development of the country and the environment in particular. As the country democratizes, the role of civil society in environmental debates is likely to increase (McKEE, 2007, p.58).

2. Aim and Research questions

As have been discussed in the previous chapter, environmental NGOs and the media can play an important role in alerting, mobilizing and educating the public about environmental issues as well as in shaping and influencing public actions and attitudes toward environmental issues and problems. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the communication-taking place between environmental NGOs and the media in Ethiopia and show whether the communication is efficient. When I say efficient, I mean whether it fulfills its purpose of having an impact on environmental management, public awareness and public involvement in environmental debates.

The paper will use the concepts of environmental communication to compare and analyze the communication between the ENGOs and the media in Ethiopia as well as the communication goals and strategies of the ENGOs with some models of how to conduct successful communication and discuss what improvements could be made in the communication process. My analysis will be accomplished through the results of one-on-one interviews with environmental communicators and journalists selected from ENGOs and media organizations.

To achieve the aim the following research questions will be discussed in this paper:

- What is the relationship between the environmental NGOs and the media and how do they perceive each other?
- What are the goals of the environmental NGOs in their communication with the media and what kind of strategies do they use to communicate?
- How do the media perceive the information they receive from the ENGOs?
- What are the communicational difficulties between the ENGOs and the media and what should be done to improve the communication with each other?

3. Methodology

In this paper, ten interviews were conducted. One phone interview was made with a freelance environmental journalist and a face-to-face interview was made with the rest of the respondents described below:

Environmental communicators

Communication Team Leader, Forum for Environment (FfE)

Research and Information Officer, Sustainable Land Use Forum (SLUF)

Program Manager, Ethiopian Civil Society Network on Climate Change (ECSNCC)

PR Officer, Relief Society of Tigray (REST)

Head of Communications, PR and Events, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ)

Journalists

Reporter, Ethiopian Environmental Journalists Association (EEJA)

Reporter, Ethiopian Herald newspaper

Reporter, Ethiopian Radio and Television

Reporter, The Reporter newspaper

A freelance environmental journalist

The interviewees were identified through a search of NGO websites and media contacts. Before I started the fieldwork, I contacted the NGO communicators and journalists that I interviewed through email and telephone. After I initiated the contacts, I booked for appointments to interview. Before I interviewed the representatives, I tried to get an understanding of the ENGOs in question by reading written materials from websites. I also used friends who work in ENGOs to tell me more about the organizations in question. Before going to interview, I called to confirm they are in the office. The interviews ranged from 35 to 45 min in length depending on the time constraints of the interviewee. Interviewees were given a brief background to the study and it was clearly explained that interviewees would not be identified in the final study report. All of the interviews were taped.

My primary method of information gathering was the semi-structured interview. I developed an open-ended interview guide in which the eventual outcome of the interview process is understood to be shaped by the interaction between interviewer and interviewee (Mishler, 1986). The strength of this method is that it is more likely than a conventional survey to allow interviewees to respond in their own terms, using their own language, and to provide unexpected arguments and descriptions (Bewley, 2002). In addition, I prepared two kinds of questions for the journalists and the communicator interviewees. As another method to realize this paper, I read relevant literatures from the course compendium and the Internet.

The following interview questions were investigated in this paper:

What is the relationship between the environmental NGOs and the media?

How do the environmental NGOs and the media perceive each other?

How do the media perceive the information they receive from the ENGOs?

How do the environmental NGOs communicate with the media?

What are the goals of the environmental NGOs in their communication with the media?

What kind of strategies do the ENGOS use to communicate with the media?

What are the communicational difficulties between the ENGOS and the media?

What should be done to improve the communication between the two actors?

After conducting the interviews and transcribing what has been said, I made categories for statements about:

- Relations between the ENGOS and the media, perception of each other
- Media perception of ENGO information
- Communication goals of the ENGOS
- Communication strategies of the ENGOS
- Communication difficulties
- Ways to deal with the communicational difficulties

The interpretation of the data was made through personal perceptions, the knowledge I received from the Master Program of Environmental Communication and relevant communication concepts/models. Information is perceived differently depending on perspective. I have my own perspectives that I use to interpret and give a meaning to the information collected from the respondents. Hence, I use my own pre-understanding, earlier experiences and knowledge when interpreting the data. Yet I am also a social person who is aware of others. As such, I am able to take the role of the respondents and see their perspective.

Therefore, this study report is the perspective of the interviewed persons and the interpretation of the data was based on my perspective that may be influenced by my own pre-understanding of what a successful ENGO-Media communication generally look like. The interpretation of the data may also be influenced by the knowledge I obtained from the Environmental Communication master program. In spite of this, I was aware of these pre-understandings and tried to reflect on them when interpreting the data and making conclusions.

To stay away from my personal bias that may have an effect on the subject of the study, I have acted as a new to the job kind of person in all the interviews. I made sure that the interviewees were in a good mood and have enough time available for the interviews. In a situation where the interviewees had a time constraint I had to be fast in asking the interview questions, in taking notes and in using a recorder to record the conversations.

In a situation where the interview was conducted in office settings, I have observed that some of the respondents were trying to give formal and reserved information rather than their own point of view. In some of the interviews where I got the opportunity to conduct the interview outside the respondents working places I was able to get their own perception as we were chatting like friends. My interpretation is that some of the respondents were very cautious to give information in their working place since it was a time of a national election.

3.1. Reflections on pre-understanding

My pre-understanding before I started interviewing was that the communication between the ENGOs and the media (particularly the journalists) in Ethiopia is not efficient and cooperative and this impression remained after I had talked to my last interviewee. However, during the course of reflecting and writing this paper I have come to question my own pre-understanding as I found that most of the environmental NGOs do maintain a good communicative relationship with the journalists, especially the environmental reporters.

Before I got the chance to study Environmental Communication at SLU, I had worked as a PR officer for an ENGO working in the area of natural resources management in Ethiopia. As a PR officer, I was coordinating all the media efforts in the organization. From the start, I tried to build a good relationship with those who work in the media, namely journalists.

However, whenever I tried to get into the papers or the camera there were many obstacles from the side of the journalists. Some journalists say they could not find my issue newsworthy. Some reporters completely or partially distort the content of the information I gave them and this has always created a problem with my job supervisor as the donors of the ENGO, who also wanted to be mentioned in the coverage, always call him whenever they see the news on the newspapers or TV. Some journalists were also not willing to cover my issue even though I tried to persuade them it is newsworthy.

The above interaction has contributed to my own pre-understanding, which is now changed due to the Environmental Communication master program as well as this thesis process. During the course of writing this paper I have come to understand that no matter how many friendly journalists I have or know, I may not get the chance to get into the papers or TV unless I use a variety of techniques such as linking my message with 'news hooks' such as a natural disaster; a national holiday; a major speech etc.

4. Theoretical framework

This paper applies some theoretical concepts of environmental communication as its conceptual framework in an attempt to analyze the communication between the environmental NGOs and the media. In this section, some of the theoretical concepts/models of environmental communication will be described.

4.1 The concept of Environmental Communication

The concept of environmental communication is a more recent in terms of concept and relatively new as an environmental management tool. There is therefore less literature on it as compared to communication in the other types of applied communication (Mehers, 1998).

There are several descriptions/ways to understand environmental communication. In this thesis I have chosen the definition outlined by the German Technical Cooperation as I find it relevant for the purpose of this thesis.

Environmental communication can be defined as the planned and strategic use of communication processes and media products to support effective policy making, public participation and project implementation geared towards environmental sustainability. It is a two-way social interaction process enabling the people concerned to understand key environmental factors and their interdependencies and to respond to problems in a competent way. It aims not so much at information dissemination as at a shared vision of a sustainable future and at capacity building in social groups to solve or prevent environmental problems(GTZ, 2000).

Embedded in a well-defined communication strategy, environmental communication makes efficient use of methods, instruments, and techniques, which are well established in development communication, adult education, social marketing, agricultural extension, public relations, non-formal training and other fields (Ibid).

Environmental communication is the missing link between the subject matter of environmental issues and the related socio-political processes of policymaking and public participation (GTZ, 2006). It is a planned activity, the purpose of which is to contribute to an improvement in resource conservation and environmental sensitive practices within the society (Nitsch, 2000). It is the pragmatic and constitutive vehicle for our understanding of the environment as well as our relationships to the natural world; the symbolic medium that we use in constructing environmental problems and in negotiating society's different responses to them (Cox 2006).

In every communication, a sender communicates a message to a receiver. The message can be in words, symbols or actions and is delivered through the media such as radio, television, newspapers, books, magazines, posters, billboards, internet, etc. to the receiver who interpret it and react to it either negatively or positively depending on his/her environment and culture.

In the field of environmental communication, three communication models are widely used to perform environmental communication. The first one is the ‘classical’ communication model (see Figure 2). The model describes communication in six steps: Sender, message, channel, audience, effect and feedback. This model takes its starting point in the sender and the message he/she wants to deliver. The channel is then used to reach the audience and get the desired effect. The effect that the message has on the audience is then monitored through some kind of feedback (Nitsch, 2000, p.205).

The classical model has a strong sender focus, and the emphasis is on the sender and the message the sender want to deliver. This model has a tendency to neglect the target group’s perspective. This results in a failure to adapt to the target group’s needs and to communicate effectively. If the target group is going to accept, understand and use information, they have to be able to see the relevance of the information from its own perspective. This means that it is important for environmental communicators to learn how to look at the situation from the target group’s point of view and try to see it through their eyes (Nitsch, 2000).

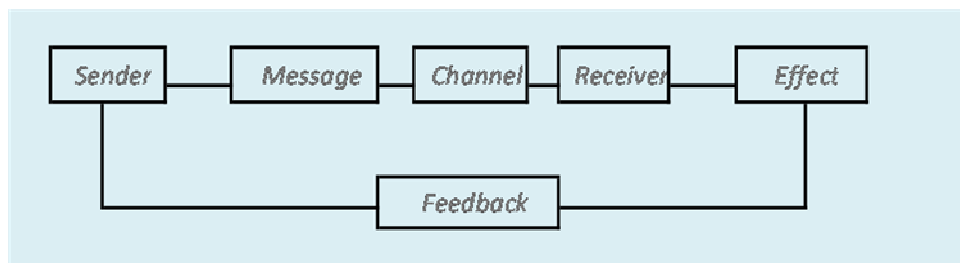


Figure 2: The ‘classical’ communication model

The second model is the relevance communication model (Figure 3). The model describes communication as “an encounter, or an exchange between the sender and the target group that is actively seeking information” (Nitsch 2000, p. 206).

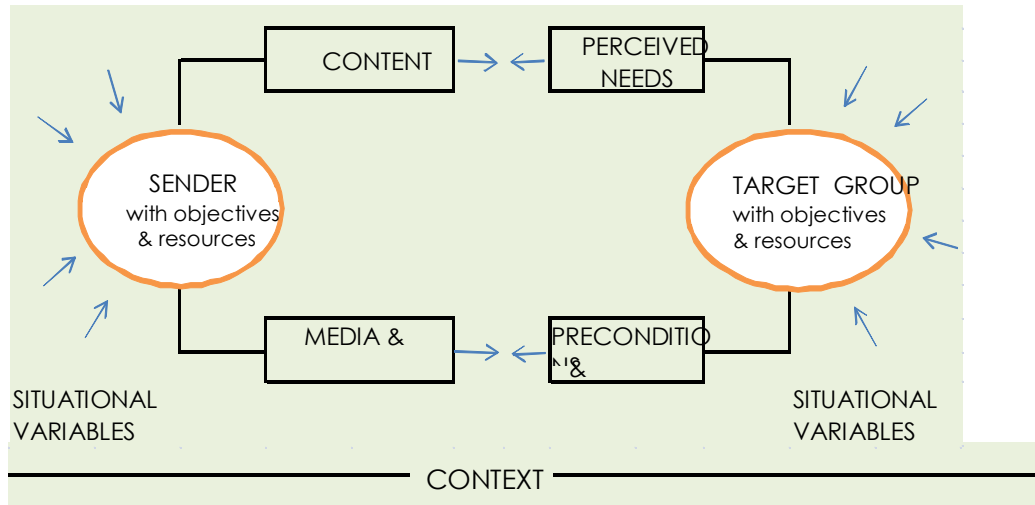


Figure 3: The 'relevance' communication model

The relevance model looks upon communication as an exchange between sender and receiver where the senders must listen to and adjust the information to the receivers' point of view and situation. In this model, the sender attempts to acquire, understand, and calculate the perspectives of the target group as a prerequisite to communicating new information or suggesting behavioral changes. The sender attempts to understand not only the target group's perceived needs by putting themselves in the shoes of the target group, but also how the context or environment in which the act of communication takes place may affect ones decisions. In both communication models, the media is considered as a method that a sender uses to deliver a message to a receiver.

The third model is the Community Based Social Marketing model developed by Doug McKenzie-Mohr. The CBSM model is quite similar to the relevance model. Like the relevance model, barriers are identified by recognizing both the perceived needs of the target group, as well as considering external, personal, and situational factors that might influence their decision-making processes. This is done through community-based research processes, such as forming focus groups, where the actual needs and perspectives of the target groups are expressed through their participation. CBSM practitioners are primarily concerned with identifying barriers that might prevent people from accepting innovations, or changing their behavior. Barriers to change in specific contexts are identified, and subsequently used to shape strategies and tools when introducing innovations or trying to make changes to social behavior (McKenzie-Mohr, 2007).

In this paper, the communication between the media and the ENGOs will be analyzed in order to investigate which communication model is related in this type of environmental communication.

5. Results and Discussions

For this study, ten interviews were conducted with five environmental communicators and five journalists. From the interviews, it was found that the majority of the interviewees were somewhat satisfied with the existing communicative relationship between environmental NGOs and the media. The NGO communicators think that the media is the most useful communication channels to reach the public with relevant information. Seeing that the communicative relationship between the ENGOS and the media is somewhat satisfying, how do they perceive each other, what kind of communicative goals, strategies are used by the ENGOS, what kind of challenges, problems occur in their communication, and how do they deal with the challenges and problems? In this section, these questions will be discussed based on the information from these ten interviews.

5.1 Relationship between media and ENGOS

In this section, I will try to answer the first research question, that is what is the relationship between the environmental NGOs and media, how they perceive each other.

5.1.1. ENGO view on the relationship

One communicator interviewee said that the communication between the ENGOS and media was not smooth until recently. He said after the recent Copenhagen Summit environmental issues are becoming a topic of interest for the media in Ethiopia and the media is showing an interest to work together with the ENGOS. He further said they are now sending a large amount of environmental news stories to the media and the journalists are asking for such kind of stories frequently. Another communicator interviewee said environmental stories are nowadays becoming a front-page story and the ENGOS are more quoted as the media source. He said these demands for environmental news stories have created an opportunity for improved communication between the NGOs and the journalists in Ethiopia.

In the perception of the communicators, the media in general pays more attention to ENGOS if their activities are 'big' or 'new'. One communicator said the journalists always come to report if they think that the issue is a hot or they will be paid a per diem. In the opinion of some communicators, the media, in many cases, pays more attention on the 'sensational' or 'big' events than the accurate situation assessment and problem resolving. This seems to be in line with the concept of *priming* which states that the media attend to some issues and not others, and thereby alter the standards by which people evaluate issues, people, or objects.

According to Cox (2006), many environmental problems are unnoticeable and less visible to our lives. Because of this invisibility, it is difficult to fit environmental problems into the media's conventions for reporting. These constraints limit both the ability to present some stories at all, and, if reported they influence powerfully the selection, angle, shaping, content, and hence the meaning of issues or concerns (p.196).

5.1.2. Media view on the relationship

In the opinion of some journalist interviewees, the relationship between the communicators and the journalists is not smooth and professional. This is because most of the communicators do not know how the media works and their knowledge of the media is poor.

According to one journalist interviewee, public relations work in Ethiopia is not professional and most of the PR activities of the ENGOs lack professionalism. He said that sometimes journalists need some form of remuneration from the ENGOs. For instance, a journalist may want the NGOs to take him/her to a field trip for a number of days and cover all expenses including a per diem or expects some form of gift from them. As a result, the communicative relationship between the ENGOs and the media (journalists) is not as such smooth and professional according to him.

In the opinion of another journalist interviewee, the ENGOs want the journalists to make them appear in a headline without doing anything. He said they want visibility but the media have their mission and editorial policy. As a result the communicative relationship not smooth since their story may not be covered or if it is covered their role would not be seen according to him.

Most of the journalists think that some NGOs are credible, the work they do is visible and the media trust them. However, they have a doubt on some of them. Some journalists think that NGOs are cooperative for their own advantages. One journalist said the NGOs think that they can get you whenever they want you or they think that any event deserves coverage. Another journalist said that the media perceive the ENGOs as one who brings their own message. He said they care about their visibility so much that if we do not mention their name in the reported story they will be very angry. According to him, sometimes the NGOs say they have organized a big event in one part of the country and they want the journalists to go there and report it. However when the journalists go there is no big event or issue to report. Since this is the case, the journalists usually do not go whenever the NGOs invite them according to him.

The journalists also think that some ENGOs are very smart to attract the media and are more attentive on funds rather than their objectives. One journalist from the printed media said that in dealing with some events a number of NGOs are more interested in publicizing themselves than trying to express the voice of the people. He said some ENGOs organize a 'small' event and make it 'sensational' to get media coverage. According to him, as a news editor, he gets different stories from the journalists and any environmental story has to compete with the different stories as the media has diverse source and community interests.

He further added that the NGOs prepare many workshops and meetings however, they cannot answer the question of what is new. According to him, the media starts by asking what is new. This seems to be in line with Cox (2006, p.175) who states that certain individuals in newsrooms decide what gets in and what stays out. One of the most important gatekeeper practices that affect environmental news reporting is criteria for newsworthiness, which is "the ability of a news story to attract readers or viewers".

5.1.3 Reflections/discussion

According to my perception, the media is important to environmental NGOs since public actions and attitudes toward environmental issues and problems are largely shaped and influenced by the media. The media can help the public shape their interpretation of the world and help them understand the world. The media can influence people's thinking by telling people what to think about. Because of these qualities, the media can be helpful for ENGOs on their way to achieve their goals of disseminating information to the public.

If the ENGOs can better cooperate with the media and gain a large amount of media coverage, they can increase their reputation among the public. Thus, the media can also help them to fulfill their objectives of mobilising more resources to their organization since they have already established a good reputation among the public.

My perception is that, for the media, environmental NGOs are also important. When the media needs information on environmental issues, the NGOs can explain specialized issues, offer journalists information and materials for their reports or provide the media with other information, for example, recommend experts who have specialized knowledge to journalists.

5.2 Communication goals and strategies of NGO communication

5.2.1 Communication Goals

In this section, I will try to answer the third question, that is: What are the goals of the ENGOs in their communication with the media?

From the interviews with the communicators, it was found that the main goal of the ENGOs in their communication with the media is to gain media coverage. According to the communicators, they make use of the media coverage to achieve other goals such as raising the public awareness about the environment, providing information to the public regarding its environmental rights and exerting pressure on the legislative and executive structures to reduce the negative effects on the environment. In the interviews, some of the communicators said they prepare a communication plan in order to achieve their goals and consider the needs and perspectives of the target groups when they prepare their communication plan. For instance, one communicator said that when they formulate their communication plan they always select the appropriate media depending on their goals and the target audience. Another communicator said they always design a message that is simple and direct to be understood since their target audience cannot read and write.

According to Nitsch (2000), there are seven stages for the planning of environmental communication: target group analysis; identification of objectives and content; choice of media and methods; implementation; analysis of results; evaluation and dealing with the institutional framework. From what I understood the communicators, after a receiver analysis is conducted, the sender develop the communication plan, identify the content of the message, select an appropriate channel, implement the communication work, analyze the process of communication and finally evaluate the communication process. Therefore, it can be concluded that the communication plan of the ENGOs is related to the relevance communication model mentioned in the theoretical framework section.

From the interviews, it was found that most of the ENGOs do not have a mechanism to evaluate their communication efforts to determine whether they were effective in getting the information across and addressing concerns. Most of the communicators admitted that they do not take a feedback to check whether the message has made an impact on the audience. One communicator said it is difficult to evaluate the impact of the broadcasted messages on the public due to time and resource constraints. This view of the communicator has been repeated by most of the interviewed communicators.

5.2.2 Communication Strategies

In this section, some of the communication strategies that environmental NGOs employ in their efforts to communicate with the media will be discussed.

According to the communicators, they communicate with the media in a strategic way. In the opinion of the communicators, the media are a means to send a message to the public. They communicate their messages to the public using the media either to teach the public about environmental issues or to expose local level environmental abuses. The media is also a means for the NGOs to publicize themselves, which was mentioned by one communicator interviewee. The communicators acknowledged that the media could help them in increasing their visibility and reputation.

Although the communicators said they do not have a well-defined communication strategy with regard to the media, it was found that there are some strategies that are used by the ENGOS when they communicate with the media. To start with the most common strategy, some communicators said that they use the help of the reporters who are members of the Ethiopian Environmental Journalist Association when they need to communicate with the media. In the interviews, two communicators mentioned that their organization always working together with the reporters of the association when they need to communicate with the media.

According to a journalist interviewee who is a member of the Association, the communicators sometimes contact him when they need to communicate with the media. He said they use our expertise to communicate with the media since the communicators do not know the proper way of communication and have a tendency not to have reliable information about environmental issues that the media needs.

Another strategy mentioned by some communicator interviewees is that they distribute environmental magazines and newsletters to the journalists. One of the communicators say that this strategy works in a good way to them since the journalists will have updated news about what the NGOs are doing. The journalists mentioned that they sometimes receive magazines and newsletters from the ENGOS that help them to remember the ENGOS whenever they want to work on environmental stories.

Building a good relationship with journalists or the media is another strategy used by the ENGOs according to some communicator interviewees. According to the communicators they always try to build good relationship with journalists by inviting them to a dinner gathering or giving them a certificate of recognition for their work. In general, according to the interviewees these are some of the communication strategies used by environmental NGOs in Ethiopia to communicate with the media in order to achieve their goals.

5.2.3 Reflections/discussion

My perception is that, consciously or unconsciously the environmental communicators are working on the two different functions of environmental communication: pragmatic and constitutive. According to Cox (2006), the pragmatic part of environmental communication “educates, alerts, persuades, mobilizes, and helps us to solve environmental problems” and the constitutive part “helps to constitute, or compose, representations of nature and environmental problems themselves as subjects for our understanding” (p. 12). An example of the pragmatic function of environmental communication is when ENGOs use the media to draw attention to environmental problems or to invite the public to participate in meetings about environmental issues. An example of the constitutive part is when ENGOs use terms, images, narratives and metaphors to shape or influence the public's attitude towards the environment.

My interpretation is that, when there is an environmental message that needs to be communicated to the public, the communicators select a channel to communicate the message to their target audience. If the media is preferred, they use the pragmatic part to choose the appropriate media for the desired message. Then, they identify what kind of message they want to transmit to the media, how to develop an effective message and when to do it, specifically, they use the constitutive part in order to change the perception, attitude and behavior of the target audience and catch the attention of the media to broadcast the desired message.

My interpretation is that, there is an exchange between the sender and the receiver when the ENGOs prepare their communication plan. When the communicators design their message, they need to think about the target group's perceived needs, preconditions and potentials for receiving the message. Since the sender and the receiver are two different parties with different perspectives, the sender of the message also need to look at situations from the receiver's perspective and design the message in a way that will appeal to the receiver. Therefore, it can be assumed that, the communicators take into account the needs and perspectives of their two target groups namely the media and the public when they design their communication plan.

From what I understood the interviewees, the ENGOs broadcast a message through the media, record the broadcasted articles and TV documentaries and put them in annual donor reports. That means the ENGOs (sender) deliver their message through the media (channel) to the public (receiver), however they through some form of feedback do not monitor the effect that the message has upon the public. Therefore, it can be said that the ENGOs are not using the classical communication model when planning their communication.

According to my perception, the target group has to be actively involved in the communication in order to give a constructive feedback. It is also important for the sender to have a feedback in order to evaluate if the receiver has understood the message. This is important because it allows the sender to better adapt the message to the needs of the target group if it finds out that the message has not been understood.

My perception is that some of the strategies used by the environmental NGOs in Ethiopia can play an important role in the communication. Magazines and newsletters can assist ENGOs to increase their visibility and reach the public and policy makers. Building a good relationship with journalists or the media is a useful communication strategy as it can assist them to accumulate media resources. Inviting high-level government officials to an event is also an important strategy even though neither the journalists nor the communicators mentioned it as one type of strategy.

5.3. Media's perception of the information

In this section, I will try to answer the second research question, that is: How do the media perceive the information they receive from the ENGOs?

According to the journalist interviewees, NGOs in Ethiopia are perceived by the public as one who have a lot of money and engaged only in some kind of charity work. They are also perceived sometimes as being extravagant, corrupted etc. The media also perceive them as such and hence the media do not trust any information that comes from the NGOs. One journalist interviewee said that the ENGOs have a lot of information which is important for the media and better information can be secured from the ENGOs however the credibility of the NGOs is very poor which makes it very difficult for the journalists to trust any information that comes from them.

He further said, “They give emphasis on meetings, advocacy, lobbying and public awareness. The humanitarian NGOs provide services that are practically seen by the public and the public think that the NGOs do not do anything. The inability not to do a practical work is perceived by the public as a failure and as a result, the NGOs cannot come out as a credible entity. If the NGOs continue to do only the lobbying and public awareness work the bias thinking among the public will continue and the media will also continue to have a bias”.

Another journalist interviewee said that when the NGOs provide them information they always check the source from the government central statistics agency or relevant bodies. He said if the public find that the information is not trustworthy it will be damaging to both the media and the NGOs. Another journalist interviewee said their newspaper puts more emphasis on balanced reporting and to maintain credibility they must report views from different sides to satisfy the editor and readers. This seems to be in line with Cox (2006) who states that the media has to “balance news stories with statements from all sides of the issue” (p. 199).

A journalist interviewee said, “some NGOs don’t want to answer what we ask them. They want to tell us what they want to say. They want to set an agenda and guide the media but in the media profession it is the media that sets the agenda. The NGOs are actors in the agenda that is set by the media.” This seems to be in line with Bernard Cohen (as cited in Wykes) who states that “the press may not be successful much of the time in telling people what to think, but is stunningly successful in telling its readers what to think about” (2000, p.82).

With regard to the question of who initiates the communication, the interviews have different opinions. In the opinion of all the NGO interviewees, they are the ones who are always initiating the communication. A journalist interviewee thinks that the media always spearhead the initiative. He said the NGOs are one of their sources of information and as such, they always go to them to get the available information regarding the environment. A journalist from the printed media however thinks that the NGOs are the ones who always take the initiative to communicate with the media but they do that not because the information is important for the public or the media needs it. According to him, the NGOs are very cautious of their images and whenever they need promotion, they organize an event and invite journalists.

5.3.1 Reflections/discussion

From what I understand the interviewees, the communicators and the journalists perceive information about environmental issues in different ways. This perception influences what information they pay attention, how they interpret it and how they translate it. These differing perceptions of information about environmental issues will lead to differing opinion as to what should be done and how it should be done. According to Nitsch (2000, p. 206), people receive, interpret and use information in different ways according to their particular backgrounds and circumstances. People with different backgrounds and different educations see and understand information in different ways. We all have experiences and interpret information in different ways. What we see and what we take note of depends on our prior knowledge and experience and is dependent on the situation and circumstances in which we live.

5.4 Communicational Difficulties

In the interviews, the interviewees were asked to mention the challenges and problems in their communication. In this section, some of the communicational difficulties identified by the respondents will be discussed.

The journalists said that the challenges are coming from the NGO side while they are trying to use the media for their advantage. Meanwhile, the communicators had different opinions. They think that the communicational difficulties between ENGOs and the media are there because the two sides did not share the same objectives.

According to the communicators, the journalists sometimes do not come when they are invited and sometimes they distort the original message. The communicators said that journalists sometimes ask NGOs' to pay them; however, they do not broadcast their stories even if they pay them, jeopardizing their communication. The journalists think that such cases are rare and if the NGOs work were interesting, then the media would be happy to report it without any payment.

In the opinion of the communicators, the majority of the journalists do not have specialized knowledge about environmental issues and therefore they cannot provide the public with such knowledge. Some think that some of the journalists do not know anything except journalism and very few reporters are trained in environmental issues. This seems to be in line with Demessie (2001), who states that the journalists and editors in Ethiopia do not have a clear understanding of environmental issues.

On the other hand, according to the journalist interviewees, the majority of the communicators do not have specialized knowledge about journalism and are not often able to give the media professional suggestions. For instance, they gave an example: some communicators send a letter without detailed information or organize events on Friday ignoring the fact that most of the widely read newspapers are circulated in the weekends.

The journalists also think that at times the NGOs' activities lack focus. A reporter from the Ethiopian Herald newspaper said, "Sometimes I feel the ENGOs' activities are unfocused, which makes it difficult for journalists to write reports." A journalist from the Reporter newspaper said that the communicators are not allowed to communicate with the media and that is the main problem. According to him, their boss sends them and their work is not more than taking the invitation letter. The one who talks is the boss and the boss may not know the media he added.

The communicators mentioned that the editors of the government owned media are all the time under pressure from the government not to publish sensitive articles or stories. They think that the editors are in many cases controlled to air news items that fit the policy of the government and officials of the government decide which news is worth airing or publishing.

This seems to be in line with Cox (2006) who states that news coverage of the environment is subject to some of the same powerful constraints that affect news reports generally. One of these constraints is media political economy, which refers to "the influence of ownership and the economic interests of the owners of news stations and television networks on the news content of these sources" (p.172).

A journalist interviewee said that the private media in Ethiopia is often influenced by economic constraints. According to him, they are dependent on advertisements to provide their financial support and therefore will avoid reporting on stories that would harm the reputation of their advertisers. He further said that they have a pressure from government bodies to avoid sensationalizing events or issues.

This seems to be in line with Anderson (as cited in Cox) who states that the production of environmental news is influenced by various constraints ranging from "advertising pressure, editorial policy and ownership, to stylistic conventions, news cultures and the limitations of time and space" (2006, p.172).

5.4.1 Reflections/discussion

My interpretation is that the interviewees have different perceptions regarding the challenges and problems in their communication and both the communicators and the journalists cannot understand why their communication is not smooth and efficient; they simply blame on the differences in their objectives, agendas, educational backgrounds and experiences.

From what I understood the journalist interviewee, most communicators do not have enough knowledge about the media, are not competent to take the role of journalists and understand the needs of journalists. In the word of the journalists, they do not know the 'media basics'. When we communicate, we imagine the communication from the perspective of the other and we are understood when the other see the issue as we see it from our perspective (Charon, 2007; p. 111). To be able to interact with other people we need to learn how to take the role of the other. According to Charon (2007), "we do not simply react to words or acts of others; we also try to get into their heads and try to understand their words from their perspective" (p. 113).

My perception is that, communication is a two-way interaction process that involves both a receiver and a sender who attempt to understand the perspective of the other when decoding and encoding information. Hence, in order to have an effective communication with the media, the communicators (sender) need to see things from the perspective of the journalists (receiver), to understand the media and learn how it operates.

5.5. Ways to deal with the communicational difficulties

In this section, some of the suggestions of the interviewees to deal with the challenges and problems of their communicative interaction will be discussed.

Media needs to learn about ENGOS

In the opinion of the journalists, the ENGOS should communicate with different types of media depending on the issues and develop their knowledge of the media, including the different emphasis and styles of different sections of the same media. One journalist interviewee said the NGOs should know the characteristics of the media, and even the characteristics of a newspaper's different pages. On the other hand, a communicator interviewee said, "there are differences in NGOs' missions and functions. Some NGOs focus on advocacy, others focus on public education, and still others focus on addressing specific environmental incidents. The media needs to learn the different functions of NGOs."

The importance of good relationships

According to the communicators, every Environmental NGO has its own strengths and they should highlight such advantages when dealing with the media. One communicator offered advice to other ENGOS on how to use their advantages. He said members of the Ethiopian Environmental Journalists Association have a good knowledge of environmental issues, so they should call attention to their expertise and communicate with them to publicize their work.

The majority of the communicators emphasized the importance of building good relationships with journalists or the media to gain media coverage. Some journalist interviewees also suggested that the environmental NGOs should involve the media from the start in the planning phase of their communication plan, rather than only being asked to report on events.

Developing media skills

In the opinion of the journalists, the communicators need to build up their media skills. The journalists also think that the communicators should develop some basic knowledge about the media.

According to one journalist interviewee, “to better communicate with the media the NGO communicators should develop their capacity. The first thing they should do is to understand the media and learn how the media operates. They need to build their capacity and the media capacity. The media has to be supported to report environmental stories. The support can be financially or technically which will make the media to report without the NGO reference.”

The importance of integrity and professionalism

In the opinion of the journalists, to better communicate with the media ENGOS should respect the integrity of the media and must adhere to professionalism in order to keep the communication in a serious manner. According to the journalists, the media need ENGOS to provide accurate information.

One journalist interviewee said: “the media has the duty to defend the public’s right to information, voice, expression, and participation. Therefore, the media needs environmental NGOs to provide new, factual, and reliable information. If ENGOS can satisfy this requirement, then our communication will be very smooth.”

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

The aim of the study was to investigate the communication between environmental NGOs and the media in Ethiopia. The study was carried out through one-on-one interviews with some environmental communicators and journalists. The information gathered from the interviews has been analyzed using the concept of environmental communication. My interpretations of the result and discussion have given the following conclusions.

The interview findings show that, the communication between the ENGOs and the media is perceived as collaborative. In the study, it was found that the ENGOs need the media to transmit their messages to the public in order to create environmental awareness, to expose environmental problems or to involve the public in their activities. Accordingly, the media is important to the ENGOs and serves as a key channel for them to achieve their different objectives. On the other hand, the media also needs the ENGOs since they can offer journalists reliable information for their reports. Therefore, it can be concluded that, the communication between the ENGOs and the media is a two-way communication.

From the study, we can see that the communicators perceive the media in different ways, which can be related to their diverse background and experiences; while, the journalists think that they need to have a critical attitude toward the ENGOs since they try to use the media for their own advantage. The interviews findings also indicate that the communication between the ENGOs and the media is strategic, particularly for the ENGOs. For the ENGOs, this communication can be considered as advertising because they are making an effort to advertise their messages using the media. Hence, the ENGOs need to develop a communication plan in order to accomplish their goals.

Based on the analysis, we can conclude that the ENGOs are using the relevant communication model when planning their communication. That means when the communicators prepare their communication plan, they take into account the perceived needs and perspectives of the target groups as well as the target group's preconditions and potentials for receiving the message.

Therefore, the ENGOs communicate with the media in a strategic way in order to catch the attention of the media to communicate their message to the public and the communicators need to formulate their communication plan depending on the target audiences and the media.

Furthermore, some of the communication strategies that environmental NGOs employ in their efforts to communicate with the media have been investigated in the paper. The interview findings show that, although most of ENGOS do not have a communication strategy, we can see that there are some important strategies employed by the ENGOS when they communicate with the media. From the analysis of the paper, it can be assumed that the communicator interviewees either are not aware of the communication strategies or have deliberately failed to mention their strategies during the interviews. From the interview discussion, we can also conclude that some of the practiced communication strategies such as distributing magazines and newsletters to journalists and building a good relationship with the media can play an important role in the communication.

In addition, the goals of the ENGOS in their communication with the media have also been studied in the paper. The main goal of the ENGOS in their communication with the media is to gain media coverage. As analyzed in this paper, they use the media coverage to teach the public about environmental issues, to expose local level environmental abuses, to raise their profile or mobilize more resources to their organization. Consequently, the mechanism for ENGOS to evaluate their effect of communication using the media is the amount of media coverage. The amount of media coverage can also help them to increase their visibility and reputation among the public.

Finally, some of the challenges and problems in the communication between the ENGOS and the media have been identified in this study and suggestions to deal with the challenges and problems have been put forward by the interviewees. Following the analysis in this paper, we can see that some of the challenges and problems are preventable while some are unavoidable as they emanate from differences in their perspectives and objectives.

Recommendations

The recommendations this paper makes are that the capacity of the communicators should be increased in order to better communicate with the media. This should be done by organizing media training for the environmental NGOs. The content of the training for NGOs should include how to prepare press releases; how to approach the media etc. During the interviews, the journalists have revealed the necessity of media training for the environmental NGOs. The communicators themselves have also revealed that there is lack of skill and understanding about the media on the part of the ENGOS.

Therefore, training on the various environmental issues as well as in journalism itself is imperative. It is when the communicators themselves are aware that they can play a role in creating environmental awareness. Both successful cases of NGO-media communication and failed cases should be used as examples in the training.

Environmental NGOs should listen to the media more to understand what journalists want. Different media want different things. It takes skill to choose the best way to disclose information to the media. ENGOS should try to take part in media's editorial meetings to find out their priority topics and communicate regularly with journalists. Environmental NGOs should also use their resources more effectively, for instance, they can invite more journalists to become NGOs' members or volunteers.

It would be good if a media handbook with advice and tips on working with the media for ENGOS is compiled. The ENGOS should use Internet-based tools such as blogs to publicize their work. I also suggest that NGOs should establish a web-based alliance, such as a mail group to help each other. The function of the web-based alliance is first to exchange information and secondly to let more experienced NGOs to help less experienced ones to develop their skills.

The staffs the ENGOS needs be prepared to publicize their work at any time and in any place. Meanwhile, the media presently gives information to the audience and assumes that all viewers/readers are uniform. It ignores the fact that people see things through different lenses and hence they have different perspectives about issues. Hence, if environmental communicators' wants to give information that can have a sustainable change of behaviour; they should also use other strategies for effective communication. The ENGOS should also remember that communication with the media is a means to an end, not the end in itself.

Finally, the communicators should understand that journalists depend on decisions from their editors on what and what not to publish. Therefore, if the ENGOS want to gain media coverage they should make a series of visits to the decision-makers of the media to discuss the importance that environmental themes have in the development of the country and the quality of life of its people.

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