

Framing climate change: Social–economics and risk in Malawi Broadcasting Corporation’s Radio Program Content from 2022-2023

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Abstract

Background: As the frequency of extreme weather events caused by climate change continues to escalate in Malawi, media reporting on climate change issues has shifted from news reporting programs to sustainable innovations programs. We, however, do not have evidence on how communication through these climate change programs contributes to public support and engagement in climate action.

Research aim: This study analyses the framing of climate change social economics and risk in radio program content of Malawi’s State Broadcaster, Malawi Broadcasting Corporation (MBC).

Methodology: It uses Framing analysis, whereby frames are viewed as organizational tools enabling language users such as journalists to organize information and decide what matters most [1]. Framing comprises a combination of different activities such as: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described [1]. A total of 30 Radio programs were systematically sampled from two dedicated climate change programs from Jan 2022-June 2023. The first radio programs of each month was selected for analysis. Audio data from radio was transcribed and converted to text for analysis. MAXQDA was used to organize and analyze data.

The analysis established the following:

- i. The dominant frames used;
- ii. Perceived climate change risk groups
- iii. Attitudes and behaviors reflected in climate change discourse;
- iv. Risk perceptions regarding social-economies;
- v. Recommended climate change action.

Results: We find that many of the frames problematize climate change but immediately proceed to call for climate action. Climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience building are the dominant frames. More specifically radio programs promote climate change adaptation, resilience building and mitigation. Climate change actions are further used to promote socio-economic development. Although climate Change has affected various social economic factors, climate change adaptation is skewed towards farming related adaptation and is silent of other aspects of development equally affected by climate change such as health, education, infrastructure and no agricultural-based

businesses. The programs only portray crop and fish farmers as the risk group to climate change, and calls to action these targeted groups to adapt and participate in climate change mitigation. The call to action is however hampered by 'external player as savior' attitude which is reiterated over and over in the programs. This reflects that the actions are largely donor-driven with minimal intervention initiated by internal players. The program structure supports the framing by devoting more voice space to external players than internal players. Voices of community members not actively involved in climate change adaptation, mitigation and resilience interventions are not heard. We note that Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Government ministries and departments covered and interviewed in the radio programs of climate change are agricultural or natural resource management related.

Conclusion: This study notes that framing of climate change in dedicated climate change radio programs on MBC is skewed toward agriculture natural resource management and leaves out other sectors of development that are equally affected by the effects of climate change like health, education, and infrastructure. The programs present farmers as the core risk group which hampers climate action from the wider community which is equally affected on the other social economic issues that are exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Hence limiting climate action to farmers.