

## **The Sustainable Development Goals: Perceptions of a cross section of members of the fourth estate of the realm in Osun State, South-Western Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The role of journalism is central to raising awareness and providing better understanding of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the 2030 agenda. Considering the fact that media organizations and/or personnel are an important source of information in this part of the world, it is imperative that journalists disseminate useful information on this agenda if its objectives are to be met. This study, therefore, undertakes an assessment of knowledge and attitude of journalists in Osun state towards the SDGs. A cross-sectional study was carried out among 120 Journalists drawn from across Osun State. A semi-structured self-administered questionnaire was used to elicit vital information on the socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge of and attitude towards the SDGs. Data were analysed using IBM SPSS and presented using descriptive statistics. The mean age of the Journalists was  $36.4 \pm 6.21$  years. Almost two-third (64.2%) had ever heard of SDG and only 1.3% had good knowledge. Less than half (43.3%) of respondents had a negative attitude towards learning about the SDGs. The knowledge of journalists in Osun State on the SDGs was very poor and may have adverse consequences for the entire population. Intervention is therefore required to improve their knowledge via education.*

**Key words:** Journalists, Perception, Sustainable Development Goals.

### **Introduction**

In order to set the world on a sustainable pathway, head of various countries agreed in September 2015 to adopt the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development which will provide a framework for sustaining the planet, people and ensuring prosperity. The agenda consists of 17 Goals with clearly defined objectives across social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development with anticipation of its full implementation by the year 2030. In order to fully implement this agenda, all relevant stakeholders across countries must form a collaborative partnership for the attainment of its goals. The goals of this agenda consist of 169 quantitative and qualitative targets which will be operational for a period of 15 years. These targets are globally and universally applicable, taking into account variations across national boundaries, conditions, capacities and development by giving considerations to respective national policies and priorities (1).

Much more than the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the 2030 agenda addresses most of the world's challenges thus the need for collaboration between partners across the globe to balance the three dimensions of Sustainable Development (2). The 2030 Agenda has been noted as being the "People's Agenda" (1), thus making it people-oriented requires ensuring that no one is left behind. A major action that needs to be taken in order to make the agenda people's inclusive is the creation of awareness and enhancing understanding of its goals. Implementing the agenda 2030 according to the United Nation requires active involvement of the state and the national governments with

communication and awareness been identified as one of the major instruments of implementation (1). As noted by the United Nation a major duty of the National government in the implementation of this agenda is to integrate its goals and targets in the national policies which are then passed to other stake holders such as civil service organizations, non-governmental organizations and the people at the grassroots for the purpose of informing them of the priorities of the agenda (1).

In the world of awareness and knowledge creation, journalism has become so crucial owing to the fact that human beings are limited in terms of time, space and capacity thus the need for a major platform to bridge these barriers. Okon, in his opinion noted that “journalism (mass media) through content and portrayal has the capacity to condense events beyond one’s immediate physical environment, bring those events into an individual’s private sphere and thus enable that individual to connect with the world” (3). Journalism thus enables individuals to acquire important knowledge concerning his or her immediate environment and be able to respond positively owing to intellectual development via responsible journalism. This function of capacity building via information and knowledge transfer has made the profession a unique one among other professions.

The benefits inherent in the media education as far as achieving the Sustainable Development goals are numerous. These include a change in attitude, practices and perceptions related to food consumption, health issues, waste management, use of natural resources and gender equality to mention a few (3). In a similar vein, the Information Literacy for the Sustainable Development Goals (ILSDG) also believed that media education and orientation is a very useful tool in the achievement of SDGs owing to the fact that adequate information and efficient media skill can buffer individual capacity by increasing the autonomy of individuals and allowing them participate in the social, developmental, cultural, political and economic spheres (4). Considering the key role of journalism in awareness creation and provision of good understanding on contemporary issues, it is imperative that the journalists equip themselves adequately with useful and reliable information on SDGs if its objectives are to be met. This study therefore sought to undertake an assessment of knowledge and attitude of journalists in Osun state on Sustainable Development Goals.

## **Materials and methods**

### **Description of the study area**

Osun state is an inland state in south western Nigeria. It has 30 local government areas, with Osogbo being the capital city. The state is educationally enriched with various higher institutions of learning. Osun state is located at an elevation of 246 meters above sea level and its population amounts to 4,137,627. Its coordinates are 7°30'0" N and 4°30'0" E in DMS (Degrees Minutes Seconds).

### **Study design**

A cross-sectional study was carried out among 120 Journalists drawn from across Osun State.

### **Study instrument**

A semi-structured interviewer administered questionnaire was used to elicit vital information on the socio-demographic characteristics, knowledge of and attitude towards the SDGs. The questionnaires were distributed randomly during their 2017 Annual General Meeting/ Conference. A 25-point and 5-point knowledge and attitude questions were used to assess knowledge of and attitude of Journalists towards the SDGs respectively.

### **Measurement of outcome variables**

Each knowledge or attitude question correctly answered was assigned a score of one while each wrong answer was assigned a zero mark. Respondent that scored below 50% were categorized as having poor knowledge and negative attitude while respondents that scored above 50% were categorized as good knowledge and positive attitude.

## Data analysis

The quantitative data collected was edited manually and then entered into a computer. The Statistical Product for Service Solutions [SPSS] version 20 (IBM SPSS Statistics) was used for analysis of data. Socio-demographic variables and respondent responses were summarized and presented using frequency tables and Bar charts. Bivariate analysis was done utilizing Chi-Square test statistics to explore the association between two categorical variables. Confidence limit was set at 95% and p value of  $\leq 0.05$  as the significant level.

## Ethical considerations

Ethical approval to conduct the study was obtained from Research Ethics Committee of the College of Health Sciences, Osun State University, Osogbo. Written informed consent was also obtained from each respondent.

## Limitation of the study

The responses of the study participant could be affected by recall bias. However, since the respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, this we believe would be limited to the barest minimum.

## Results

Socio-demographic variables of the respondents show that most (59.2%) of the respondents were males, in the age range of 30 to 39 years (41.7%). About one-third (30%) of the respondents work with radio station, 20% with TV station while 14.2% of the respondents work with online media houses. Majority of the respondents (65%) specialize in news while only 4.2% specialize in education/ enlightenment programs (Table 1).

Table 2 shows the association between attitude of respondents towards the SDGs and selected variables. Age and sex were not statistically significantly associated with respondent's attitude towards the SDGs, however, awareness and having had previous lecture/seminar/official assignment on the SDGs were statistically significantly associated to having positive attitude towards the SDGs ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Figure 1 depicts the distribution of respondents according to whether they were aware of the SDGs or not. Majority (64.2%) of the respondents attested to having heard about it. However, among those respondents who are aware about the SDGs, their sources of information are; Radio/ TV station (28.3%), Internet (26.7%) while only 14.2% heard in the course of their official duty (Fig 2).

When the level of knowledge of the respondents about the SDGs was assessed, it was observed that only 1.3% had good knowledge of SDGs (Fig 3). Figure 4 shows the distribution of respondents according to their category of attitude displayed towards the SDGs. Only 56.7% had positive attitude towards the SDGs.

## Discussion

In this study, percentage of journalist who had not heard about SDGs is on the high side considering the fact that media is expected to be one of the primary sources of information particularly on SDGs. This may be connected with the fact that most of the journalists involved in this study didn't get to know about the subject in the course of their official duty. It is therefore expected that those who are to discharge the duties of media enlightenment should have adequate information about the subject matter thus capacity building cannot be overlooked. Okon opined that "the mass media are indeed endowed with capacities to wield an enormous influence on the people through widespread enlightenment and awareness". He further stated that the core role of journalism in the entire value chain of sustainable development is anchored on education and awareness and sustainable development becomes dysfunctional in the absence of these core elements (5). About 14.2% of the respondents hearing about SDGs during the course of their official duties may reveal to certain extent the inadequacy in capacity building of these group of individuals whose primary duties lie in production and distribution of reports accrued from various events, facts and ideas. Similarly, Okon further stated that educating and capacity building of journalists is the only instrument that can bring

about the ideals of modernization into a society and by so doing make the people to embrace best practices hence, achievement of core values embedded in sustainable development (6).

The percentage of journalists with good knowledge of SDG in this study is abysmally low and this may have a serious implication for the attainment of SDG objectives in Osun state in particular and Nigeria in general. Usually, what is reported in the media may be an indicator of the level of a population's knowledge. Through the media, the effectiveness and success of a particular SDG campaign can be assessed and the knowledge of the relevant stakeholders on the subject can be improved. In a related global survey, Glocalities found that, across 24 countries, only around 1 in 100 citizens know the SDGs 'very well', while 25% say they know the name only (7). According to the latest Eurobarometer, just a little over 1 in 10 Europeans know what the SDGs are (8). All these corroborated the result of a related study that was carried out to assess the knowledge and awareness level within a university environment in Osun State, Nigeria by Omisore in 2017 where he noted that only 4.2% of the respondents had good knowledge of SDGs while 56.3% of the respondents showed positive attitude towards it (9). This researcher in his study observed that having had any form of enlightenment on SDGs or having taken time out to read or find out more on the SDGs as well as being an academic staff was significantly associated with respondents having good knowledge of SDGs. Having enlightenment on SDG can therefore not be disconnected from the purview of the media which act as a public information channel, engagement platform, watchdog and advocate for policy improvement on this subject. Thus the media has a critical role to play in ensuring a successful implementation of these new development goals in Nigeria, which cannot be achieved without people's awareness and education. Unfortunately, the journalists at the center of this reorientation platform within the state have been observed in this study to have limited knowledge of the subject despite its great importance to national development in the next one-and-a-half decades. Media is a major change-oriented platform for transfer of information to relevant stakeholders such as Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), traditional rulers, and marginalized community groups on agenda for Sustainable Development thus stimulating them to contribute their own quota towards the success of the agenda.

Stakeholders at the center of SDG publicity must have positive attitude about this subject as this may be an indispensable tool in making the general public understand the concept of SDGs and be aware of its importance. While studying the relationship between various factors associated with the attitude of the journalists on SDGs, the study observed that positive attitude of the journalists was found to be significantly associated with having heard about SDGs and this also reiterates the importance of capacity building and awareness creation if the people's attitude and perception on SDGs must be a positive one. The media has been noted by UNESCCO to be a key tool that can help give practical interpretation to the concept of sustainable development and its relevance to daily life (10). Lack of information and limited knowledge on the new global development agenda in the media may result in limited reporting of the agenda thus limiting the population awareness and knowledge of it (10). Okon reported in 2017 that "the surveillance function of the mass media in an ideal sense entails the collection of news, pictures, facts, comments and opinions in order to enable the citizenry understand and react knowledgeably to environmental, national and international conditions while being in a position to make informed decisions" (6). In order to however perform this function, adequate capacity building of the media may be an effective solution. This may be the reason why Inter Press Service (IPS) in 2016 supported by the United Nations Foundation organized four media capacity building workshops across three continents (11,12). The main objective of the workshops held in Stockholm, Bonn, Quito and Dhaka was to equip journalists in different regions with the information and tools required to understand and file substantive reports related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its processes, content, thematic thrusts, targets and indicators of the 2030 agenda (11).

## Conclusion

Addressing the world challenges using Sustainable Development framework requires the unique role of journalism in the context of awareness and knowledge of the agenda creation. The duty of journalist in shining light on issues that is of paramount importance such as Sustainable Development

requires good knowledge and positive attitude so as to aid constructive journalism. Public information through this medium encourages people to know about the solutions to the world's problems thus motivating them to take informed decision on solving these problems. Therefore, for progress and problems of SDGs to be adequately reported, the capacity building of journalists within the state/nation cannot be over emphasized.

The knowledge of journalists in Osun State on the SDGs was very poor and may have adverse consequences for the entire population. Intervention is therefore required to improve their knowledge via education. Data obtained from this preliminary research can be used to improve the knowledge and perceptions of journalists and other stakeholders on the SDGs.

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**Table1.** Results of socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

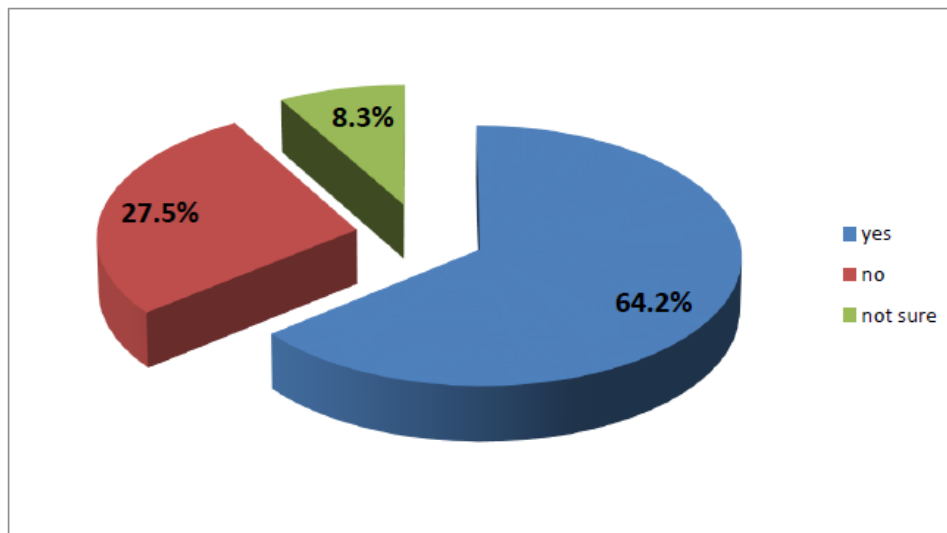
Variable	Frequency
<b>Age (years)</b>	
20-29	29 (24.2%)
30-39	50 (41.7%)
40-49	26 (21.7%)
50-59	14 (11.7%)
60-69	1 (0.7% )
<b>Mean age</b>	<b>36.4 ± 9.703</b>
<b>Sex</b>	

Male	71 (59.2%)
Female	49 (40.8%)
<b>Media house type</b>	
Radio	36 (30%)
TV	24 (20%)
News paper	19 (15.8%)
Online media	17 (14.2%)
Others	24 (20%)
<b>Primary area of duty</b>	
News	78 (65%)
Entertainment	13 (10.8%)
Sport	17 (14.2%)
Education/ Enlightenment	5 (4.2%)
Commercials	5 (4.2%)
Others	2 (1.6%)

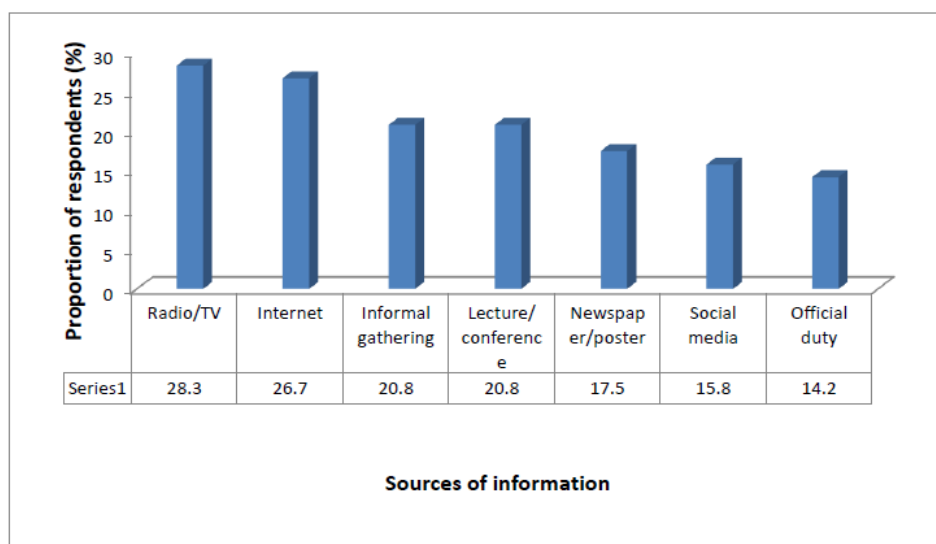
**Table 2.** Relationship between attitude of respondents and selected variables

Variables	Attitude (n=120)		P-value
	% -ve	% +ve	
<b>Age</b>			
Young adults	32(50.8)	31(49.2)	0.109
Middle age	17(32.7)	35(67.3)	
Older adults	3(60)	2(40)	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	31(43.7)	40(56.3)	0.930
Female	21(42.9)	28(57.1)	
<b>Have you heard of SDG</b>			
Yes	21(27.3)	56(72.7)	<0.001
No	31(72.1)	12(27.9)	
<b>Had lecture/ Seminar/ Assignment on SDG before</b>			
Yes	7(24.1)	22(75.9)	0.014
No	45(49.5)	46(50.5)	
<b>Personal effort to find out about SDG</b>			
Yes	36(48.0)	39(52)	
No	36(48)	39(52)	

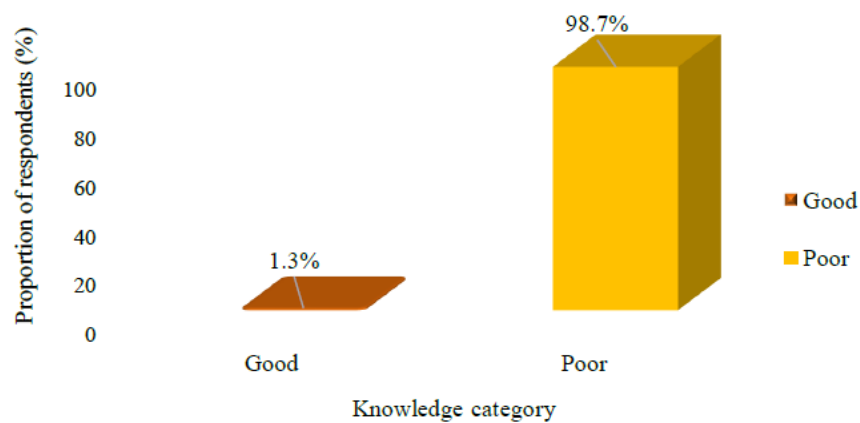
Likelihood ratio used



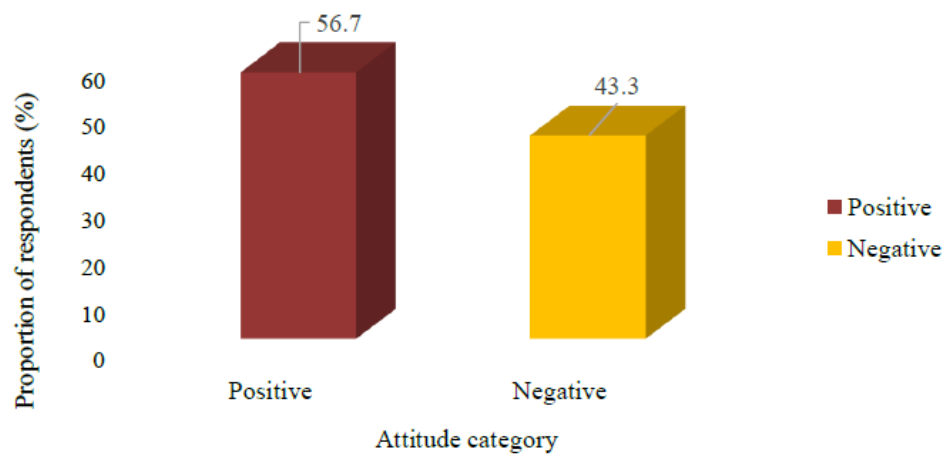
**Figure 1.** Proportion of journalists who were aware of the SDGs



**Figure 2.** Distribution of respondents according to sources of information on SDGs



**Figure 3.** Level of Knowledge of respondents on SDGs



**Figure 4.** Distribution of respondents according to the attitude category towards the SDGs