



Assessment on Newspaper Reportage on Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project: A Case of Mwananchi and Habarileo Newspapers

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.9734/arjass/2024/v22i7548>

Open Peer Review History:

This journal follows the Advanced Open Peer Review policy. Identity of the Reviewers, Editor(s) and additional Reviewers, peer review comments, different versions of the manuscript, comments of the editors, etc are available here: <https://www.sdiarticle5.com/review-history/112277>

Original Research Article

Received: 16/02/2024

Accepted: 20/04/2024

Published: 21/06/2024

ABSTRACT

Despite regular coverage in newspapers about government-established strategic development projects, citizens lack comprehensive awareness of the Julius Nyerere Hydropower project. This gap suggests that newspapers have incomplete responses to the public interest in the project. Using framing theory, this study aimed to understand this phenomenon by assessing newspaper reporting on the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project. Specifically, it sought to analyse the issues covered in relation to the project, explore the prevalent media frames employed when reporting Julius Nyerere, and examine the sources of information used by newspapers in reporting on the project. Content analysis examined news stories in Mwananchi and Habarileo from June 1st to August 31st, 2019. The findings revealed that newspapers covered seven key aspects: project launch, development stages, historical context, tourism impacts, budget details, security concerns,

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Cite as: Juma, Ibrahim M., and Rajendran J. Britto. 2024. "Assessment on Newspaper Reportage on Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project: A Case of Mwananchi and Habarileo Newspapers". *Asian Research Journal of Arts & Social Sciences* 22 (7):32-41. <https://doi.org/10.9734/arjass/2024/v22i7548>.

and employment opportunities. Primary media frames included attributing responsibility, environmental impacts, and economic consequences. Newspapers relied heavily on government officials, experts, official reports, ordinary citizens, and political leaders as sources. However, coverage often paralleled government events, indicating a potential lack of independent journalism. Nevertheless, newspapers effectively used media frames to convey information about the project, resonating with readers. However, an imbalance was noted in source utilization, favouring government voices. In summary, despite newspapers' efforts to cover the Julius Nyerere Hydropower project, there is a disconnect between media coverage and public awareness. While newspapers effectively frame information, they often rely heavily on government sources, potentially limiting independent scrutiny. This study sheds light on the dynamics of media coverage and its impact on the public perception of major development projects.

Keywords: Episodic; thematic; framing; media; news; newspaper; reportage; Broadcasting; Government; project.

1. INTRODUCTION

The media plays a significant role in shaping public awareness and opinions within local communities regarding national development projects and policies. This influence is achieved through the careful framing of media content [1]. In Tanzania, the media has historically played a crucial role in various periods, including preindependence, during the nationalization era, and after Tanganyika's independence and subsequent union with Zanzibar to form Tanzania. Particularly notable was its role during the Kagera War, where the media framed the conflict until Tanzania's victorious conclusion.

During the initial stages of the conflict in October 1978, Radio Tanzania was the dominant media outlet, refraining from reporting on the conflict, while Radio Uganda incorrectly reported a Tanzanian invasion and intense border clashes [2]. Once the Kagera invasion became public knowledge, Radio Tanzania launched an intensive propaganda campaign to reap public support for the war. The station retold stories of atrocities committed within the Tanzanian territory and depicted the Ugandan attack as a self-serving endeavour by Amin to enhance his own image [3].

Another instance highlighting the power of media framing in Tanzania was the portrayal of COVID-19 in different frames during different time periods. Under the rule of late President John Pombe Magufuli, the media framed COVID-19 as an economic weapon wielded by Western countries against developing nations. The media supported the government's traditional methods and downplayed the severity of the disease, discouraging vaccinations. However, during President Samia Suluhu Hassan's tenure, the

media shifted its framing to emphasize the danger of COVID-19 and advocate for vaccinations as the primary safeguard against the disease [4]. These instances highlight the media's role in consolidating information to influence audiences. By selecting, emphasizing, and omitting specific ideas, emotions, and values, news frames guide the audience's perceptions and conclusions on various phenomena.

The Tanzanian government's ambition to construct a major power station dates back to the 1960s. This dam, set to become Africa's fourth largest and the world's ninth largest, will also be the largest in East Africa. The arch-shaped concrete dam will stand 134 meters tall, creating a massive 100-kilometer-long lake covering 1,200 square kilometers. This project, managed by the Tanzania Electric Supply Company (TANESCO), aims to produce 5,920 billion units of power annually.

Both national and private media sources, such as the Tanzania Standard Newspapers and Mwananchi Newspaper, published updates on the project's progress, informing the public and influencing their perceptions. However, the researcher noted a lack of awareness about the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project, raising questions about the media's coverage. This led to a keen interest in assessing newspaper reports on this particular project [5].

This study aimed to assess newspaper reports on the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project. Specifically, it sought to analyse the topics covered in relation to the project, explore the prevalent media frames employed when discussing Julius Nyerere, and examine the sources of information used by newspapers in

reporting on the project. Guided by framing theory, this study employed content analysis as its method of data collection. This involved reviewing content published in Mwananchi, a privately owned newspaper and readership-leading newspaper in Tanzania, and Habarileo, a government-owned newspaper and leading newspaper on publishing government policies and projects. The researcher selected a period of three months from June to August 2019 because this was when the project was constructed. This study provides significant insights into reported issues, media frames, and news sources related to the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project. Understanding these aspects is crucial for assessing public awareness, project impact, media bias, communication strategies, credibility of information, and stakeholder influences on the project's narrative and public perception.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Issues Reported by Media Concerning Government Projects

Within the context of government projects, environmental considerations revolve around their potential impact on the natural environment, ecosystems, and ecological balance. Initiatives involving infrastructure development, urban planning, or resource extraction can result in profound ecological consequences that warrant careful evaluation. Addressing these concerns is pivotal for ensuring sustainable development, preserving biodiversity, and safeguarding the well-being of current and future generations [6].

Habitat destruction and alteration stand out as primary environmental concerns in government projects. The construction of roads, buildings, dams, and other infrastructure often leads to significant habitat loss. This habitat fragmentation resulting from development can isolate populations, disrupt migration patterns, and contribute to the decline of vulnerable species. Research underscores the fragmentation caused by road development, emphasizing the importance of environmental assessments and strategies for mitigation [7].

Pollution and contamination represent additional environmental concerns. Government projects can exacerbate pollution through emissions, waste disposal, and runoff. Pollutants can compromise air, water, and soil quality, posing risks to both human and wildlife health. Extractive industries such as mining introduce pollutants that disrupt natural processes. The

United Nations Environment Programme advocates for regulations and cleaner production methods to mitigate pollution [8].

Media reporting goes beyond surface concerns and delves into broader ecological implications. By considering ecosystems, public health, and long-term sustainability, journalists highlight the potential effects on local biodiversity, water sources, and air quality. The interviews with environmental scientists and stakeholders provided valuable insights, enriching the reporting process. Through this coverage, the media raises awareness of the ecological risks inherent in government projects and advocates for their sustainable development [9].

Furthermore, the media scrutinizes transparency and accountability in government projects. Transparency involves the availability of information about actions, processes, and decisions, while accountability holds officials responsible. Both elements are essential for maintaining public trust and effective governance [10]. Journalists delve into transparency levels, governance practices, and mechanisms for public participation, oversight, and checks and balances [11].

Instances of public opposition emerge when citizens, communities, or stakeholders dissent due to perceived threats or exclusion from decision-making processes. Media reports on these protests amplify voices, explore motivations, and advocate for increased public engagement. Journalists delve into the reasons behind opposition, conduct interviews with participants and experts, and provide comprehensive coverage to encourage open discourse [12].

The influence of political considerations and partisanship on project decisions and resource allocation can potentially compromise transparency and accountability. Political factors may lead to biased project selection and inefficient allocation. Journalists uncover instances of influence, analyse their effects, and advocate for transparent governance [13].

Moreover, media coverage plays a pivotal role in government development projects. Developmental communication fosters dialogue between implementers and recipients, empowering people through information exchange [14]. Media's function in reporting on development projects extends to analysing their socioeconomic impact, facilitating public discourse, and influencing policy decisions.

The role of media reporting and analysis is crucial for raising awareness, holding authorities accountable, and promoting sustainable development [15]. Diverse media content nurtures democratic debate and understanding, and communication strategies contribute to informed citizen participation. The diversity of media content is influenced by ownership structures and media profiles, which shape public awareness and discourse [16].

2.2 Sources used by Media for Government Project Reporting

In terms of news sources used by the media to report on government projects, effective journalism draws on a diverse array of sources to provide a well-rounded perspective. Government officials, as emphasized [17], serve as instrumental sources offering official statements, context, and insights into project progress. Their contributions illuminate project objectives and significance, assisting journalists in presenting accurate and well-informed narratives.

Experts also play a pivotal role by providing technical analyses that deepen understanding of the projects. Through interviews and consultations, their expertise sheds light on feasibility, economic impacts, and social considerations. This enriches the reporting process by offering comprehensive insights into various dimensions of the projects [18].

The authentic voices of ordinary citizens significantly contribute to news coverage. By sharing personal experiences and perspectives, they humanize complex projects and highlight their real-world effects [19]. Gathering input from those directly impacted by government initiatives, such as infrastructure development, adds authenticity and relatability to reporting, ensuring a connection between policies and people's lives.

Official documents also serve as crucial sources of accurate information. Project proposals, feasibility studies, and budget reports provide verifiable data, enabling journalists to corroborate facts, analyse project details, and deliver well-informed reporting. These documents also provide context to projects within legal frameworks, financial allocations, and potential challenges, enhancing transparency and accountability [20].

Politicians offer valuable insights as elected representatives and decision-makers. Their

perspectives provide a political lens through which journalists can understand project motivations, objectives, and implications. Incorporating politicians' viewpoints enriches reporting by showcasing how projects align with policy priorities, budget allocations, and broader government strategies [21].

By skillfully combining insights from government officials, experts, citizens, official documents, and politicians, journalists create comprehensive and nuanced coverage of government projects that informs the public and fosters a deeper understanding of these initiatives.

2.3 Prevalence of Media Frames

In terms of the prevalence of media frames, the literature that focuses on media frames related to fuel and energy plantation projects is limited. This review thus draws upon the available literature on energy projects and other social-political studies to analyse five media frames: economic consequences, energy policy, environmental concern, human interest, and attribution of responsibility.

The attribution of responsibility in news reporting refers to how problems are presented and who is identified as causing or being able to address them. Similar to assigning blame to children for a messy room, news can place responsibility on specific entities or individuals. The attribution of responsibility illustrates how news content influences our perception of blame and solutions, akin to how movies shape our opinions of characters. [22].

News frequently employs conflict framing, highlighting disagreements to capture our curiosity. This is akin to stopping watching kids argue on a playground. Conflicts and disagreements are key drivers of news coverage, making it exciting and attention-grabbing, much like actions in movies or games. These conflicts become news triggers, showcasing tensions and discord. [23].

Scholars have identified several common ways in which news stories are framed, including the attribution of responsibility, conflict, economic consequences, human interest, and moral values. In their study of 2601 newspaper stories and 1522 TV [24].

News also frequently highlights economic consequences, illustrating how events impact

finances. By linking issues to gains and losses, news makes topics relatable, helping editors decide which stories to share based on their importance. Additionally, studies revealed that discussions were dominated by economic consequences and environmental concerns related to newspaper coverage of oil and gas development. [25].

The 'human interest' frame adds a personal touch, resonating emotionally with readers. Additionally, the 'international interest' frame emerges when global communities intervene to resolve conflicts. News framing varies based on the audience's interest and the news outlets' priorities. [26].

3. METHODOLOGY

This study focused on the Mwananchi and Habarileo newspapers to analyse their coverage of the Julius Nyerere hydropower project in Tanzania. A mixed method approach was employed, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies. In the qualitative phase, content analysis was used to interpret and describe the newspaper stories, while the quantitative phase involved analysing the number and percentage of stories, media frames, and news sources.

The study population comprised all copies of the Mwananchi and Habarileo newspapers published in 2019. A total of 184 newspaper copies from June to August 2019 were analysed (92 from each newspaper). Purposive sampling was employed, selecting both a private-owned (Mwananchi) and a government-owned (Habarileo) newspaper to ensure a

comprehensive perspective. The study focused on Mwananchi, a privately owned newspaper and the most widely read newspaper in Tanzania, as well as Habarileo, a government-owned newspaper known for its focus on disseminating government policies and projects. The period of study was chosen due to the project's construction launch.

Content analysis, involving the examination of stories in the selected newspapers, was employed as a method of data collection to study the project's coverage. The researcher used coding sheets during document reviews for data collection. The unit of analysis was paragraphs, where each paragraph was assessed for media frame occurrence, issue coverage, and news sources. If multiple frames, issues, or sources appeared in a paragraph, they were coded individually.

The collected data were presented and analysed according to subtopics aligned with the study's objectives. Qualitative data were described using a descriptive approach, while quantitative data were presented using tables and figures.

4. RESULTS

A total of 184 copies of newspapers published in those three months were reviewed: 92 copies from the Mwananchi newspaper and 92 copies from the Habarileo newspaper. Nineteen stories were published concerning the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project. The Habarileo newspaper published 11 stories within those three months, while Mwananchi published 5 stories during this particular period.

Table 1. Issues reported about the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project

S/N	Reported issues	Number of reportages	Mwananchi	Habarileo	Percentage
1	Launch of the project	11	4	7	28.20%
2	Development of the project	2	0	2	5.12%
3	History of the project	8	3	5	20.51%
4	Tourism	3	2	1	7.69%
5	Budget and funding of the project	7	3	4	17.94%
6	Project security	4	2	2	10.25%
7	Employment	4	1	3	10.25%
Total		39	15	24	100%

Source: Research findings, 2023

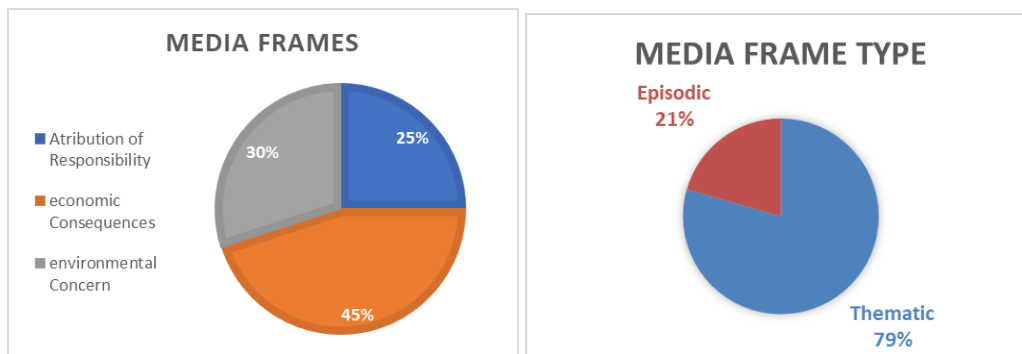


Fig. 1. Prevalence of media frames used to report Julius Nyerere
source: Research findings, 2023

Table 2. News sources used for reporting the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project

S/N	Type of source	Number of coverages	Percentage
1	Government officials	11	61%
2	Expert	2	11.115%
3	Ordinary people	2	11.11%
4	Official reports/documents	2	11.11%
5	Political leaders	1	5.55%
Total		18	100%

Source: Research findings, 2023

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 Issues Reported by Newspapers

The findings show that the newspapers reported 7 issues related to the Julius Nyerere hydropower project: Launch of the project, development of the project, history of the project, tourism, budget and funding of the project, and project security and employment.

Launch of the project issue was the leading issue to be reported because the project was at the earliest stage of the beginning, which is why we found that subissues such as signing contracts, handing over the land from government control to constructors, building roads to the project area and other preparation measures were reported to a high extent.

The study reviewed content published in June, July and August 2019, while the project was officially launched in July 2019; hence, most of the stories published in that period informed people about the establishment of the project and the history of the project in which the newspapers published a story on how late president, Julius Nyerere, had the idea of establishing a large hydropower project that would guarantee the availability of electricity services in the country.

Other issues reported that indicate the beginning of the project at that time are the development of the project in which government officials visited the project area to determine how the beginning steps of project construction are taking place.

The issues mentioned above, together with tourism issues, are not well known in the literature on the reporting of government projects and cannot be reported by the number of scholars who have explored the issues reported by media on government policy and projects.

The findings for issues such as project security, budget and funding are consistent with the findings of previous research that explored issues published by media on strategic development projects conducted by governments.

There are some crucial issues that were reported by some researchers but could not be reported by the Mwananchi and Habarileo newspapers on the coverage of this project. Some of those issues are habitat destruction and alteration, pollution and contamination, public opposition, conflicts of interest within government projects, the influence of political considerations and partisanship on project decisions, and public health and safety concerns. People want to hear them to measure the accountability of their governments.

People want to hear about issues that critique the government because they tend to uphold accountability, protect public funds from misuses and enhance public trust. By reporting these kinds of issues, people contribute to ensuring that public officials and institutions are held accountable for their actions and use public resources, respectively.

5.2 Prevalence of Media Frames

The findings reveal three media frames presented while reporting on the Julius Nyerere Hydropower project, namely, attribution of responsibility, environmental concern and economic consequences.

The responsibility media showed who was responsible for certain activities or responsibilities to ensure that the project was accomplished as planned. Most of the responsibilities attributed to these two newspapers were of an earlier stage and were intended to maintain a clear environment for the project to begin.

Such responsibilities included funding the project attributed to the government, maintaining a secure environment and protecting project building material attributed to the police force and ensuring that the project was completed at the proposed time; this responsibility was attributed to the government of Egypt.

In terms of economic consequences, newspapers reported about how the government, public and industries would economically benefit from the project once it was completed and start to produce enough electricity services. The availability of such services would enhance both the micro- and macroeconomy of the country.

Environmental concern. This media frame had two sides, and fortunately, the media reported this media frame in a balanced manner by reporting both sides, the supporting side and the opposing side. The opposite side claimed that the project would have negative impacts, insisting that cutting trees in construction areas would destroy the environment.

The supporting side was led by government officials, including late president Maguuli and the minister for energy, who responded to the opposing side that the project would conserve the environment by transforming the left area into

a conservation area and protecting trees from theft as it was before.

The reporting of strategic energy projects in terms of the attribution of responsibility for economic consequences and environmental concern is consistent with the findings of previous research conducted to explore the prevalence of media frames on development projects, as revealed by various researchers.

The predominant thematic framing observed in the two newspapers aligns with Zhang and Jin's (2017) findings, which indicated that national publications tend to focus on large-scale public-, government-, and policy-based programs. This trend is common in national newspapers due to their extensive coverage. Another reason for this thematic-heavy approach could be linked to macrolevel factors in collectivistic cultures, where collective welfare takes precedence over individual needs and interests. In contrast, Western media, influenced by individualistic cultures, often adopt an episodic approach, emphasizing direct consequences for individuals

5.3 News Sources Used by Newspaper on Reporting about the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project

According to our findings, five types of sources were used by newspapers to report on the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project: government officials, experts, official reports/documents, ordinary people and political leaders.

We see that government officials are the leading source of the news used by both newspapers; 61% of all news sources are covered by newspapers because most of the stories covered were from government officials who participated in launching the project and signing contracts.

There were only two stories reported on the ordinary people who were Kisasi residents expressing their expectations on the project; they made only 11.115% of the news sources used by newspapers at that time.

Using government officials as the dominant source of news in a certain issue or policy causes ordinary people to keep the least concentration on that matter because people believe that government officials have vested interests in promoting specific policies, agendas, or outcomes. When their perspectives dominate news stories, biased information can be

presented to the public, potentially distorting the truth and limiting the diversity of viewpoints.

Government officials may be inclined to withhold certain information or manipulate facts to protect their reputation or advance their political interests. This lack of transparency can hinder the public's ability to fully understand an issue and make informed. Focusing on government officials in news stories might neglect the perspectives of ordinary citizens or other stakeholders directly impacted by policies or events. This lack of representation can result in a less comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand.

The above statement supports the findings of this study, where we found that government officials were given privilege and that ordinary people were neglected by newspapers, resulting in only two stories covering their perspectives.

When people hear from themselves, stories become more relatable and impactful when they feature real people and their emotions. By including ordinary people in news stories, the human element is emphasized, making the events or issues being reported more immediate and personal.

This humanization fosters empathy and understanding among readers or viewers. By knowing that their voices are heard, people may be more motivated and eager to know about and participate in a particular activity or advocate for change.

Moreover, the findings show that important sources of news, such as experts and official documents, were also neglected and were used only twice each. The neglect of these sources causes people to miss important information on particular issues.

Experts bring specialized knowledge and expertise to the table; when they are featured in news stories, it increases the credibility and accuracy of the information being presented. Their qualifications and experience lend weight to the information being reported, helping the audience to trust the news source. The incorporation of official reports and documents in news stories allows journalists to present in-depth analysis from credible sources, enhancing the public's understanding of complex issues.

6. CONCLUSION

The study's findings indicate that newspapers primarily reported issues related to the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project based on events planned by the government. This suggests that the media relied on government-prepared events and did not proactively investigate or highlight their own concerns about the project. Several crucial issues, such as the project's cost, contractor selection process, inadequate consultation, social displacement, public health, safety concerns, corruption, and mismanagement, were overlooked by the media. These are vital aspects identified by researchers that the public is keen to know about regarding government projects and policies. This limitation highlights a gap between the audience's information needs and the topics covered by the newspapers.

On a positive note, the Mwananchi and Habarileo newspapers effectively employed appropriate media frames to convey messages about the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project. Various scholars have noted the consistent use of specific media frames across different media outlets when reporting on development, power, and energy projects.

However, the study also revealed an imbalance in the use of news sources. Government officials dominated the coverage, accounting for 61%, while other essential sources such as experts, official documents, and ordinary people were underrepresented. Consequently, the public missed diverse perspectives, in-depth analysis from experts, and detailed information available in documents, including contracts. This disparity underscores the limited scope of voices and viewpoints presented in the news coverage, indicating a need for more comprehensive and varied reporting approaches.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Media outlets should proactively identify public interest issues when reporting on strategic development projects rather than relying solely on government-planned activities. The study highlighted overlooked concerns such as delays, corruption, social displacement, and community resistance. Newspapers are urged to include these neglected issues in their coverage, fostering a more comprehensive understanding and holding the government accountable.

Balanced reporting is crucial. Currently, government officials and political leaders

dominate news coverage, leaving out ordinary people and diverse perspectives. Newspapers should actively seek input from the public, ensuring that their concerns are accurately represented. Moreover, media outlets should broaden their sources, including experts, various political leaders, and directly affected individuals. This diverse range of perspectives will provide a more comprehensive and balanced view of the Julius Nyerere Hydropower Project.

Experts should actively engage with media to share their knowledge and experiences related to public issues. Media institutions must provide in-depth analysis, delving into various aspects of the project, such as environmental impacts, economic benefits, social implications, and long-term sustainability. This thorough analysis will enable readers to gain a deeper understanding of the project and its broader implications, empowering them with knowledge beyond surface-level information.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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Peer-review history:

The peer review history for this paper can be accessed here:
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