Evaluation of the Level of Awareness and Training of Burundian Journalists on the Media Coverage of Agricultural Issues: Case of the Written Press

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Abstract

Agriculture is the main pillar of the Burundian economy. It was also found that sufficient and well-designed agricultural information is the lever of the agricultural sector. The Government of Burundi has highlighted the role of the press in the success of the national development plan (2018-2027). The problem that is posed in this study is therefore to know if journalists of the Burundian print media have been trained and sensitized on the coverage of agricultural issues to ensure good coverage. We conducted exploratory interviews and a survey of journalists. The results show that the academic training curricula of Burundian print media journalists do not include any reference to training in the agricultural field. The study also reveals a lack of training in the coverage of agricultural issues, a low rate of preference for news items related to agriculture, and a lack of information on agricultural development policies and programs in the Burundian print media.

Keywords: Burundi, media, training, agriculture, economy
1. Introduction

The development of agriculture is one of the key growth factors on which efforts must be focused to better fight hunger, poverty, and malnutrition. According to the World Bank, compared to other growth sectors, agriculture is two to four times more effective in increasing the income of the poorest populations[1]. In sub-Saharan Africa, the agricultural sector employs more than half of the total working population[2] and provides a livelihood for a multitude of small producers in rural areas[3]. It is for this reason that in the framework of the implementation of the Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security of 2003[4], the signatory states, of which Burundi is a part, committed to devoting at least 10% of their budget to the agricultural sector to increase its annual growth to 6%. In Burundi, the population is essentially rural and derives its livelihood from agriculture, which employs 84% of the population, provides 95% of the food supply, and is the main provider of agri-food materials[5]. This sector also contributes 39.6% of GDP, while the secondary and tertiary sectors contribute 15% and 40% respectively according to Burundi National Development Plan, 2018-2027. World Bank figures nevertheless reveal that in Burundi, nearly one household in two (about 4.6 million people) is food insecure and more than half of children suffer from stunting[6].

Thus, in Burundi, the year 2022 has been placed under the sign of "the agricultural revolution to make agriculture an engine of economic recovery". This agricultural revolution is based on the process of structural transformation of the economy provided for in the Burundi NDP 2018-2027, which aims to "improve the characteristics of the Burundian economy currently dominated by the agricultural sector, which is less structured and marked by low productivity.

The success of the PND Burundi 2018-2027 requires the contribution of all actors of economic development including the news media. It is for this reason that through this strategic planning tool, the Government of Burundi highlights the role of the press and the media in a development approach: "The role of the press and the media, in general, is crucial for an effective accompaniment of such a dynamic of change. If it is true that certain sociological environments and cultural behaviors are more favorable to development than others, it is necessary that information, education, and training be used to achieve this" according to Burundi NDP 2018-2027.

This is especially true since "communication policies go hand in hand with those formulated in other areas (education, agriculture, livestock, culture, health, and water) and must be designed to complement them[7], [8].

Moreover, the press has long been considered a good information tool in the development of the agricultural sector[9]–[15]. Thus, since the beginning of the 1930s, France has had a press that deals exclusively with agricultural issues. It is called "Presse agricole". It is the case of some newspapers like La Terre of 1937, La France Agricole of 1945, Le Figaro Agricole of 1954, and the Betteraver français which was created in 1931. This press specialized by the sector disseminates practical advice and constitutes for the farmer a kind of aid to decision
...and the technique of exploitation. The development and dissemination of new agricultural techniques and machinery, as well as the implementation of the common agricultural policy, strongly structure agricultural information by sector. Three communication theories explain the influence of agricultural information on the development of the agricultural sector: McCombs and Donald Shaw's "Agenda setting theory"[16], the "Two steps flow of communication theory"[17], developed by Paul Lazarsfeld and Elihu Katz, and the "Diffusion of innovations theory"[18]. Furthermore, there is no longer any doubt that to produce quality information, journalists need to be trained on specific subjects and benefit from continuous training as science is built. Within a newsroom, it is also important to have journalists who specialize in specific areas, and who can place information in context and convey it intelligently to the public. It is in this context that French-speaking countries are integrating science journalism courses into their educational offerings or organizing training sessions for professional journalists on specific topics. It is within this framework that Dakar, the Senegalese capital, hosted from October 10 to 16, 2022, the first world conference of French-speaking science journalists, which was organized under the theme “Le Journalisme Scientifique face à l’urgence climatique”. This conference brought together 60 journalists from 20 countries. It was organized by the French Embassy in Senegal, the Centre d’Etudes des Sciences et Techniques de l’Information (CESTI) of the University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar, UNESCO, the Association of Communicators of Quebec, the Swiss Medical Journal, International Relations and Francophonie of Quebec, etc.

Based on the above, can we say that Burundian print journalists have been trained and sensitized to cover agricultural issues in a way that ensures good coverage? This is the question of our research. Ideally, Burundian print media journalists should be sufficiently trained and sensitized to cover agricultural issues in a way that ensures good coverage? This is the question of our research. Ideally, Burundian print media journalists should be sufficiently trained and sensitized to cover agricultural issues to better contribute to its development.

The present study aims to take stock of the training and sensitization of journalists in the Burundian print media on agricultural issues. We start with a research hypothesis that will be confirmed or refuted by the results of our research. It is worded as follows: "Journalists in the Burundian print media suffer from a lack of training and awareness on the coverage of agricultural issues. We note with Daniel Cornu that: "The work of the journalist deserves some esteem. Most people, Max Weber maintains, are unaware that quality journalistic work" requires at least as much intelligence as any other intellectual work[19].

2. Materials and Methods

Exploratory interviews with resource persons who are interested in agricultural information gave us a broad view of the subject and diverse assessments of how the Burundian media deal with agricultural issues. The documentary research allowed us to collect data related to media coverage of agricultural issues. For example, a recent study on the "analysis of agricultural information produced by the Burundian print media"[20] allowed us to observe that certain aspects of the agricultural sector are poorly covered. These include agricultural equipment (1.36%); financing of the
agricultural sector (1.36%); diseases that attack crops (1.36%); management of agricultural associations (1.36%) and the scarcity of cultivable land (1.36%). On the other hand, the coverage of meetings of public authorities with farmers comes in first place with a coverage rate of 53.4%. The same study shows a low coverage rate of agricultural issues (4.449%) during June and July 2021.

To collect and analyze the data, we used the mixed method (quantitative and qualitative). With the quantitative approach, we presented the responses that were provided by our respondents as indicators on graphs. These graphs allowed us to see the frequency of each indicator as well as the percentage of subjects who mentioned it. The study refers to Harold Lasswell’s communication theory model with its famous formula: Who? says what? To whom? Through what channel? With what effect? Our study is interested in the first question (Who speaks?). The study targeted a sample of 40 journalists working for 7 general newspapers, which are supposed to cover all issues and reserve space for agricultural issues in their columns. These are the newspapers ABP Infos, Le Renouveau du Burundi, Ubumwe, Net Press, Burundi Eco, Iwacu, and Ndongozi. To determine our sample, we used the "simple random sampling technique” known as the "probability sampling method” by choosing journalists who are on the list. We took the 1st, 3rd, and 5th for each newspaper; that is to say that all journalists had the same chance to be retained to answer our survey questionnaire. We administered a survey questionnaire to the journalists that included both closed and open-ended questions. The study starts from a three-dimensional analysis grid, namely the initial training of the journalist and the training and awareness of journalists on the coverage of agricultural issues (on-the-job training) and the preferences of journalists concerning news topics.

3. Results

Figure 1: Journalists’ participation in training sessions
From the data in graph 1 above, we can see that 75% of our respondents followed training courses in the field of humanities, while 7.5% of our respondents followed the journalism training course. The same table shows that our respondents followed other training courses such as law (7.5%), psychology and educational sciences (5%), and social communication (5.5%).

3.2 Training and sensitization of journalists on the coverage of agricultural issues

Table 1: Presentation of the indicators, their frequencies, and proportions expressed in percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have already taken a training course on covering agricultural issues</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not yet been trained in agricultural coverage</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have already participated in an information/awareness session on agricultural sector policies/programs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have not yet participated in an information/awareness session on agricultural sector policies/programs</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The table upwards indicates 100% of the journalists we interviewed have never received training in agricultural reporting. The data in this graph also show that 100% of our subjects have never participated in an information/awareness session on agricultural sector development policies and programs.

3.3. Journalists’ preferences concerning news stories

Figure 2: Frequency of debated issues by journalists in percentage
Graph 3 shows that journalists prefer political and security issues (13.66%) in their choice of topics to be covered. These themes are followed by topics related to human rights (11.48%); health and good governance (10.93%). The same results show that the rate of preference for the Education sector (9.29), and the Justice, and the Environment sector are of interest to journalists in the proportions of (7.1%) and (5.46%). The data in the same table also show that other journalists’ favored areas are transportation and sports rated at (3.83%). Journalists are less interested in the agriculture and farming sector with only 2.29%.

**Discussion**

These include agronomy, agroforestry, environment, agro-economics, etc (Graphic 1). The initial training in the fields related to the agricultural sector would be an asset for journalists who deal with agricultural issues, especially for certain aspects that require solid knowledge in this field. For example, we can mention subjects related to climatology, diseases that attack plants, the exploitation of scientific documents related to the agricultural sector, etc. This lack of training in the agricultural sector partly explains the absence of certain aspects of the agricultural sector in the agricultural information produced by the Burundian print media[20]. Moreover, it would be difficult to believe that a journalist could produce good quality information on a subject that he or she does not master.

We thus note that a few can succeed professionally in the field of mass communication without mastering the theory and practices of broad areas of knowledge, which encompass the fundamentals of higher education. Society is so complex, its specialties so numerous, and its various relationships so intertwined, that only a person with intelligence and understanding of many facets of human endeavor can unravel the meaning of events[21].

Table 1 shows responses provided by our subjects showing that the lack of training and sensitization of media professionals on the coverage of agricultural issues is a reality in the Burundian print media. These data show the extent of the training deficit of media professionals in the coverage of agricultural issues. This gap is also confirmed by Laurent Kaganda, interim president of the CNC they also note that the training of Burundian media professionals is deficient in the treatment of economic topics, especially concerning agriculture[22]. The lack of training and sensitization of journalists on agricultural issues negatively affects the coverage of agricultural issues in the Burundian print media. This is especially true since 92.5% of the journalists interviewed mentioned the lack of training as an obstacle to media coverage and, in addition, 100% of the subjects interviewed expressed the desire to receive training on agricultural issues. In addition, Roumeen Islam noted that in many developing countries, media professionals lack technical skills, which hampers economic and political journalism[23]. This concerns both the knowledge of those directly involved in researching, analyzing, organizing, and writing or disseminating information and the management knowledge needed to operate the business as a profitable commercial activity[24].
Graphic 2 gives the information provided by our subjects showing that the agricultural sector comes in 10th position in terms of preferences in the choice of topics to be put on the media agenda while political news and security news come in the 1st one. Other production sectors that are less popular with journalists are Transport; Trade; Energy and Tourism. These results partly explain the low rate of coverage of agricultural issues that we mentioned above. This is all truer because it is the journalists who propose and defend the subjects of the reports so that they are retained for coverage. To put it another way, journalists play an important role in the construction of the building agenda.

5. Conclusion

The study reveals that the academic training curriculum of Burundian print journalists does not include any reference to training in the agricultural field. All print journalists (100% of the journalists interviewed) have taken courses in the social sciences. The study also reveals a lack of training in the coverage of agricultural issues, a low rate of preference for news items related to agriculture (10% of journalists surveyed), and a lack of information on agricultural development policies and programs in Burundian print media. This lack of training and information explains the difficulties that 92.5% of the journalists interviewed face in covering agricultural issues, as well as the low rate of preference for news items related to agricultural issues expressed by the journalists (10%). The results of this study confirm our research hypothesis and prove that the training and sensitization of journalists on the coverage of agricultural issues are more than necessary for a better contribution of the press to the development of the agricultural sector.

References


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