# MEDIA LANDSCAPE OF REPORTING AIR POLLUTION IN NAIROBI

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# Background

## INTRODUCTION

Kenya's capital Nairobi – like many big cities in the world – suffers from air pollution.

Internews is part a consortium implementing the Clean Air Catalyst program (Catalyst) a USAID global flagship program launched in 2021.

It aims at accelerating clean air solutions by working with communities around the world to identify and raise awareness of local pollution sources, and to build focused coalitions which deliver interventions leading to cleaner, healthier air.

# OBJECTIVE

To provide the Clean Air Catalyst program with an understanding and assessment of the existing media coverage of air pollution and air quality in Nairobi and to identify the gaps and opportunities for media programming within the Catalyst's Nairobi pilot project.

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Environmental Defense Fund

Columbia Climate School Clean Air Toolbox for Cities

Climate & Clean Air Coalition

Internews

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Vital Strategies

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What is the existing media coverage of air pollution-related issues in Nairobi?
2. What are the gaps in media coverage of air pollution in Nairobi?
3. What are the sources of information on air pollution in Nairobi?
4. What are the knowledge gaps among journalists covering air pollution in Nairobi?
5. What are the challenges of reporting on air pollution in Nairobi?

# APPROACH

Desk review of academic journals and research studies on the coverage of air pollution by selecting the top 28 items from Google search results using the keywords “air pollution in Nairobi” and “air quality in Nairobi.

Media scan of television, radio, newspapers and social media in Nairobi.

Five leading television stations, five leading radio stations, two leading newspapers and social media platforms that are popular among the population in Nairobi.

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Media of Africa for Africa

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# APPROACH

The selected journalists covered at least ten climate and environment stories between the period of June 2022 to December 2022.

The ten comprised three journalists from the Nation Media Group, three from the Standard Media Group, two from the Kenya Broadcasting Corporation, and two from the Royal Media

phone interviews with four librarians from the four selected media houses

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# Findings

## GAPS IN MEDIA COVERAGE

The reviewed media stories highlight the general health issues with air pollution.

However, they do not specifically discuss the various health conditions arising from air pollution. In addition, the impacts of air pollution on vulnerable populations such as people with disabilities, children, street families and the elderly were not highlighted.

The reviewed stories focus on air pollutants from industrial sources and hardly focus on other sources such as vehicles and indoor cooking, which also contribute significantly to air pollution.

# Findings

## GAPS IN MEDIA COVERAGE

This points to a limited understanding of the sources of air pollution among journalists. Kiundu Waweru, Project Manager, Internews Earth Journalism Network East Africa, said that “most journalists in Kenya have received little or no training in environmental reporting because few media institutions cover this as a unit.”

None of the reviewed daily newspapers had allocated their front pages to air pollution stories.

This means that none of the newspapers had air pollution high on their news agendas.

When air pollution stories were covered, they tended to report on the aftermath of air pollution while hardly providing sources, health impacts and solutions to the problem.

# Findings

## SOURCES LARGELY FROM GOVERNMENT

Media stories officials as sources for their stories on air pollution.

They rarely use environmental scientists as sources on air pollution, resulting in some of their reports lacking scientific data.

For example, a story written by Maureen Kimotho on the launch of Kenya’s fifth air quality monitoring sensor equipment only quoted government sources such as the Environmental Permanent Secretary and a cabinet secretary in charge of sports as sources.

# Findings

## KNOWLEDGE GAPS IN JOURNALISTS

Some of the journalists lacked clarity about how to view and report air pollution in different contexts and from different angles.

Jael Opicho, an environmental reporter at KBC TV, said: “I find it very difficult to vary story angles when reporting on air pollution because these stories are based on science journalism, which is not easy to unpack.

“My editor also lacks knowledge in science to guide me effectively. Most often we stick to the same negative story angles of impacts of air pollution."

# THE CHALLENGES

## ACCESSING INFORMATION ON AIR POLLUTION:

Journalists I interviewed stated they experienced challenges in accessing information on air pollution.

## SAFETY ISSUES:

Members of the public in Nairobi would only grant them interviews off camera for fear of retaliation by cartels that run the garbage collection industry in Nairobi.

Also, of reprisals from senior government officials prevented Nairobi residents from sharing important air quality information with journalists.

## ACCESS TO DATA:

organizations with air quality information denied them access to the data.

# THE CHALLENGES

## ACCESS TO AIR POLLUTION HOT SPOTS:

Intimidation or fear while researching air pollution stores because some of the air pollution hot spots like Dandora are heavily protected by locals since they are a source of livelihoods for the residents.

Difficult to access information on air pollution as some government officials treated it as a “state secret.”

## BUDGETARY CONSTRAINTS:

Media houses faced constraints in reporting on air quality, which included budgetary constraints, time and personnel dedicated to producing the stories.

# RECOMMENDATIONS.

- The Catalyst should provide training to journalists on the potential ways and angles to report on air pollution. For example, the health angle, policy responses, innovative solutions and climate angle, among others.
- Journalists should be trained on gender inclusive reporting and perspectives of vulnerable groups such as women, children and people with disabilities.
- The Catalyst should provide story grants to journalists and mentorship to address the challenge of a lack of funds and capacity.

# RECOMMENDATIONS.

- Facilitate dialogues with editors so they recognize the public interest value of reporting on air pollution and will give more priority to the coverage of air pollution.
- Journalists need training on how to gather information about air quality from different credible sources and available data platforms.
- Journalists need training on how to read and use different air quality indexes and data and also how to use the data for reporting effectively.
- Journalists should be guided on how to find and disseminate information on social media platforms more effectively.

# THANK YOU

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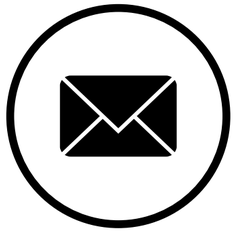
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