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THEME: Strengthening Research and Innovations for Climate Adaptation and Sustainable Development

Mass Media Framing of the Causes, Impacts and Solutions to Climate Change in Kenya

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Abstract

Climate changes pose a major development and human civilization in the 21st century. IPCC projections indicate that the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is among the top areas in the world that will be most affected by the effects of extreme climate change events in the next 20 years. Recent research reports have noted that regions such as the SSA, the quantity of climate change coverage remain low and disproportionate to the level of threat it poses in the region. There is, however, a paucity of research on the extent and the magnitude of this problem in Kenya. The authors used media framing theory, agenda-setting theory, discourse analysis to explore the mediated definitions, causes and solutions to climate change discourses in Kenya; a sample of 173 stories from the *Daily Nation* and *Standard Media* were collected from May 1, 2015, to April 30, 2017, a time the country was experiencing prolonged droughts and floods. The stories were analyzed using iterative methods, constant comparison, and content analysis. Results revealed climate change-driven drought as something normal and a reality. The drought was illustrated with veracious animals and negative human emotions story archetypes showing a sense of hopelessness, gloom, and death. Climate change had negatively impacted human-wildlife conflicts, heightened water insecurity, massive crop failure, increased human suffering, and despair. The women, children and elderly are most impacted. There were massive animal deaths though some traders used the opportunity to reap supernormal profits. The blame for lack of preparedness for these cyclical droughts was first pointed to the government which is portrayed as overwhelmed, doing nothing or pursuing irrelevant projects. Secondly, human greed and corruption were blamed for food and water cartels. The government resists the blame discourse by accusing the people of failure to change their ways of living despite warnings. It called for other stakeholders to join the fight. The climate change reporting was portrayed as inadequate or ambiguous. Overall there was a call for long-term and lasting solutions. The discourse of contextual vulnerability is evident. The country lacks resilience and adaptive capacity. Implications for theory and practice is given.

Keywords: Climate change, drought, resilience, drought, pastoralist economy, gender, vulnerability, developing world