

**AN ANALYSIS OF THE VIEWS OF JOURNALISTS AND GOVERNMENT  
OFFICIALS REGARDING THE IMPACT OF *NEW VISION*'S COVERAGE OF  
THE NAKIVUBO CHANNEL REHABILITATION PROJECT**

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HAMIS KAHERU

SUPERVISOR: PROF. GUY BERGER

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

EIAs	Environmental Impact Assessments
KCC	Kampala City Council
NWSC	National Water and Sewerage Corporation
NEMA	National Environment Management Authority
WID	Wetlands Inspection Division
LVEMP	Lake Victoria Environment Management Programme
NES	National Environment Statute
CCEC	China Civil Engineering Corporation
US	United States

## **ABSTRACT**

The media is said to be an integral part of the policy-making process. Drawing from Berger (2002a), the policy-making and implementation process can be seen as a circuit or “triangle” with three major players: media, public and policy people. Any of the three players drives the process at any moment depending on the issue at hand and the circumstances. But at times one of the players may be left out in the process, thereby leaving the “triangle” incomplete.

This study set out to determine the extent to which *New Vision* was perceived to be part of the “triangle” in the implementation of the Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project which was meant to control floods and improve drainage in Kampala City in Uganda. The study notes that the newspaper highlighted dangers facing Lake Victoria and Nakivubo wetland during implementation and advocated corrective measures to prevent pollution and a potential disaster.

Using mainly qualitative methods of investigation, I have established that research subjects believe that *New Vision* played the agenda setting, awareness and watchdog roles of environmental journalism. I also established that the majority of subjects believe that the public was not very instrumental in the process and as such the “triangle” was left incomplete.

The study also reveals that most subjects believe that coverage made government officials act faster and in so doing prevented a possible catastrophe. This conclusion is drawn from analysis of views of selected journalists and government officials. A few respondents believe that Kampala City Council officials would not have implemented remedial measures if *New Vision* did not report the project the way it did. The majority of subjects believe that the officials would have acted even without the coverage but they also think that remedial measures would have come too late.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENT</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b> .....	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS</b> .....	<b>v</b>
<b>CHAPTER ONE</b> .....	<b>1</b>
INTRODUCTION .....	1
1.0 Introduction.....	1
1.1 Background to the study .....	1
1.1.1 <i>New Vision</i> .....	1
1.1.2 Nakivubo Channel .....	2
1.1.3 Nakivubo wetland .....	2
1.1.4 Lake Victoria .....	2
1.1.5 Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project .....	3
1.1.6 <i>New Vision</i> 's coverage and government actions.....	3
1.2 Objective of the study .....	4
1.3 Policy on environment in Uganda.....	5
1.3.1 The Constitution.....	5
1.3.2 National Environment Statute.....	5
1.3.3 The National Environment (Wetlands, River Banks and Lake Shores Management) Regulations .....	6
1.4 Probing perceived impact of coverage on policy.....	6
1.5 Research assumption.....	6
1.6 Significance of the study.....	7
1.7 Methods of study.....	7
1.8 Conclusion .....	8
<b>CHAPTER TWO</b> .....	<b>9</b>
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	9
PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY MAKING .....	9
2.0 Introduction.....	9
2.1 The concept of public opinion .....	9
2.2 Media and effects theory with relevance to public opinion.....	10
2.3 Direct effects (primary effects) theory.....	10
2.3.1 Stimulus-response model.....	11
2.3.2 Uses and gratifications model.....	11
2.4 Indirect effects (secondary effects) theory.....	12
2.4.1 Agenda-setting theory .....	13
2.4.2 Framing.....	13
2.4.3 Overview.....	14
2.5 The concept of policy.....	14
2.6 Policy-making theory.....	15
2.6.1 Active media model.....	16
2.6.2 Liberal democratic model .....	18
2.6.3 Bypassing civil society model .....	18
2.6.4 Manipulation model.....	19
2.6.5 Propaganda model.....	20

2.7 Overview.....	21
2.8 Empirical studies from the United States of America .....	21
2.8.1 Home Health Care.....	21
2.8.2 Drunk Driving (DD) .....	22
2.9 Why media may not affect policy action directly .....	23
2.10 Conclusion .....	24
<b>CHAPTER THREE .....</b>	<b>26</b>
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW .....	26
ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM.....	26
3.0 Introduction.....	26
3.1 Objectivity and environmental journalism.....	26
3.2 Roles of environmental journalism.....	28
3.2.1 Agenda-setting.....	28
3.2.2 Watchdog role.....	29
3.2.3 Celebratory roles.....	30
3.2.4 Influencing government policy and practice.....	31
3.2.5 Bringing people into the picture .....	31
3.3 Characteristics of environmental reporting.....	32
3.3.1 Sources.....	32
3.3.2 Event orientation.....	33
3.3.3 Negativism .....	34
3.3.4 Frames.....	35
3.3.5 Trivialisation.....	35
3.4 Overview.....	36
3.5 Environment story not a priority.....	36
3.5.1 Non-political nature .....	36
3.5.2 Soft news versus hard news.....	37
3.5.3 Lack of immediacy .....	38
3.6 Conclusion .....	38
<b>CHAPTER FOUR.....</b>	<b>39</b>
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	39
4.0 Introduction.....	39
4.1 The qualitative research tradition.....	39
4.2 Data collection techniques .....	40
4.3 Content Analysis.....	40
4.3.1 Sampling .....	41
4.4 Interviewing .....	43
4.4.1 Sampling .....	45
4.4.2 Interview procedure .....	47
4.4.3 Analysing and reporting data.....	49
4.5 Conclusion .....	50
<b>CHAPTER FIVE .....</b>	<b>52</b>
SUMMARY OF COVERAGE.....	52
5.0 Introduction.....	52
5.1 General coverage .....	52
5.2 Selected stories.....	52

5.2.1 Dumping sludge.....	54
5.2.2 Cultivation of crops.....	55
5.2.3 Encroachment by private developers.....	56
5.3 KCC to blame.....	57
5.4 Government interventions.....	58
5.5 Editorials.....	59
5.6 Overview of stories and editorials.....	61
5.7 Character of reporting.....	62
5.7.1 Genre.....	62
5.7.2 Type of source.....	63
5.7.3 Source context.....	64
5.7.4 Frame.....	65
5.7.5 Value dimension.....	66
5.7.6 Positioning.....	67
5.8 How advocacy-oriented was the coverage?.....	68
5.9 Framing.....	68
5.10 Preferred readings.....	69
5.11 Agenda-setting and priming.....	69
5.12 Conclusion.....	70
<b>CHAPTER SIX.....</b>	<b>71</b>
INTERVIEW RESEARCH FINDINGS.....	71
6.0 Introduction.....	71
6.1 Process of establishing findings.....	71
6.2 How <i>New Vision</i> knew about the dangers and solutions.....	71
6.2.1 Journalists.....	71
6.2.2 Government officials.....	72
6.3 Generating stories.....	73
6.3.1 Journalists.....	73
6.3.2 Government officials.....	74
6.4 Role of civil society.....	75
6.4.1 Journalists.....	75
6.4.2 Government officials.....	75
6.5 Did the Nakivubo Project overshadow other issues?.....	76
6.5.1 Journalists.....	76
6.5.2 Government officials.....	77
6.6 Did coverage cause fear, alarm or anger?.....	78
6.6.1 Journalists.....	78
6.6.2 Government officials.....	79
6.7 Framing.....	80
6.7.1 Journalists.....	80
6.7.2 Government officials.....	81
6.8 Impact on public in relation to government policy and practice.....	82
6.8.1 Journalists.....	83
6.8.2 Government officials.....	84
6.9 Impact on government policy and practice.....	85
6.9.1 Journalists.....	85

6.9.2 Government officials .....	85
6.10 Perceived connection between coverage and government actions .....	86
6.10.1 Journalists .....	86
6.10.2 Government officials .....	87
6.11 Similarity between coverage and government actions.....	88
6.11.1 Journalists .....	88
6.11.2 Government officials .....	89
6.12 Other factors.....	89
6.12.1 Journalists .....	90
6.12.2 Government officials .....	91
6.13 Role of <i>New Vision</i> 's coverage.....	92
6.13.1 Journalists .....	92
6.13.2 Government officials .....	94
6.14 Reportage .....	95
6.14.1 Journalists .....	95
6.14.2 Government officials .....	96
6.15 Perceived impact of environmental journalism in general .....	97
6.15.1 Journalists .....	97
6.15.2 Government officials .....	97
6.16 Conclusion .....	98
<b>CHAPTER SEVEN.....</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>INTERPRETATION, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION .....</b>	<b>100</b>
7.0 Introduction.....	100
7.1 Roles of coverage.....	100
7.2 Effect on public.....	100
7.2.1 Agenda-setting effect.....	101
7.2.2 Framing.....	101
7.2.3 Effects on emotions and attitudes (Stimulus-response model).....	102
7.3 Impact of public opinion on policy and practice .....	103
7.4 Impact of coverage on policy and practice .....	103
7.5 Actual impact on policy and practice.....	103
7.6 Policy-making model.....	104
7.7 Impact of environmental journalism on policy .....	105
7.8 Conclusion .....	106
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>APPENDIX A .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>APPENDIX B .....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>APPENDIX C .....</b>	<b>115</b>

# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1.0 Introduction**

This study examines perceptions of journalists and government officials regarding the impact of *New Vision*'s coverage of the Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project in Uganda. This study is concerned with media, government and environment, in particular the impact of *New Vision* in the conservation of Nakivubo wetland and the protection of Lake Victoria against pollution. This chapter provides the background to the study, the general policy framework for environment in Uganda and the objective of the study. It also outlines the significance of the study and methods of study.

### **1.1 Background to the study**

This thesis analyses the connection between *New Vision*'s coverage and government actions regarding the Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project. It is therefore important to first shed light on *New Vision*, Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project and related government actions.

#### **1.1.1 *New Vision***

*New Vision* is dynamic in that while it is a government-owned newspaper, it often boldly criticizes government. This is partly because it enjoys editorial independence<sup>1</sup> and also because "Museveni's regime has provided more freedoms for the media than previous regimes did" (Wakabi, 2002:30). Therefore, the paper is able to carry stories on the environment in which some government officials may be depicted as not doing their job to protect the environment or degrading the environment themselves<sup>2</sup>. The newspaper has a page most Tuesdays exclusively for environmental matters. However, stories on the environment sometimes run on other pages meant for general and political news. Chapter

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<sup>1</sup> New Vision Act 1987 grants the newspaper freedom to criticize government without being an institutional opposition (Interview with news editor, November 2003).

<sup>2</sup> Chapter Five gives a summary of *New Vision*'s coverage of Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project. The newspaper was critical of some high-ranking government officials or their spouses who violated environment laws by encroaching on the Nakivubo wetland

Five of this study examines how selected stories were positioned in the newspaper. Factors which determine positioning of stories on Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project are explained in Chapter Six.

### **1.1.2 Nakivubo Channel**

Nakivubo channel is eleven kilometers long<sup>3</sup>. It runs through a valley from Wandegeya in the northern part of Kampala City. Its contents include flood or rainwater, effluents and sewage from all parts of the city. Everyday the channel delivers waste equivalent to raw sewage from 100,000 people.<sup>4</sup> The last part of the channel passes through the Nakivubo wetland that connects to Lake Victoria where the foul water is emptied.

### **1.1.3 Nakivubo wetland**

The Nakivubo wetland is more than two kilometers long and nearly a kilometre wide.<sup>5</sup> It lies between Bugolobi and Namuwongo suburbs. The wetland filters and purifies 80 percent of Kampala's sewage and surface water run-off, which passes through it before it enters the lake.<sup>6</sup> For the wetland to do its filtering work at maximum capacity, it should remain big so that dirty water spreads and stagnates there for as long as possible before it enters the lake. This filtration is made possible by papyrus, the indigenous plant in the wetland. However, for the last 10 years the wetland has seen considerable encroachment in form of residential houses and cultivation of crops. The wetland has become smaller while papyrus is gradually being replaced by coco-yams and sugarcane. As a result, the purification capacity of the wetland has gradually diminished, leading to severe pollution of Lake Victoria.

### **1.1.4 Lake Victoria**

Lake Victoria is shared by the three East African countries: Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. The lake is relevant to public policy for two reasons: First, the lake is home to

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<sup>3</sup> The Channel is 11 kilometres long but the rehabilitation project covers nine kilometers only (interview with Tamale Kiggundu, the project coordinator, November 2003).

<sup>4</sup> *New Vision*, October 2, 2002. The newspaper quoted a 1998 report of the Murchison Bay Water Quality Project.

<sup>5</sup> *New Vision*, October 2, 2002

<sup>6</sup> *New Vision*, September 24, 2002

various species of fish and other marine life. Secondly, it is the only source of piped water for Kampala City. National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) pumps water from Murchison Bay to its plant at Ggaba where the water is treated before it is distributed to the city for consumption.<sup>7</sup> Murchison Bay is very close to the mouth of Nakivubo channel. A drained wetland would mean dirtier water in Murchison Bay forcing NWSC to apply more chemicals to treat the water before distributing it to consumers. More chemicals could put health of consumers in danger while at the same time increasing water treatment costs and therefore higher water tariffs.

### **1.1.5 Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project**

The rehabilitation project is underway, financed by a US \$24m World Bank loan to Kampala City Council (KCC). The project involves de-silting the channel and widening it to accommodate larger volumes of water to end flooding in the city.<sup>8</sup> Widening the channel means more dirty water travels in it toward the lake. This makes it necessary for the water to spend more time in the wetland for natural purification. However, during construction a number of problems came up which were likely to lead to destruction of Nakivubo wetland and pollution of Lake Victoria.<sup>9</sup> The main dangers facing the two protected areas were: dumping sludge in the wetland by contractors;<sup>10</sup> encroachment on the wetland by farmers and private developers who were building residential houses; and the poor design of the channel's mouth.

### **1.1.6 *New Vision's* coverage and government actions**

Dumping sludge in the wetland posed two dangers. First, it meant destruction of the wetland. Secondly, there are big sewers and manholes located near the wetland. These

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<sup>7</sup> NWSC pumps about 120 million litres of fresh water into the city daily (*New Vision*, October 2, 2002).

<sup>8</sup> The size of width and depth varies but in most parts the channel has been widened from seven meters to 15 meters. The channel reportedly takes three times the water it used to take (interview with project coordinator, November 2003).

<sup>9</sup> Construction started around 1998. The method of construction is called hybrid because in some places concrete was used on both the base and the banks while in other parts of the channel concrete was used only on the banks. In other places, big stones were used on the sides and elsewhere it is just earth both on the sides and the base (interview with project coordinator, November 2003).

<sup>10</sup> China Civil Engineering Corporation (CCEC) is the contractor who is carrying out the physical construction of the channel.

transport sewage to the treatment plant where the foul liquid is treated before it can be released into the lake. The poor design of the channel's mouth, if unchanged, would have meant that foul water would enter the lake without going through the wetland for natural purification. Encroachment on the wetland by farmers and building of residential houses in the wetland also had the potential to reduce the size of the wetland and therefore the vital function of purifying the water before it enters the lake. These processes would have meant that foul water would enter the lake without natural purification. This impact would endanger human and marine life and also affect local and foreign earnings from fish. Subsequently, *New Vision* embarked on a campaign in 2001 to protect the wetland and the lake:

This was a deliberate campaign. Our policy was that whenever we would meet on Thursday in the investigation team's meeting we need to keep the Nakivubo channel on the line-up. It was an agenda. It was a sustained campaign (interview with news editor, November 2003).

The newspaper highlighted the three dangers (dumping sludge, encroachment and poor design) and called for eviction of encroachers, re-designing of the channel and a halt to dumping sludge in the wetland. The government responded by reining in the contractors and demolishing the houses, seemingly in response to the coverage.

## **1.2 Objective of the study**

This study seeks to establish whether subjects involved in media and government believe government actions were a result of *New Vision's* campaign. I asked the respondents if they thought that actions of the government officials were in any way prompted by stories in the newspaper. For example, did they (both groups) think that government officials reacted in the way they did – for example, reining in contractors and demolishing houses – because of the newspaper reports? Did they think that without the newspaper stories the wetland would have been destroyed and the lake polluted? These views were analysed in relation to the policy and practice triangle and roles of environmental journalism (outlined in Chapter Two and Chapter Three) to establish whether subjects think that coverage set the agenda and/or influenced government policy and practices. Research subjects were also asked whether they thought environmental journalism in general

affects government policy and in particular whether *New Vision*'s coverage affected policy on environment.

### **1.3 Policy on environment in Uganda**

Government policy states: "Every person in Uganda has the right to live in a healthy environment and the duty to keep the environment clean."<sup>11</sup> The overall policy goal of Uganda is "sustainable social and economic development which maintains or enhances environmental quality and resource productivity on a long-term basis that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."<sup>12</sup> This goal is the foundation of laws regarding environment in Uganda. This study is concerned primarily with policy regarding management and use of wetlands and lakes. The relevant sections of the broader environment policy are listed below.

#### **1.3.1 The Constitution**

The responsibility for management of the environment in Uganda is vested in the government by article 237 of the constitution: "The government or a local government as determined by Parliament by law, shall hold in trust for the people and protect natural lakes, rivers, wetlands, forest reserves, game reserves, national parks and any land to be reserved for ecological and touristic purposes for the common good of all citizens" (Clause (2) (b) of the Constitution).

#### **1.3.2 National Environment Statute**

The National Environment Statute was passed by parliament in 1995. It provides for sustainable management of the environment. It established the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) as a coordinating, monitoring and supervisory body for management of the environment. The Statute requires Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) of proposed projects which may significantly affect the environment or use of natural resources. NEMA reviews and approves EIAs. The law also provides for restrictions on the use of wetlands. This provision forbids anyone from reclaiming or

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<sup>11</sup> The National Environment Management Policy for Uganda, 1994

<sup>12</sup> The National Environment Action Plan for Uganda, 1995. The two documents give details of implementation procedures aimed at achieving the policy goal.

draining wetlands without written permission from NEMA. It is also forbidden to build structures in wetlands, to destroy or disturb the plants and animals living there and to introduce any exotic species. Management of environment is decentralised in Uganda. Local authorities, in this case Kampala City Council, are empowered to manage the environment in their areas of jurisdiction by implementing relevant laws and policies.<sup>13</sup>

### **1.3.3 The National Environment (Wetlands, River Banks and Lake Shores Management) Regulations<sup>14</sup>**

The objective of the regulations concerning management of wetlands is “to provide for conservation and wise use of wetlands and their resources in Uganda.”<sup>15</sup> The minister for environment may, with advice from NEMA and other stakeholders and by statutory instrument, gazette a wetland by declaring it a protected area where certain activities like cultivation and settlements are prohibited.<sup>16</sup>

### **1.4 Probing perceived impact of coverage on policy**

To probe perceived impact of *New Vision*'s coverage on government policy and practice, respondents were asked whether they thought the above policy framework and laws were sufficient for the protection of the environment. They were also asked whether they thought coverage centered on absence of a policy on wetlands, poor implementation of an existing policy or presence of a flawed policy leading to poor implementation of the project. Respondents were further asked whether they thought coverage led to a review of existing policy or formulation of a new one.

### **1.5 Research assumption**

This study was largely premised on the hypothesis that journalists believed that corrective measures implemented by government to protect the wetland and the lake were a result of *New Vision*'s coverage, while government officials believed that their actions were not

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<sup>13</sup>Every district has a District Environment Committee to co-ordinate activities of the local government relating to management of the environment and natural resources (National Environment Statute and interview with EIA coordinator, November 2003).

<sup>14</sup> The regulations were issued under statutory instrument No. 1 of 2000

<sup>15</sup> The regulations say that “wise use of wetlands” means sustainable utilisation of wetlands in a way compatible with the maintenance of the natural properties of the ecosystem.

<sup>16</sup> The National Environment (Wetlands, River Banks and Lake Shores Management) Regulations, 2000.

prompted by the media reports. However, as will be shown, the findings reveal that most journalists and majority of government officials believe that government would still have acted even without the coverage, although at a later time. This means that the findings disprove the research assumption regarding the journalists' beliefs but confirm research assumption concerning government officials' beliefs.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

It is hoped that this study will contribute to existing literature on media, and particularly to the understanding of the challenges of environmental journalism. The study suggests that environmental journalism is of significance if it affects government policy and practice. The media-government-policy triangle is explained in Chapter Two.

It is further expected that this study and its findings will help those concerned with planning and production of environment stories. Reporters and editors may find the study useful because it gives the features and constraints of environmental journalism and suggests possible solutions to the constraints. This should help media people to produce better stories that meet the needs of their targeted audiences.

### **1.7 Methods of study**

This study used qualitative individual interviews as the major method of data collection. Six journalists of *New Vision*, four editors and two reporters, were interviewed at their place of work in Kampala. Ten government officials were also interviewed at their offices. Four of the government officials are working in Kampala City Council, the implementers of the project. The purpose of the interviews was to seek perceptions of *New Vision's* impact on government policy and actions. This study also used qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods to come up with a summary of *New Vision's* coverage (see Chapter Five) as a background to the interviews. A literature review was also used to explain the theories that inform this study. The theories are discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

## **1.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has given the background to this study by explaining the status and character of *New Vision*, the background and scope of Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project, the objective and significance of the study. The chapter also outlined the general policy framework in Uganda. The research assumption was also given as well as a summary of methods of data collection. The next chapter tackles public opinion and policy theory, two of the three theories that inform this study.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICY MAKING**

##### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter is dedicated to two of the three theoretical perspectives that inform this study: public opinion theory and policy-making theory. The next chapter focuses on the third theoretical perspective – environmental journalism. This chapter defines the two major concepts: public opinion and policy, it looks at how they are formed and analyses their relationship to the media. For further illustration of media-public-policy/practice connection, I discuss two empirical studies that were carried out in the United States. This discussion will lead me to the main focus of this study – perceptions of the impact of environmental journalism on government policy and practice – in the next chapter.

##### **2.1 The concept of public opinion**

The expression “public opinion”, as originally coined by Lippman (1952), has been defined differently by a number of scholars. Parsons (1995:111) notes that public opinion can be defined as “an identifiable body of views held by a defined group and to whose opinions government attaches a standing and a significance”. Berger (2002a) calls it “a set of shared attitudes based on knowledge, beliefs, values and norms”. MacDougall (1966:24) says, “public opinion is the expression on a controversial point within an interest group”. Habermas (1964:117) says the expression public opinion refers to “the tasks of criticism and control which a public body of citizens informally – and, in periodic elections, formally as well – practices vis-à-vis the ruling structure organised in the form of a state”.

A number of points come out of the above definitions. First, public opinion refers to views or attitudes about specific issues that matter to members of a group - in the case of this study, the general public. Secondly, there is no agreement, consensus or common stand about the issues at the beginning. This means that public opinion is the end product (MacDougall, 1966) of a process through which individual attitudes are compared and

filtered – or shaped – to produce a common view that represents the group’s stand on an issue. It is worth noting that public opinion does not reflect attitudes of all members of the group because some views are rejected and therefore excluded from the end product. The inclusion or exclusion of particular views is based, in part, on the knowledge and information people possess about the issue in relation to their beliefs, values and norms (Berger, 2002a). Thirdly, individual members of the group should be able to express themselves for consensus to emerge about originally or potentially controversial issues. Fourthly, in modern times, public opinion should be able to attract attention of policy-makers or political leaders and to exercise a degree of influence upon them. Lastly, the importance of public opinion is to affect action that is to be taken about the issue. Therefore, public opinion is of significance if it reaches those responsible for directing and managing the affairs of the group, or government officials in the case of this study.

In short, even without a precise definition, public opinion can be understood in terms of its characteristics that arise from the above discussion. It can be taken to mean a mass thought, group mind or collective consciousness, widespread views or a set of shared attitudes. Media is viewed as facilitating the formation of public opinion as illustrated by media effects theories below.

## **2.2 Media and effects theory with relevance to public opinion**

That media is seen to be vital in the formation of public opinion, is based on the idea that media influence people’s attitudes, beliefs and behaviour (Berger, 2002a; Cook et al, 1983; McQuail and Windahl, 1981; McQuail, 1983; Parsons, 1995). According to Berger (2002a), the theories can be categorised into direct (primary) effects and indirect (secondary) effects theories.

## **2.3 Direct effects (primary effects) theory**

Direct or primary effects work on short-term attitudes and opinion. These can be seen in emotional responses like anger, happiness or suicides (Berger, 2002a). Such effects can be explained by the stimulus-response model and uses and gratifications model of media influence. The significance of these short-term effects is that they can feed into public opinion very powerfully.

### **2.3.1 Stimulus-response model.**

This model suggests that media has enormous power to affect receivers directly. The stimulus-response model presumes that an individual receiver responds (verbally or behaviourally) to a message, usually at an emotional level. “It presumes a more or less direct behavioural effect in line with the initiator and consistent with some overt stimulus to act in a certain way which is built into the message” (McQuail, 1983:339). Berger (2002a) notes that stimulus-response exists in affective responses like fear, tears, anger, laughter, arousal, suicides, fashions and riots. This model, also referred to as ‘bullet’ or ‘hypodermic’ theory, views the audience as passive consumers of meanings structured by the source. However, the relationship between media and audience is not this simple and straightforward. Media reception is a complex process in which receivers draw on a number of resources at their disposal, like historical and social context in which they are located, in order to make sense of media messages. Thus, the stimulus-response model has been criticised for assuming that the process of reception is “an unproblematic and uncritical process through which individuals absorb products like a sponge absorbing water” (Thompson, 1995:25). That is, the model “far exaggerates the probability of effect and the vulnerability of the receiver to influence” (McQuail, 1983:339). Consequently the model has been modified to a less-powerful view to take into account individual differences and audience variations (Berger 2002a; McQuail, 1983). Therefore, it would be too simplistic and probably misleading to expect that *New Vision* stories alone prompted actions of government officials. A look at other factors that might have played a part would be necessary. These factors would include interest group pressure like NGOs; professional environmentalists and conservationists; government’s own interests or donor pressure. Such analysis is not possible here. However, this thesis probes to what extent journalists and government officials interpret *New Vision*’s coverage in stimulus-response terms.

### **2.3.2 Uses and gratifications model**

The model argues that audience members are active rather than passive and bring to the media a variety of different needs and uses that influence their response to the media

(Curran et al, 1987; Good, 1989; McQuail and Windahl, 1981). People are seen to act on media, not vice-versa. Research under this model was in reaction to assumptions about textual determinism (e.g. stimulus-response), which saw individual behaviour as being influenced by media. The research within this tradition focused on the uses of media content for obtaining gratifications or need fulfilment. “This approach argues that people choose to use the media to gratify basic human needs – in particular the need to be connected with one’s social environment” (Good, 1989: 56). The model upholds the ‘polysemic’ nature of media messages; that is, it stresses that different members of the audience may use and interpret any particular programme in a quite different way from how the communicator intended it, and in quite different ways from other members of the audience. Thus, while some people might interpret the *New Vision* campaign against encroachers as a conservation crusade, others might interpret it as undermining real estate development and therefore general development of the country. This study investigates the extent to which the research subjects perceive impact in these terms.

This model has been criticised for over-estimating the ‘openness’ of media messages and ignoring dominant or preferred readings (Hall, 1980). Preferred reading refers to the internal logic of the text, which contains meanings the communicator wishes the audience to get. Uses and gratifications model also “assumes that people’s values, their interests and associations are pre-potent, and that people selectively fashion what they see or hear” (Morley, 1992:49). This is a problematic assumption because audiences consume what is available; they do not entirely choose what to watch, listen to or read. However, uses and gratifications model has some useful insight because audiences are not passive, even if they act on messages that already contain hegemonic meanings. This research investigates whether interviewees believe that the public makes its own opinions independent of possible hegemonic meanings in media texts, and if so, how this belief influences their perception of government’s response and assessment of the coverage.

#### **2.4 Indirect effects (secondary effects) theory**

Indirect or secondary effects of media work on long-term attitudes and opinion. Unlike direct effects, which are mainly reflected in quick emotional responses, indirect effects are slow, deeper and relatively powerful. These effects are part of the foundation of

attitudes and opinions which work on people's values, beliefs and attitudes. This level of media influence is supported by agenda-setting theory and framing theory. The significance of agenda-setting is that it sets the issues around which short-term reactions may play, and it creates a frame within which there is a preferred reading of these issues.

#### **2.4.1 Agenda-setting theory**

Agenda-setting means that media orders issues that people take to be important. Terkildsen and Schnell (1997:880) note that, "by deciding which issues to cover the media set the public agenda, which in turn influences the importance citizens ascribe to reported issues". McQuail and Windahl (1981:62) say that agenda-setting theory holds that, "the mass media simply by the fact of paying attention to some issues and neglecting others will have an effect on public opinion". The authors argue that people will tend to know about those things which the mass media deal with and adopt the order of priority assigned to different issues. This is called priming. The issues that media take to be important and meriting coverage form topics for public discussions. Such discussions help to crystallise individual views into common views that come to represent public opinion about those issues. There are many factors which might lead issues to become important to the public. Examples are interest groups, crises and the mass media. This study focuses on the role of the media only. It follows therefore that if *New Vision* elevated conservation of Nakivubo wetland over other issues at the time, this would raise public concern over the threat facing the wetland and the lake. As a result, the public would see saving the wetland as deserving very high attention from government at the time.

#### **2.4.2 Framing**

The theory of framing contends that issues can be presented in multiple ways and this may potentially influence how people think about an issue. Media framing is related to the language and imagery used in priming an issue. The media primes and frames an issue simultaneously. By using a specific language about an issue being primed, the media are seen to pair a specific frame to that issue. An example is packaging the debate about residential houses built in Nakivubo wetland as a manifestation of corruption in

Kampala City Council which authorizes all developments in the city, as opposed to incompetence on the part of those in charge of monitoring and protecting wetlands. Another way of framing the same issue is to present it as a solution to scarcity of land needed for industrial expansion as opposed to lack of relevant laws to conserve natural vegetation. Thus, as Terkildsen and Schnell (1997:881) note, “frames are the maps or internal story patterns reporters and editors draw for their readers”. The authors note that framing cognitively serves to structure the public debate, influence readers’ issue information and may also change considerations that come to bear when forming an opinion. It follows therefore that *New Vision*’s presentation of houses built in Nakivubo wetland as “encroachment” as opposed to “land reclamation” could have had the potential to draw public condemnation of the owners of the houses instead of drawing sympathy for them. What this means is that media frames are a potential source of public opinion, which was defined above as a set of attitudes among a group on a specific issue.

### **2.4.3 Overview**

Agenda-setting impact of the mass media on the public opinion has been explained in terms of leading the public to view certain issues as more important than others (priming). Agenda-setting theory and framing conceive the media as having effects at the level of defining issues, setting the agenda of social problems, and providing the terms in which those problems can be thought about. This study probes the views of journalists and political actors about their conception of priming and framing effects of the coverage in terms of their analysis of the representation and construction of public opinion.

### **2.5 The concept of policy**

Government practices have a relationship, directly or indirectly, to policy. This may be stated policy or *de facto* policy. This study is concerned with how media acts on the policy-practice through its (media) perceived power of shaping or of reflecting public opinion.

Mayer and Greenwood (1980:5) define policy as “a decision to act which is made in the name of a particular social group, which has complex implications, and which constitutes an intent to influence the group members by the provision of sanctions.” The

authors argue that policy involves sanctions, negative or positive, because it affects some people more favourably than others. This is because, for example, a decision to spend on one programme removes chances of spending for competing alternatives. Thus, a decision to spend scarce resources on the Nakivubo channel, for example, reduces chances of spending for construction of community health centers. This is why policy is also seen to have complex implications, and therefore as being coercive.

Parsons (1995) notes that an essential element in most writers' use of the term policy is purposiveness of some kind, an intended course of action, or a decision to act. But the author argues that policy can be a result of 'non-decision'. He argues that policy-makers with power or their allies have capacity to keep issues off the agenda which they control. It follows therefore that some issues may be barred from reaching the public agenda and the decision-making arena or be destroyed in the decision-implementing stage. Parsons (1995) gives an example where some cities may be active in addressing the issue of air pollution, while in another city the issue remains off the agenda simply because the city is dominated by a big industry (polluter) which uses its power to keep it outside the political arena, thereby affecting the scope and direction of decision-making. He argues that in such a case policy is seen more in what is not done than in what is seen to be done. This research seeks to establish whether subjects view policy and practice on protection of wetlands and lakes in terms of 'decision' or 'non-decision'.

## **2.6 Policy-making theory**

The policy-making process can be seen as a triangle or a circuit where specific players are the media, public and policy people (Berger, 2002a; Lindblom, 1980; Parsons, 1995). In the Nakivubo channel case, the public includes ordinary citizens, interest-group leaders and civil society groups like non-governmental organisations and businesses. In general, specialised professional fact-finding, research, private corporations, universities and research institutions also make considerable inputs (Lindblom, 1980). Policy people include policy-makers, especially politicians, and policy implementers. The latter are mainly bureaucrats.

Public opinion is seen as an integral part of policy-making and implementation process because in a democratic situation the views of the public have a bearing on

policies that are formulated. In such a situation media are also important. Media highlights a problem or covers issues that are prioritised by some sections of the population. This sparks off public discussions via the media and other forums. Here, freedom of expression is a prerequisite. Through public discussions individual views are crystallised into common views that are then taken to represent public opinion on which policy-makers may rely to determine what issues matter to the public, and to formulate policies accordingly (Yanovitzky, 2002). This conventional view of the impact of media on public opinion and policy is steeped in democratic tradition where policy is viewed as the outcome of a three-step process in which published exposés are the original cause and an activated public the crucial intermediate link (Protess et al, 1991). However, “Active Media” model is only one paradigm that explains how policy is made. Other paradigms would argue that policy-making and its implementation do not follow such a simple linear process. Below I discuss presumptions of this model and later look at the liberal democratic, bypassing civil society, manipulation and propaganda models (Berger, 2002a).

### **2.6.1 Active media model**

This model views media coverage as the active source of public opinion. This normative “hypodermic” model of journalism (Cook et al, 1983) suggests a sequence that goes as follows: First, media highlights a problem and mobilises the public around that issue. Next, a mobilised and informed citizenry demands action from leaders. Lastly, policy-makers respond by taking corrective action. In the case of this study, media would be seen to expose encroachment and potential pollution thereby arousing citizens who demand that government acts against perpetrators and work to change the relevant policies.

In this model, the objective of investigative journalists is to dig deep down for wrongdoing and to expose all kinds of societal ills. The aim is to trigger outrage from the public or policy-makers, to provoke anger against those responsible for what is exposed. These become the villains – the corrupt, greedy, wasteful, scandalous, lazy, etc. – and in most cases they are public officials. Protess et al (1991) argue that the investigative journalists get satisfaction when the citizens respond by demanding change from their

leaders. An example is United States' media disclosures of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal. The authors note that war improprieties were considered to have turned public opinion against the war, which led to changes in United States policy. "Similarly, news stories that linked top White House officials to Watergate crimes were held responsible for the public's loss of confidence in the Nixon administration, ultimately forcing the president's resignation" (1991:3).

In this view, the role of media is to act as societal watchdogs by exposing wrongdoing like political corruption, government inefficiency or corporate abuses so as to trigger public outrage – hence the name "journalism of outrage" (Protess et al, 1991). The authors (1991:11) argue that investigative journalists are reformers and not revolutionaries "because they seek to improve the system without overthrowing it." In effect, this model of journalism seeks civic betterment. MacDougall (1982) argues that investigative journalists are crusaders to those who like them and muckrakers to those who hate them. But their work remains to follow up exposés by putting consistent media heat on officials for reform.

Whether they are crusading journalists, investigative journalists or journalists of outrage, these media workers expose wrongdoing in order to trigger public outrage and right reputed wrongs (Protess et al, 1991). The authors note that this model, which is also called Mobilisation Model, is steeped in the ideal popular democracy tradition of an informed citizenry that exerts its will on an accountable government following published exposés.

The conventional wisdom is that the general public, once mobilised, becomes a catalyst for change. .... The notion is that media exposés lead to public reforms by first changing public opinion. .... Typically, corrective action is viewed as the outcome of a three-step process in which published exposés are the original cause and an activated public the crucial intermediate link (Protess et al, 1991:15).

However, as noted above, the media-policy change does not usually work in such orderly and linear way. In some cases, media can impact on policy irrespective of public opinion as other models below suggest (Cook et al, 1983; Berger, 2002a; Protess et al, 1991; Terkildsen, and Schnell, 1997).

### **2.6.2 Liberal democratic model**

Under liberal democratic model, the public is the active source of public opinion. For example, AIDS activists demanding that government provides free anti-retroviral drugs may win media coverage and affect government. This model is centered on the idea that media plays the role of liaison between citizens and governments. First, media covers issues that are prioritised by sections of the public. Next, media representations of these issues stimulate public discussions that help to crystallise individual opinions on these matters. Finally, media collects individual opinions to represent public opinion that policy-makers rely on for learning about issues that matter to the public and for feedback (Yanovitzky, 2002). This can be possible in a democratic society where media is independent and freedom of expression is guaranteed. It also requires that both media and policy-makers be committed to serving the public interest and the latter (policy-makers) are accountable to the public. It also assumes an active civil society or a skilled corporate public relations cadre. Sometimes, however, this might not be the case, leading to other models of the media-public-policy connection below.

### **2.6.3 Bypassing civil society model**

This model contends that sometimes media impacts on government irrespective of real public opinion. An example is the Home Health Care study in the United States in which actions to correct abuse and fraud in the federally-funded programme were the outcome of direct collaboration between journalists and government (Leff et al, 1986; Cook et al, 1983; Protesse et al, 1991). While corrective measures followed the exposure of abuse and fraud in Home Health Care programme by the media,

it was not the airing of the investigative report that created the impact. Nor was it the members of the public who were so aroused over the exposé that they pressured their representatives to act. Rather, it was the active collaboration between journalists and policy-makers in the ongoing process of the media investigation that created the policy outcome (Cook et al, 1983:32).

This means that public did not play an active role in the policy-making process. It also shows that the notion of popular democracy does not apply in all cases. This model rejects the idea that the general public is directly relevant to the governing process and

sees special interest groups and other elites, rather than the populace, as the key sources of pressure on public policy-makers. However, interest groups can be representative of the popular will. Proffess et al (1991) refer to direct collaboration of journalists and policy-makers as “coalition journalism”. They argue that this form of journalism proves that the relationship between the investigative journalist and policy-makers is not always adversarial but can sometimes be symbolised by cooperation. This cooperation is important because journalists depend on constant cooperation of official sources for information like government records and quotes. In turn, government officials also need coverage of their activities, which can lead to manipulation of media by such sources.

#### **2.6.4 Manipulation model**

Under this model, government is the originator of public opinion (Berger, 2002a). There is a manipulated body by government to champion its objectives. The 2003 Iraq war can serve as an example. Although pre-war opinion polls indicated that majority of U.S and British citizens did not support the war, Western media generally helped politicians to push the case for war. Thus, Greider (2003) argues that *The Washington Post's* editorial pages expressed an over-the-top pre-emptive enthusiasm for the Iraq war, “arguing the case as repetitiously as Bush and nearly as cockily Rumsfeld” and ignoring critical questions. For example, what exactly did Saddam Hussein have to do with Osama Bin Laden or the September 11 attacks? Instead of digging into these and other relevant questions, Greider noted, most reporting concentrated on war plans and Saddam’s many crimes. He said the reporting also ridiculed anti-war uproar and public demonstrations:

The shortage of critical challenges from the press assisted the manipulation of public thinking. By relentless repetition, Bush and his team accomplished an audacious feat of propaganda – persuading many Americans to redirect the emotional wounds left by September 11, their hurt and anger, away from the perpetrators to a different adversary (<http://thenation.com>).

Said (2003) also argues that the United States media’s lack of balanced and fair reporting before the Iraq war also promoted the cause of war proponents in America and Britain. He notes that Western media’s support for the 2003 Iraq war was in total disregard of the fact that it was probably the most unpopular war in United States’ modern history. Fisk

(2003) describes how media bought into the double-speak used by the invaders of Iraq (<http://news.independent.co.uk>).

What Western media coverage of the 2003 Iraq war means is that media can ignore the public and side with policy-makers. There are possible reasons to explain such a scenario, to which I come after looking at the last model.

### **2.6.5 Propaganda model**

Berger (2002a) says that under the propaganda model, media coverage is designed to please government and effectively ignores the public. But it is not clear why the author separates this model from manipulation model because both contend that media puts government above the public. The only difference I see is that the manipulation model views media as a manipulated body by government, while the propaganda model views media as pleasing government. However, it is difficult to see how media can please government without being manipulated. Therefore, in my view, manipulation and propaganda models ought to be combined.

Susceptibility of the media to government manipulation can be attributed to ownership and economic forces. For example, in Africa where most governments still maintain a monopoly over ownership of public service broadcasters, the latter have historically played a propagandist role (Berger, 2002c). Even where media organisations are largely in private ownership they are typically inclined towards the dominant ideology because of the need for advertising revenues and other economic considerations (Curran et al, 1987; Golding and Murdock, 1991; Good, 1989; Jhally, 1989). By looking at studies of the political economy of the media, the authors note that globalisation, the rise of media conglomerates and cross-ownership undermines editorial independence, leading to production of media content whose (preferred or hegemonic) meanings are determined outside newsrooms.

A propaganda role of the media can also be explained by the interaction between media professionals and their sources of information in political and state institutions. Curran et al (1987) note that this interaction takes place outside the institutions of both journalists and their 'sources' but also at the 'interface' between the media and these institutions. As noted in section 2.6.3 above, journalists depend on constant cooperation

of official sources for information like government records and quotes. In turn these institutional sources seek publicity for government plans and in the process media may run propaganda campaigns for government. Therefore, in this view, what media portray as public opinion is not a true reflection of collective public attitudes. In this case the public is marginalised in the policy-making and/or implementation process.

## **2.7 Overview**

The notion of public opinion can be argued to be a possible consequence of media coverage (at least in the past) in terms of agenda-setting and framing effects. Whether media and public opinion can have impact on policy depends on the applicability of the active media and liberal democratic models rooted in the pluralist democratic tradition. These models view policy making as a linear, three-step process or triangle where the public are directly involved in governance. But as other models demonstrate, the whole process is sometimes an incomplete triangle where the public is left out. To demonstrate this argument further, I look below at two Western empirical studies of the media-public-policy/practice connection. The significance of this is that this thesis asks interviewees why, in their view, the public was not part of the coverage and what this meant for the government reactions to the coverage.

## **2.8 Empirical studies from the United States of America**

A number of empirical studies (Cook et al, 1983; Terkildsen and Schnell, 1997; Yanovitzky, 2002) have been carried out in the United States to examine the impact of the media on public opinion and policy. The studies concluded that media coverage of issues influences the importance citizens ascribe to those issues. The studies also found that coverage of issues alters policy-makers' perception of issue importance and their perception of the public's view of issue importance. Examples are media coverage of fraud in Home Health Care programme and Drunk Driving (DD).

### **2.8.1 Home Health Care**

Cook et al (1983) examined the effect of a televised investigative news report in the United States. The report, aired by NBC in 1981, was the outcome of an extensive

journalistic investigation of fraud and abuse in the federally funded home health care programme. Using an experimental design built around that single media event, they concluded that there was a clear agenda-setting effect of the programme.

The findings indicated that members of the general public who saw the media report changed their perceptions of issue importance and altered their policy priorities. The study also revealed that the media coverage “altered government policy elites’ perception of the issue’s importance, their belief that policy action was necessary, and their perception of the public’s view of issue importance” (Cook et al, 1983:28). However, their own (policy-makers) issue priorities did not change.

This study suggests that media may affect the public and policy-makers differently and its influence on policy-makers may be only in terms of perceptions of issue importance to the public and not on their own actual policy priorities. For example, the study revealed that following this particular news report, the issue of fraud and abuse in home health care went up from four to two in the priority ranking of the public, but it remained last on government policy-makers’ policy priorities.

Therefore, while the news media coverage to home health care impacted on the belief that policy action was necessary, new political action was not a direct consequence of the coverage. Actual changes resulted more from direct pressure for “reform” by the journalists themselves than from demands by the general public or political constituencies (Leff et al, 1986; Cook et al, 1983). An example of activities that followed the media event were Senate hearings that resulted in calls for new laws to curb abuse in the home health care programme. The authors note that the public was almost completely bypassed in the process. This corresponds to the model in 2.6.3, which is demonstrated by “coalition journalism.”

### **2.8.2 Drunk Driving (DD)**

Yanovitzky (2002) studied media coverage of the problem of drunk driving in the United States between 1978 and 1995. He argues that based on the results, one can say that intensive periods of media attention to issues are instrumental in attracting policy attention to problems that are low on policy-makers’ agendas, and that they create a sense of urgency among policy-makers to generate immediate, short-term solutions to public

problems. “Once media attention decreases in intensity, related policy outputs decrease as well and gradually shift from ad hoc solutions to long-term solutions for the problems” (Yanovitzky, 2002: 445). This highlights the need to distinguish between policy attention and policy action. Yanovitzky notes that it is right to think of policy attention as a cognitive response to media cues. However, he adds, policy actions are slower to change in response to increased media attention because they are constrained by external circumstances and organisational routines such as legal and budgetary considerations, committee work and so on.

Subjects in my research were asked whether or not they thought government actions in regard to Nakivubo wetland and Lake Victoria were a result of *New Vision*'s coverage. In addition, the participants were asked whether they thought external factors, for example donor pressure, explain why government officials acted in ways similar to solutions advocated by the newspaper (evictions, stopping dumping sludge and re-designing the channel's mouth) and whether or not this reflected policy omissions.

There are three possible external factors relevant to this research. The first is government officials' stand prior to the coverage. It is very likely that government officials were opposed to swamp destruction and lake pollution before *New Vision* highlighted these dangers. Therefore, a link between *New Vision*'s coverage and actions of government officials may be a result of similarity in solutions advocated in the newspaper and the officials' own stand prior to the coverage. Secondly, *New Vision*'s coverage was one-sided (against swamp destruction and lake pollution) simply because nobody would argue for the opposite, given the strength of conservation and anti-pollution sentiment around the world. The third factor is the extent to which *New Vision*'s coverage served government officials' interests, in this case protecting the environment. My research sought to establish whether participants think the above three factors might explain why government officials acted in ways similar to solutions advocated by *New Vision*.

## **2.9 Why media may not affect policy action directly**

The above empirical studies suggested that although heightened media attention may attract policy-makers' attention to certain issues, there may be a very low likelihood that

this coverage will alter their policy priority rankings. Yanovitzky (2002) argues that this is because,

At any given moment, the political system is grappling with a great number of tangible problems that vie for leaders' attention. Because leaders can only attend to a very small number of them at a time, they typically rely on these routines to prioritise their activities (2002: 425).

The author notes that while the issue of drunk driving was examined in isolation from media and policy attention to other problems, "there is little doubt that the simultaneous competition between issues that seek media and policy attention has an important role in shaping the dynamics of the media-policy connection" (2002: 446). This argument is supported by Cook et al (1983):

Government policy elites are continually being barraged about important policy issues from various sources. They cannot change their priority rankings easily (1983:28).

It follows therefore that it would be desirable to study several issues competing for attention of media and policy-makers at the same time for a better understanding of media's impact on policy. For reasons of focus and space, this study will only probe to what extent journalists and government officials perceive impact of *New Vision's* coverage on public opinion and government practice, and will not study other issues that may have been competing with Nakivubo channel for attention.

## **2.10 Conclusion**

Public opinion has been defined broadly in this chapter as a set of attitudes, collective views or group mind intended to influence action in regard to specific issues. The media role in formation of public opinion and policy is mainly in making issues important to the public and policy people. At the same time, there are various reasons why an issue can become salient and media coverage is only one of them. Other factors include interest groups and crises. Public opinion is of significance if it, or its perceived presentation by media, can affect action in regard to those issues around which a group mind has been formed. The view that public opinion (and media) can affect policy and/or policy implementation is supported by the liberal democratic and active media models, steeped

in the pluralist view of democracy which see the public and the media as directly involved in governance.

This chapter has also looked at media effects theories under two categories: primary and secondary effects. Indirect effects of media are slow and work on long-term attitudes and opinion. Direct effects theories view people as responding to media messages directly. Within a context of indirect effects (such as establishing credibility in the eyes of the public or government), media is seen to have short-term effects that feed into public opinion, policy and practice powerfully. In this case, actions of government officials or the public view on Nakivubo project could be seen as a result of *New Vision*'s coverage. But as home health care and drunk driving studies suggest, policy and practice is not always a result of pressure from the public. Rather, the public is sometimes bypassed in the whole process, leaving the triangle incomplete. Factors that make the media seem to have influence on decisions and behaviour of policy-makers and implementers include the degree to which news coverage serves their interests, available options and their own stand on the issue prior to its discovery by the media (Yanovitzky, 2002). Therefore, the response of policy-makers and implementers to news stories can be put in context by looking at other factors in play. In addition, these actors may be affected by the extent to which they perceive media coverage to represent actual public opinion, or as having impact in creating public opinion around a particular issue.

Against the backdrop, this study will probe the extent to which *New Vision* is seen to have influenced actions and practices of government officials, via understanding perceptions of media relevance to public opinion and policy practice. The study will not stretch to probing other possible factors that might have played a part in prompting policy actions. This investigation of the perceived impact of *New Vision*'s coverage on government officials' actions will look at a particular kind of journalistic practice, environmental journalism, which is the focus of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **ENVIRONMENTAL JOURNALISM**

##### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter is devoted to environmental journalism, which is the third and last theoretical perspective that informs this study. The first two perspectives, public opinion theory and policy theory, were covered in the last chapter. This chapter discusses roles of environmental journalism – its character, complexities, contradictions and also the constraints on the practice. The relevance of this discussion is that this thesis seeks to establish perceptions about the nature of *New Vision*'s coverage of Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project, how the form of journalism was perceived and how this in turn influenced the perceived impact on government policy and implementation.

##### **3.1 Objectivity and environmental journalism**

Environmental journalism as a recognised practice distinct from other forms of reporting began in the 1970s (Berger, 2002b). In 1968 only one journalist in the United States was identified as a 'specialist' environment reporter in the *Editor & Publisher Yearbook* (De Mott and Tom, 1990). After the first Earth Day in the United States in 1970 the number of environment reporters in the United States rose to 100 in 1973 before stabilising at 58 in 1988. Frome (1998) argues that environmental journalism is communication designed to present the public with sound and accurate data as the basis of informed participation in the process of decision-making on environmental issues. He argues in addition that environmental journalists "ought to be advocates for the health and safety of the planet, professionally and personally concerned with global warming, acid rain, destruction of tropical forests, loss of wilderness and wildlife, toxic wastes, pollution of air and water, and population pressures that degrade the quality of life" (1998: ix).

There is debate as to whether environmental journalism can avoid taking sides because of its advocacy nature (Frome, 1998). Most specialist journalists who report on environment have a strong sympathy for environmental protection and belong to the breed of naturalists or conservationists (Chowdhury, 2000). As such, they are not free from “bias”, something “mainstream” or “conventional” journalism says should never happen. Conventional journalism emphasises commitment to professional philosophies of “objectivity”, impartiality and fairness, with a claim that journalism is not supposed to take sides (Curran et al, 1987). Journalists are expected to be neutral, to separate fact from opinion and to keep aloof from societal controversies.

One school of thought believes that there is no such a thing as objectivity (Chowdhury, 2000; Frome, 1998). This school argues that the fact that journalists make judgements in selecting what constitutes news means that they are not mere spectators or chroniclers of information. Frome (1998: x) argues that objectivity “does not promote as much digging into contrary views as the alternative of advocacy.” He adds that if objectivity means presenting ‘facts’ and balanced views without giving direction to the audience then it has no place in environmental journalism. The author further argues that environmental journalism, though based on sound data and thorough research, also reflects the author’s “imagination, deep inner feeling, and desire to advance the cause of a better world” (Frome, 1998:22-23). Thus, environmental reporters are strongly sympathetic to the cause of environmental protection and some of them have become campaigners and have set up their own environmental groups. Even those who have not become activists usually express basic points of view of sympathy with environmentalists’ viewpoint and are regarded as allies by environmentalists (Chowdhury, 2000; Frome, 1998; Lowe and Morrison, 1984). My view is that if all journalism makes judgements, then advocacy is not different except that it is “a catch-all word for the set of skills used to create a shift in public opinion and mobilise the necessary resources and forces to support an issue, policy or constituency” (See Wallack et al, 1993: 27).

Frome (1998:xii) argues that advocacy journalism “serves the interest of God-given nature and humanity rather than of those who exploit and profit from them.” In a

struggle between corporate polluters and victims, environmental journalism would be on the latter's side, as Barnett (2002) found out in his case study of environmental political mobilisation in Durban, South Africa. My point is that while environmental journalists are expected to rely on facts, it is nevertheless often presented as being legitimate for them to engage in proactive reporting, blending science and politics with a social justice value orientation (Wallack et al, 1993), and, as advocates, to advance a cause for the health and safety of the planet. This study will use this understanding to investigate whether the respondents think *New Vision's* coverage exhibited advocacy reporting, and whether they think the coverage was special and different from other kinds of journalism. In turn, I will probe whether this matter had specific bearing on perceptions of impact.

### **3.2 Roles of environmental journalism**

Berger (2002b) notes that environmental journalism has played mainly three roles: agenda-setting, watchdog and celebratory roles. Below I discuss these roles in this order. While the roles are not unique to environmental journalism, they are still nevertheless essential components of environmental journalism. Because this thesis probes the perceived role of *New Vision's* coverage in the protection of Nakivubo wetland and Lake Victoria, this makes it important to consider the roles of environmental journalism.

#### **3.2.1 Agenda-setting**

The agenda-setting role of the media, as discussed in the previous chapter, means that media help transform certain issues into major issues for the public. Kwansah-Aidoo (2001) cites studies undertaken in Canada, Finland and Ghana which found agenda-setting effects in relation to environmental issues. He says the studies confirmed a relationship between media coverage of environmental issues and public opinion about those issues. For example, his own study in Ghana found that the media played an important role in making the public aware of the enormity of the problem of waste management/disposal in the capital Accra and other cities. His evidence was conclusive mainly among educated city dwellers in Ghana, but in general the study showed that the audience's environmental agenda was influenced by the media's environmental agenda.

He concluded that Ghanaian media coverage transforms environment issues into major issues for the public audience.

However, media is not the only factor that brings environmental issues or problems to the forefront. Apart from investigative journalism, an issue may come to the forefront as a result of a dramatic event such as a nuclear explosion or revelations by activists (Campbell, 1999). Thus, it is argued (Parsons, 1995), the media agenda-setting process in the case of environment is easily noticeable because its ups and downs coincide with disasters and ‘crises’ of various kinds. “Further more, environmental issues also have three other kinds of advantages: They are visible, they are events which impact on the public as a whole and they are relatively simple to identify in terms of cause and effect” (Parsons, 1995: 117). As will be seen in subsequent chapters, these insights inform this thesis on the *New Vision* case study.

### **3.2.2 Watchdog role**

Berger (2002b) argues that if media coverage serves to transform discrete environmental issues into major issues for audiences, this means that environmental journalism has also played a role of mobilising civic action. Drawing from a range of writers, he says that many environment stories are framed as a drama of choice between ‘save the planet or go under’. The author notes that reporting on environment is different from general reportage that tends to portray people’s powerlessness to change negative trends. He cites an example of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda as exhibiting this feature of general reportage. He argues that environmental journalism’s distinctiveness can stimulate questions of social accountability of businesses and governments, and should therefore be hailed as positive. Implicit in all this is the idea that media acts as watchdog, which in turn is rooted in Western ideology which sees media as protecting citizens’ rights and representing the broad public in holding the powerful accountable to society (Berger, 2000). The author says that journalists are seen to be autonomous from political forces, owners, advertisers and other vested interests. He notes that this liberal conception stresses professional ideologies of editorial independence, objectivity, fairness, balance, freedom of expression and access to information held by the state. He says the institution

of media constitutes an important check on power and an aid to accountability, especially in regard to the state.

It follows that if environmental journalists are to act as a watchdog on the powerful in the public interest, one way they can do this is by investigative journalism, as touched upon in the previous chapter. This calls for close monitoring of government programmes on water and sanitation, land redistribution policies and their impact on environment and people's living conditions. Environmental journalists also need to be on the lookout for possible pollution and degradation to expose offenders. As a watchdog on the powerful in the public interest, environmental journalists engage in proactive advocacy (Berger, 2002b). This role has a bearing on the topic of this thesis, as will be discussed in the ensuing chapters.

### **3.2.3 Celebratory roles**

Berger (2002b) says that environmental journalism can independently celebrate successes and popularise people participating in clean-up campaigns. In covering degradation, reporters overtly or covertly identify villains, heroes and victims. Some organisations like GreenPeace have been successful before global media as champions of the cause of a clean, healthy and safe world. Hannigan (1995) cites an example of the 1994 coverage of public hearings into a request by a joint Canadian-American venture to convert an unused oil pipeline running through rural Ontario to a natural gas conveyance:

Rather than examine the technical, economic and environmental feasibility of the project, the reporter chose to emphasise the participation as an intervener of Jean Lewington, the widow of an area farmer who has spent thirty years successfully fighting a previous pipeline extension, thereby changing the way utility companies must deal with farmers and their land. This frame was accented by a photograph of Mrs. Lewington in front of a barn and a headline which read 'Farm widow refights old pipeline foe' (1995: 71).

The 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, also turned into a media blitz for celebrities and politicians. Among those attending were US President George Bush, British Prime Minister John Major, German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Cuban President Fidel Castro and more than a hundred other heads of state, and an estimated 12,000 representatives of NGOs and celebrities. All were celebrated as friends of nature. While

this role is not unique to environmental journalism, it is often a feature thereof and will be probed in terms of the perceptions of actors in Nakivubo channel case.

### **3.2.4 Influencing government policy and practice**

A number of authors (Berger, 2002b; Parsons, 1995; Vieira, 1985) argue that media has also played an important role in the public's ecological consciousness through educating and alerting the population against degradation risk and voicing people's opinions and complaints about the quality of life they experience. As lay people become better informed about the causes and consequences of pollution, they begin to participate in the debate and are prepared to take action in defence of a better quality of human life compatible with respect for nature. Hannigan (1995:58) says that media is crucial in moving environmental problems from conditions to issues and to policy concerns: "Without media coverage it is unlikely that an erstwhile problem will either enter the arena of public discourse or become part of the political process." Vieira (1985) argues that in some countries media has had significant impact as regards policy-makers. She says that a study of Canadian mass media in 1960s and 1970s revealed that the media led to political recognition and institutionalising of environmental concerns at all levels of the political system. She adds that, "the power of media in changing governmental policies was apparent in India, when public pressure through the media caused authorities to reconsider projects like the Silent Valley hydroelectric plant in Kerata and the industrial complex of Mathura, which was likely to damage the Taj Mahal" (1985:61). However, actual impact of media on policy in such a case is difficult to assess (Berger, 2002b). Accordingly, this thesis covers relatively uncharted, and certainly complex, territory.

### **3.2.5 Bringing people into the picture**

Berger (2002b) says that in the 1980s world leaders and international financial institutions linked sustainable development to environmental protection. He argues that the fusing of developmentalism and environmentalism meant that development and environment have become international concerns and can no longer be addressed as local or national matters. Environmentalism was expanded from only addressing conservation

to include industrial wastes, mining, pollution and aspects of economic development. That is, what was previously concerned with “green” issues came to encompass “brown” issues as well because they all affect people. Therefore, much environmental journalism has come to address pro-people development, not to focus on the interests of nature only. This means that in addition to the four roles outlined above, environmental journalism can empower communities with information to enable them get involved in decision-making. In this role, it interprets and analyses events and trends in society, and examines their impact on human conditions of both present and future generations. In probing perceptions in this thesis, the developmental-environmental axis will not be interrogated for purposes of space and focus.

### **3.3 Characteristics of environmental reporting**

As Berger (2002b) notes, looking at how environment gets onto the news agendas reveals some problematic characteristics of environmental journalism and raises concerns of whether it can play its roles satisfactorily. Below I discuss these characteristics.

#### **3.3.1 Sources**

There is over-reliance on elite groups like scientists and government officials as authoritative sources of information. Pressure groups and average citizens get relatively low exposure within environment news (Berger, 2002b; Stocking and Leonard, 1990). For example, a study of the 1969 oil spill in Santa Barbara, California, found that powerful figures (US President, federal officials) and organisations (oil company representatives) were more likely to function as news sources than were conservationists and local officials (Hannigan, 1995). The author notes that “these sources exercise considerable social and political power by providing a pre-packaged, self-serving and socially-constructed interpretation of a given set of events or circumstances – an interpretation that is readily adopted by journalists who rarely have the time or the specialised knowledge needed to flesh out their own news angle” (1995:60). Stocking and Leonard (1990) note that claims of scientists who disagree with majority of their colleagues rarely get into the media:

The majority of the scientific community – a substantial majority, 70 to 80 percent, believe (sic) the greenhouse effect is real, that there has been some global warming. It is only a minority of the scientific community that believe that all this is a bunch of hooey. But journalists seldom say that second part ... they are sacrificing truth for balance. The result is rampant confusion among citizens and policy-makers concerning risks that, addressed or not, may affect their health, their habitat and their pocketbooks (1990: 8).

Over-reliance on formal political actors and scientists is partly because many journalists feel inadequate evaluating scientific information that forms the bulk of environment stories (Weinberg, 1996). Weinberg argues that in fact reporters rely more heavily on government regulators as sources for environment stories than many other beats.

However, Barnett (2002) also found that media relied heavily on environmental activists for recent coverage of industrial pollution around Durban City, South Africa. The author notes that this coverage brought to the forefront the negative living conditions of ordinary people and helped to popularise public protest against pollution. This is, however, in part due to ability of activists to mobilise the community and to establish links with the media to invite them to give attention to their cause and events. As shown later, this thesis has taken up these points and sought to establish whether *New Vision* over-relied on any type of sources in the Nakivubo Channel coverage (see Chapter Five, section 5.7.2) and what this meant to subjects in terms of impact of coverage on government policy and practice.

### **3.3.2 Event orientation**

Most environment stories are about immediate crises and dramatic events (Berger, 2002b). Stocking and Leonard (1990) note that immediate problems like oil spills interest editors. The authors quote Dianne Dumanoski, environmental reporter for the *Boston Globe* saying that immediate environmental problems – oil spills for example – interest editors more “because they can understand that.” She adds that, “it’s hard to sell editors a story on slow death.... especially when you are talking about 30 years in the future” (1990: 6). Consequently, future problems like chronic oil releases into the sea get less attention although they may pose a greater problem in the long run.

Event-centered reporting leads to inconsistent coverage. For example, media coverage of environment in US increased towards the first national Earth Day in 1970 but dipped in the weeks after. The amount of reporting in Brazil also grew rapidly in the two years leading up to the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and then largely disappeared once the meeting ended (Detjen, 2001). However, Berger (2002b) says that long-running stories about problems whose effects will become clearly visible in the future, like global warming, ozone depletion and acid rain, have also received considerable coverage. Barnett (2002) also found that media in South Africa have tended to move from event-centered reporting to story-narratives and coverage that is people-centered in attempt to reach hitherto ignored and excluded audiences. He says that media coverage of industrial pollution around Durban city in recent years took a human-interest angle and focused on risks and hazards and was able to reconcile the long-term frame with the daily character of news. But Hannigan notes that, in order to fit into news agenda, “journalists are required to picture them (slow environmental hazards like global warming, ozone depletion, etc) as the recent outcome of an event rather than the inevitable outcome of a series of political and societal decisions” (1995: 65). Therefore, much of environmental journalism is centered around events. In this regard, this thesis analysed the character of *New Vision*'s reporting on the processes around the Nakivubo Channel Project (see Chapter Five, section 5.7).

### **3.3.3 Negativism**

Negative news is preferred over positive news in journalism though not all news is negative. But for Lowe and Morrison (1984: 78), “environment is simply not an area where positive news is to be found; in principle it is a story of regression rather than advancement.” Thus we have potential or actual disasters at nuclear power stations, oil spillages, pollution, deforestation and so on. Emphasis on negative developments, which are a result of technological advancement, poses a challenge to the logic of industrial capitalism. Lowe and Morrison (1984) say that even where positive elements exist in environmental journalism, they become news by being compared to the negative. For example, reporting on introduction of rare fauna in a natural habitat often follows extinction caused by man. Therefore, the reporting is still not positive.

Furthermore, Hannigan (1995: 65) says that, “environmental catastrophes are the bread and butter of environmental news coverage.” News about environmental disasters is generally framed pessimistically and disasters are sometimes portrayed as depicting failures of technological innovation. Sometimes the news becomes alarmist (Berger, 2002b) and gives a wrong picture of reality (Campbell, 1999). Negativism in environment news is a result of conventional news values, which make events that can be categorised as drama, scandal and surprise more newsworthy in the eyes of editors. This thesis probes how subjects in the Nakivubo case compare environment stories with other kinds of stories like politics or economics in terms of newsworthiness.

### **3.3.4 Frames**

By using a specific language about an issue, the media defines the terms in which it can be thought about. An example is South Africa where “the conversion of agricultural land to game ranches is generally framed as a tourism positive with little assessment of the social retrenchment and displacement of farm workers” (Berger, 2002b: 7). The author reports others who note that Chernobyl was widely framed as a unique cold war incident rather than an issue around nuclear power. The 1986 explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in Ukraine resulted in immediate death of about 30 people and the subsequent death of a disputed number in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus. This thesis probes perceived framing of *New Vision*'s stories and what this means in regard to government policy and practice in the minds of subjects.

### **3.3.5 Trivialisation**

Sometimes media downgrade serious issues into simple stories because of chosen frames and event-oriented coverage.

By focussing on discrete events rather than on the context in which they occur, the media tend to give news consumers the impression that individuals or errant corporations rather than institutional politics and social development are responsible for those events. This is especially the case with environmental catastrophes (Hannigan, 1995: 65).

Hannigan cites an example of the 1989 *Exxon Valdez* oil spill in the US where the media framed the story in terms of the ship captain's alcoholism problems rather than more

serious frames like lax maritime safety standards or the oil industry's lack of capability in cleaning up large oil spills. This is because of the tendency to keep reporting in the usual narrow news format which does not allow background explanation. What this means is that media does not help in identifying underlying causes of problems and as a result the problems often remain unattended to.

### **3.4 Overview**

From the characteristics of environmental reporting outlined above, it is clear that it often falls short of providing comprehensive interpretations of causes, consequences and possible solutions. It does not simply empower people to get involved in advocating for a better quality of human life compatible with respect for nature. This means that environmental journalism is often far from fulfilling its roles in society because of its character. This thesis probes perceptions about the success of *New Vision*'s reporting in terms of affecting government policy and practice.

### **3.5 Environment story not a priority**

Media coverage of environment issues is not only low, but environment stories also often get relegated to the bottom of the radio and television running order or are buried deep within the pages of newspapers (Campbell, 1999; Hannigan, 1995; Stocking and Leonard, 1990). This is because news editors consider environment not 'newsworthy' and as such the environment story comes low on their priority lists (De Mott and Tom, 1990). Some of the factors that influence positioning of stories are explained below. The relevance of these factors is that this thesis analysed positioning of selected stories as a basis for interview research. Subjects were later asked what they thought were the factors that influenced positioning of selected stories and whether or not they thought *New Vision* gave enough prominence to Nakivubo Channel project and what this meant to them in terms of the coverage's impact on government policy and practice.

#### **3.5.1 Non-political nature**

Campbell (1999:71) investigated environmental journalism in Scotland and concluded that environmental issues are treated as less newsworthy "because the media play a part

in setting the political agenda, and the environment is positioned far down that agenda.” While it may be misleading to consider environmental issues as non-political issues, it is true that they do not fall under what most people regard as unambiguously political matters like party or national elections, national budgets, corruption and so on. However, the non-political nature of many environment stories can be an advantage because “they can be depicted in non-partisan terms, allowing journalists to foster environmental protest at the same time as appearing to maintain a politically balanced stance” (Hannigan, 1995: 68). Media can exploit this perception to carry out campaigns without offending anybody:

Though the environment is very political, it is not necessarily seen as such at the editorial level. It does not have any identifiable political or class partnership which marks the brittle areas of race, education or industrial affairs. .... At editorial level, a major attraction of environmental issues is that they are public interest issues of a non-partisan nature. ... They allow expression of political ‘outrage’ or concern without the danger of giving political offence to readers or viewers (Lowe and Morrison, 1984: 80).

Therefore, environmental issues are often viewed as non-controversial (Chapman et al, 1997) and the media can use this perception productively. However, it is evident from this discussion that the environment may not be a priority for editors. With all this in mind, this study asked subjects why *New Vision* was interested in the Nakivubo Channel and whether or not they thought the coverage was political or had political implications.

### **3.5.2 Soft news versus hard news**

Environmental news is often covered from the human-interest perspective and is thus classified as ‘soft’ news as opposed to hard news (Campbell, 1999). Soft news is descriptive, analytical and interpretive and in most cases not dramatic. The author argues that environment news is treated as a kind of “last time” on the news. Thus, environmental issues are regarded as less newsworthy due to their “softness”. The majority of the stories are about future problems that will culminate in many years. These stories may be written in the form of features that explain causes, trends and consequences of events and problems. It is only environmental disasters (for example an accident at a nuclear plant) that are dramatic, have an element of crisis and fall under

“hard” news. For this reason they command immediate attention of editors. The softer stories, however, are less of a priority. This thesis probed whether *New Vision*’s stories on Nakivubo Channel project were mainly ‘soft’ or ‘hard’ and whether this may explain the amount of *New Vision*’s coverage in relation to other issues (political, economic, social, etc.) and the subsequent perceived impact on the public, government policy and practice.

### **3.5.3 Lack of immediacy**

The classification of many environment stories as “soft” news means that they lack an important news value found in disasters – “immediacy”. Campbell (1999) quotes journalists she interviewed as saying that environment news is not given priority because the issues are generally classed as long-term problems which take time to develop: “It is the environmental disaster which takes precedence” (1999: 13). Thus, unless an environment story contains dramatic or tragic events, it will always be relegated to the lower part of the broadcast schedule or newspaper. Subjects were asked whether this characteristic was a factor in coverage and whether this affected the way the public and government officials reacted to the coverage.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have looked at the history and character of environmental journalism as a distinct practice from other kinds of journalism. My point is that environmental journalism is intrinsically advocacy journalism as elaborated in section 3.1. This chapter has also outlined the major roles of environmental journalism and gone on to argue that the environment story is not a priority to editors. This link between environmental problems, media and policy/practice, as discussed in the previous chapter, is the major concern of this study. Because media’s actual impact on policy is difficult to measure (Berger, 2002b), this study focuses on perceived impact of *New Vision*’s coverage (discussed in Chapter Six) particularly on the actions of government officials.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter focuses on methodological issues in the study. This research used mainly a qualitative methodology but also gave consideration to quantitative methodology for purposes of analysing the coverage. However, the study remains located in the qualitative research tradition/interpretive paradigm because the main focus is perceptions of participants. This chapter explains the rationale for situating the study within the interpretive paradigm. Choice of data collection methods is justified. Data collection and analysis techniques are also described.

#### **4.1 The qualitative research tradition**

Qualitative research has various applications including critical theory, interpretive paradigm, hermeneutics and naturalistic inquiry (Strelitz, 2002). Qualitative research is different from quantitative research in philosophy and objectives. The latter, because of its adherence to positivism and empiricism, is pre-occupied with developing law-like generalisations about the relations of social facts that establish connections of cause and effect (Deacon et al, 1999). On the other hand, the central concern of interpretive tradition is not with establishing cause-effect relations but to understand people's interpretations of the world around them (Cohen and Marion, 1994; Deacon et al, 1999). However, both qualitative and quantitative approaches are useful in social investigation and the choice of either methodology depends on the research goal (Bryman, 1988; Seidman, 1991).

The interpretive approach is appropriate in attempts to understand perceptions of the impact of media coverage on government actions because its central endeavour is to "understand the subjective world of human experience" and it relies on the human being as the central instrument of research (Cohen and Marion, 1994: 36).

The approach was also deemed suitable for this research because it endeavours to understand social phenomena from the view of the research subject. That is, to see

through the eyes of those being investigated (Bryman, 1988). In this line, the primary objective of this research is to understand perceived impact of media coverage on government policy and practice from the point of view of the journalists and government officials who are the research subjects.

The aim of interpretive research is to understand how people make meaning out of social phenomena or what sense they make out of their social world. This approach enabled me to understand what sense the respondents made out of media coverage of the project, how they understood the messages in the stories and how they understood government actions in relation to the coverage.

Unlike the positivist paradigm, which advocates for ‘independent’ or ‘objective’ investigators to stand outside the social phenomena being studied, the interpretive paradigm calls for methods of inquiry that involve interaction – in line with ethnographic practices developed by anthropologists (Deacon et al, 1999). Thus, this approach enabled me to interact with research subjects during interviews in my endeavours to tease out their perceptions.

#### **4.2 Data collection techniques**

Seidman (1991: 4) notes that “the adequacy of a research method depends on the purpose of the research and the questions being asked”. Two techniques of gathering data are used in this study, namely interviewing and quantitative content analysis. The techniques were chosen because of their respective capacities to generate data relevant to the research question. Interviewing is the primary technique because it fosters exploration of subjects’ perceptions. Content analysis was chosen as a secondary technique to help understand the nature of coverage. The results of this were crucial in designing questions for the interviews.

#### **4.3 Content Analysis**

Hansen et al (1998: 95) note that the purpose of content analysis is “to identify and count the occurrence of specified characteristics or dimensions of texts, and through this, to be able to say something about the messages, images, representations of such texts and their wider social significance.” The authors note that it is not unusual for studies of news

production to combine interviews of media professionals and their sources with content analysis. This study did exactly that.

The authors say that content analysis allows for establishing how often different aspects of texts occur. This helps to identify some features that are prominent or absent in the coverage. In line with this, I did an elementary content analysis of *New Vision's* coverage of the rehabilitation project in order to identify and count the occurrence of specified characteristics of the stories like frequency, genre, positioning, and so on.

Another purpose of my content analysis was to determine the nature of coverage by looking at prominent features in the stories to establish whether they fit in the characteristics of environmental journalism discussed in Chapter Three. For example, whether the stories on the project were mainly on the inside pages, how often they appeared in the paper, whether the coverage was mainly negative, whether the paper was supportive of the project or saw it as a waste of money, whether or not there was over-reliance on certain types of sources, whether stories took on long-term or event-oriented frame, soft news against hard news, and so on.

Knowing the nature of reporting would be meaningless if participants were not going to be asked whether, in their view, it implied a special kind of reportage and whether they thought government actions were influenced by the coverage. I therefore sought participants' perceptions about the nature of the reporting, what it meant to them in relation to the character and roles of environmental journalism and what they thought was its significance in the implementation of the project. Therefore, analysis of the reportage provided raw material for the interview guide and questions. It helped to inform and structure the questions in the subsequent interview research.

#### **4.3.1 Sampling**

Hansen et al (1998: 100) say that, "it is rarely either possible or desirable to analyse absolutely all media coverage of a subject or issue." I narrowed down the type of coverage to be analysed by selecting dates and content which were relevant to the objective of this study, as I explain below.

The wider framework of this study is perceived impact of environmental journalism on government policy and practice. However, environment is a very wide

subject and it is difficult to determine what is or is not an environment story. The fusing of environmentalism and developmentalism changed the focus of environmental journalism from “green” issues to “brown” issues encompassing all issues that affect conditions of human living. Conversely, too, a story about a proposed dam or factory is no longer purely a development story but has an environment angle as well. Consequently, the line separating environmental stories from others is thin and environment today has no clear news beat. Hannigan (1995: 66) talks of a reporter who described the environment story as a ‘business-medical-scientific-economic-political-social-pollution story’. To avoid getting bogged down by issues of definition of an environment story, I narrowed the focus down to coverage of Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project as a case study. The coverage, though informative like other reporting, placed particular emphasis on the need to conserve Nakivubo wetland and to protect Lake Victoria against pollution.

Analysing all stories about the project would give me huge volumes of data, much of which would be irrelevant to the objective of the study. For example, stories announcing a planned closure of a city road for a limited period to allow installation of underground culverts would not be of significance to the research. Accordingly, I left out such stories and selected those that made reference to protection of the wetland and the lake or dangers facing them.

While the project started earlier and was still ongoing at the time of writing this report, I chose the period from May 2000 to September 2003 because my initial observation indicated that the coverage about dangers facing the lake and the wetland occurred during this period. Interventions by government officials (reining in contractors and encroachers) also took place during the same period. Subsequent coverage after September 2003 was mainly follow-ups on earlier stories and actions. Hansen et al (1998: 101) observe that sampling of the period to be analysed “depends essentially on whether the subject of analysis relates to a specific event or whether it concerns the mapping of some general dimension of coverage....” The authors note that in the case of specific events “the period to be analysed is ‘naturally’ defined by the time and dates of the event concerned” (Hansen et al, 1998: 101-2). This study treated the rehabilitation project and the problems highlighted by *New Vision* as events. Accordingly, sampling and the period

of study were determined by the period during which these events (rehabilitation and coverage) took place.

After identifying the relevant stories, I defined analytical categories. In categorising stories for analysis, I included only dimensions that were relevant to the research question. The dimensions included genre, types of sources, source context, position of story and so on, as shown on the coding schedule (See Appendix A) where they are listed as variables to be coded for each article (Hansen et al, 1998).

Hansen et al (1998) observe that value-dimensions or stance can be determined from overall impressions the coder gets from the story. I used this approach and formed overall impressions after reading each story. I would determine the tone and decide whether it was to be coded as negative, positive or mixed. For example, the tone of stories about dumping sludge in the wetland was interpreted as ‘it is bad, it should be stopped’ and therefore portrayed the contractors and supervisors in a negative way. Such stories were coded as negative. This also means that there was an element, though minor, of qualitative analysis of the stories.

Before embarking on full coding, the coding schedule was first tried out or ‘piloted’ on a small sample of ten stories to correct inadequacies or inconsistencies in the category systems.

Data collected through the coding schedule was entered into a computer file and analysed by a hired statistician using a relevant computer programme. The summary of coverage presented in Chapter Five was written by looking at the distribution or frequencies for each category in the coding schedule. I drew inferences from the frequency with which themes and features appeared in the text to summarise *New Vision*’s coverage of the Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project.

#### **4.4 Interviewing**

Information from respondents was collected through oral face-to-face interviews. Cohen and Marion (1994: 272) note that the research interview “involves gathering of data through direct verbal interaction between individuals.” Qualitative research interviews were appropriate for investigating perceptions because, as Kvale (1996: 1) notes, they attempt to “understand the world from the subjects’ points of view...”. Seidman (1991)

also argues that in most cases interviewing may be the best method of inquiry if a researcher is interested in people's experience and in what meanings they make out of that experience – their subjective understanding. This is relevant to the study of the subjective understandings of participants.

Semi-structured in-depth individual interviews were used. Kvale defines the semi-structured interview as one “whose purpose is to obtain descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena” (1996: 5-6). Such an approach marks a compromise between an open conversation and structured interview. In the latter, standardised questions are set prior to an interview with limited options for responses. Although semi-structured interviews allow open-ended dialogue, they are different from everyday conversation because the interviewer retains control of the terms of the discussion.

The conversation in a research interview is not the reciprocal interaction of two equal partners. There is a definite asymmetry of power: The interviewer defines the situation, introduces the topics of the conversation, and through further questions steers the course of the interview (Kvale, 1996: 126).

I controlled the discussion by referring to an interview guide that set out relevant themes and issues and included suggested questions (Deacon et al, 1999, Kvale, 1996) as shown in Appendix B.

Semi-structured in-depth interviews were appropriate for this research because they give the subject a much freer rein to talk than in other types of interviews (Bryman, 1988). This was necessary for the journalists and government officials to give detailed accounts of their perceptions of the impact of media coverage on government policy and practice. I applied directive informal questioning techniques in order to “encourage interactive dialogue with interviewees” because my aim was to “generate deeper insights into subtle and complex perceptions and beliefs” (Deacon et al, 1999: 63).

Use of semi-structured interviews reflected acknowledgement of the view that, “meaning is, to some degree, a function of the participant's interaction with the interviewer” (Seidman, 1991: 16). Thus, apart from the researcher learning from the respondent, qualitative interviews promote joint construction of knowledge of reality between the two parties. Seidman (1991) further notes that interviews enable participants

to learn from the inquiry process because the interviewers and respondents sometimes share experiences:

There are times when an interviewer's experience may connect with that of the participant. Sharing that experience in a frank and personal way may encourage the participant to continue reconstructing his or her own in a more inner voice than before (Seidman, 1991:66).

In this line, Kvale (1996) notes that a qualitative research interview is a construction site of knowledge. "An interview is literally an *inter view*, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest" (Kvale, 1996: 2). What this means is that sharing experience boosts chances of getting more information from the subject.

Kvale says that "interviews are particularly suited for studying people's understanding of the meanings in their lived world, describing their experiences and self-understanding, and clarifying and elaborating their own perspective on their lived world" (1996: 105). This study utilised this and other strengths of qualitative approach to understand participants' perceptions, experiences and meaning making in a specific context. By providing access to what is in a person's mind, qualitative research process made it possible to measure what participants think (Cohen and Marion, 1994).

#### **4.4.1 Sampling**

This study used purposeful sampling to select potential interviewees as research subjects. The method is appropriate because it allows a researcher to focus in depth on issues important to the study.

In purposive sampling, researchers handpick the cases to be included in the sample on the basis of their judgement of their typicality. In this way they build up a sample that is satisfactory to their specific needs (Cohen and Marion, 1994: 89).

What this means is that the selection of the sample is at the discretion of the researcher but consideration must be given to the case's relevance to the research question. The logic behind this sampling is to have a small but information-rich sample, in this case, of the informants. Since the purpose of this study was find out perceptions of journalists and government officials regarding *New Vision's* coverage of Nakivubo Channel

Rehabilitation Project, it was appropriate that I selected reporters and editors who were involved in the coverage for the paper. It was also deemed appropriate to select government officials who were involved, directly or indirectly, in the implementation of the project within Uganda's environmental policy framework. This research sought to study possible connections between the coverage and the actions of the government officials, at least in the participants' view. Therefore, research participants were selected because they were also participants in the case being investigated. The participants are listed below in two categories:

**(a) Journalists**

- |                        |                        |
|------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. William Pike        | Editor-in-Chief        |
| 2. David Sseppuuya     | Deputy Editor-in-Chief |
| 3. John Baptist Wasswa | News Editor            |
| 4. Ben Opolot          | Chief Sub Editor       |
| 5. Charles Wendo       | Health Editor          |
| 6. Gerald Tenywa       | Environment Reporter   |

**(b) Government officials**

1. Kezimbira Miyingo  
Minister of State for Environment
2. Paul Mafabi  
Assistant Commissioner for Wetlands
3. Patrick Ssemogerere  
Senior Information, Education and Communication Officer  
(Wetlands Inspection Division)
4. Arnold Waisswa  
Environmental Impact Assessment Coordinator  
(National Environment Management Authority)
5. Oliver Gutosi  
Monitoring Officer (Wetlands Inspection Division)
6. Christopher Kanyesigye  
Quality Control Manager (National Water and Sewerage Corporation)

7. Tamale Kiggundu  
Project Coordinator (Kampala City Council)
8. James Segane  
Town Clerk for Kampala (Kampala City Council)
9. Mugizi Rwandume  
Environment Officer (Kampala City Council)
10. Simon Muhumuza  
Public Relations Officer (Kampala City Council)

The government officials are in two groups: Central government officials and local government officials. The first group comprises officials working in the Wetlands Inspection Division and those working in National Environment Management Authority. These two bodies fall under the Ministry of Lands, Water and Mineral Development. In this study, officials in the two bodies are occasionally referred to as ministry officials when taken collectively. The second group comprises officials of Kampala City Council (the local government) who are the implementers of the project.

#### **4.4.2 Interview procedure**

Interviews were conducted in a period of 30 days, from 10th October to 10th November. I first sought permission of the Editor-in-chief of *New Vision* to interview his staff. Permission of heads of relevant government departments was also sought and obtained.

The purpose of the study and data collection requirements were explained. This was done with help of introductory letters from my supervisor and head of department. In line with Kvale's recommendation, informed consent of interviewees was sought and they were told about their right to withdraw at any point of the interview process.

Informed consent entails informing the research subjects about the overall purpose of the investigation and the main features of the design, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the research project. Informed consent further involves obtaining the voluntary participation of the subject, with his or her right to withdraw from the study at any time, thus counteracting potential undue influence and coercion. (Kvale, 1996: 112)

Interviewees were first contacted for setting dates and venues for interviews. The purpose of the research and use of data collected (as purely for academic purposes) was explained. Kvale (1996: 114) says that “the protection of subjects’ privacy by changing their names and identifying features is an important issue in the reporting of interviews”. However, the subjects did not object to their names being used in the study. Prior to the interviews, pilot interviews were conducted with one journalist and one government official in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the interview schedule and questions. Afterwards the schedule was revised and the sequence, style and language of questions were changed.

The interviews were conducted separately and privately with each participant in their workplaces, at *New Vision* head offices and in government offices, to give participants a relaxed atmosphere (Kvale, 1996). Participants were again told about the purpose of the research and how data collected would be used. They were also asked for consent to have the interviews recorded on tape. Each interview lasted 60 minutes but there were variations because some participants were so detailed that there was no need for probing while others required follow-up questions for clarity.

The interviews were not formal and I was free to modify the sequence of questions, change the wording, explain them and add to them (Cohen and Marion, 1994). The questions were open-ended to get the interviewees talking more about their experiences and expressing their views on how they perceived impact of the coverage on government actions. Open-ended questions were deemed appropriate because of their advantages:

They are flexible; they allow the interviewer to probe so that she may go into more depth if she chooses, or to clear up any misunderstandings; they enable the interviewer to test the limits of the respondent’s knowledge; they encourage cooperation and help establish rapport; and they allow the interviewer to make a truer assessment of what the respondent really believes (Cohen and Marion, 1996: 277).

Leading questions were also used to guide the interview. As Kvale (1996: 158) notes, “the qualitative research interview is particularly well suited for leading questions to check repeatedly the reliability of the interviewees’ answers, as well as to verify the

interviewer's interpretations." Therefore, contrary to popular opinion, leading questions do not have to reduce reliability of interviews, but may enhance it.

Having worked at *New Vision*, I found myself interviewing friends, which Seidman says can be a problem.

....interviewers and the participants who are friends usually assume that they understand each other. Instead of exploring assumptions and seeking clarity about events and experiences, they tend to assume that they know what is being said. The interviewer and participant need to have enough distance from each other that they take nothing for granted (Seidman, 1991: 33).

I followed Seidman's advice and sought clarification where necessary. I kept on probing participants during interviews until a point where I began to hear the same information. Then I would stop the interview after realising that I was no longer learning anything new (Seidman, 1991). Adequate information was obtained because all participants were well informed about the case study.

#### **4.4.3 Analysing and reporting data**

It is difficult to separate the process of gathering and analysing data (Kvale, 1996; Seidman, 1991). While interviews were going on, a general picture and common themes and perceptions started to emerge. However, in-depth analysis of the interview data started after I had completed all the interviews. I first played the tape-recorded interviews to get a general feel of what participants had said and later transcribed the tapes to transform the spoken words into text to study.

The interviews generated enormous amount of text that I could not use in totality. After reading the text I marked the passages that were of informed interest to this study. The goal of marking the transcripts was to reduce the material and remain with text that was relevant to the research question. Thus, in line with Seidman (1991), I organised excerpts from the transcripts into two categories: journalists and government officials. I then labelled and categorised the responses according to themes and topics set out in the interview guide (Hansen, et al, 1999; Strelitz, 2002). After marking relevant passages, labelling them and grouping them, I studied the transcripts again to select striking quotes which illustrated, confirmed or enhanced my hypothesis and pre-conceived ideas, but I

also consciously remained “open to new ideas, unanticipated responses, unexpected conflicts in the statements of participants and so on (Hansen et al, 1999: 279).

The responses were categorised quantitatively according to identified themes and topics that made it easy for comparison and analysis of views from the two groups of participants. Therefore, while this research was located in the interpretive paradigm, it also used some form of quantification or counting. It is not unusual for interpretive work to rely on numbers to illustrate a point:

The prevailing conception of interpretive work has led to a widespread rejection of any form of counting or calculating. .... Supporters of interpretive work claim that boiling people’s thoughts and activities down to numbers ignores exactly the complexity and creativity of social and cultural life which research should be illuminating. However, a closer look reveals that they quite often support their arguments with assertions about how many people said or did something and how often (Deacon et al, 1999: 8).

The authors note that one of the reasons why qualitative research sometimes uses statistics is the need to reveal patterning. In this study, I employed some form of counting to get patterns in participants’ perceptions. For example, counting enabled me to establish that the majority of journalists interviewed perceive effects of media coverage on government officials in direct terms.

When reporting the results of the interviews, I followed Strelitz’s (2002) approach of maintaining a balance between ‘letting the data speak for itself’ and analysing and summarising the material. I limited verbatim quotes to representative quotes. The questions in the interview research and the analysis of the findings were informed by the theories discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has looked at the qualitative research methodology as the major paradigm within which this study is located. The justification for locating the study mainly in the qualitative research tradition was given. The data collection techniques of content analysis and interviewing were outlined. The sampling method used was purposeful and this was explained and its choice justified. The chapter also discussed interviewing, data

analysis and data reporting procedures. The use of content analysis was explained, and the results of this are the subject of the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY OF COVERAGE**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter gives a summary of *New Vision*'s coverage of the Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project. It comes out of a content analysis of selected stories – as discussed in Chapter Four. The chapter gives an overview of the general coverage, the message in selected stories and ends with a look at the occurrence of specified characteristics or dimensions of texts that are relevant to the study. The dimensions are frequency, genre, type of sources, source contexts, framing, value-dimensions and positioning. These help bring out the nature of coverage of the project, which informs the questions for interview research in the next chapter.

#### **5.1 General coverage**

This study does not attempt to analyse the entire coverage of the Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project. Rather, it concentrates on stories that focused on Nakivubo wetland and Lake Victoria and the dangers that faced the two protected areas.

*New Vision* gave extensive coverage of the rehabilitation project before and after it kicked off in October 2000. A search in the paper's electronic archive for the period under study (May 2001 – September 2003) yielded 150 results. This means that on average the paper carried more than one story every week during that period. This frequency is high given that usually there are many issues competing for space. The electronic search results also showed that the coverage was regular and consistent during that period.

#### **5.2 Selected stories**

Purposeful sampling (discussed in Chapter Four) was used in selecting relevant stories in the same way it was used to select interviewees. Forty-three articles, including six editorials, were selected for deep analysis because of their relevance to the study. The stories selected were those that referred directly to the dangers facing Nakivubo wetland

and Lake Victoria. The health editor and the environment reporter wrote most of the stories, which explains why they were among the interviewees listed in section 4.4.1 (a). The other interviewees in this category were editors. These were selected because they assigned or edited the stories and determined whether or not they appeared in the paper and on which pages.

The message in the stories was what I would call ‘protect Nakivubo wetland and Lake Victoria or go under’. The tone emphasised threats to the two protected areas and called for action against contractors and encroachers. Some of the relevant headlines are listed below to give a sense of the tone.

- Environmentalists protest channel dump – May 23, 2001
- Wetlands valuable in treating sewage – May 29, 2001
- Firm resumes dumping in wetland swamp – June 7, 2001
- Polluted wetland may hike water treatment costs – June 12, 2001
- Project threatens environment – July 6, 2001
- Kampala sewerage system threatened – July 10, 2001
- KCC ordered to redesign Nakivubo channel mouth – May 16, 2002
- Environmentalists bothered by channel – July 6, 2002
- Cost of Kampala water will rise – October 2, 2002
- City water prices to rise – October 2, 2002
- Raze homes in wetlands, Government orders – April 30, 2003
- The floods are a wake up call – May 8, 2003
- Government to demolish houses in wetlands – June 25, 2003
- Nakivubo channel redesigned – August 27, 2003
- KCC razes house built in wetland – August 28, 2003
- Nakivubo wetland crops to be razed – August 29, 2003
- KCC halts allowing houses in wetlands – September 9, 2003

The message in the stories was that something was going wrong and needed to be rectified. The stories highlighted the importance of the wetland in purifying dirty water from the city before it enters Lake Victoria. The stories also called for action from relevant authorities, especially Kampala City Council, to stop the dumping, evict

encroachers and re-design the channel's mouth. The paper also called on government to gazette Nakivubo wetland – that is, to declare the wetland as a protected area in which activities like human settlements and cultivation are prohibited. Below, I divide the coverage into three sections: dumping of sludge in the wetland, encroachment by crop cultivators, and encroachment by private developers.

### **5.2.1 Dumping sludge**

The first stories about dumping sludge in the wetland were published in May 2001, six months after construction started. The stories said the ministry of water, land and environment had protested to KCC over dumping sludge in the swamp between Bugolobi and Namuwongo.<sup>17</sup> A photograph showing a truck offloading the soil accompanied one of the stories.<sup>18</sup> It was reported that the ministry had given China Civil Engineering Company, the contractors, seven days to remove the soil.<sup>19</sup> The contractors had been allowed to dump the soil on a nearby private land (off Luthuli Avenue) but later encroached on the swamp.<sup>20</sup> The paper kept sending reporters and photographs to the site to check whether dumping had actually stopped as directed. A subsequent story confirmed that the contractors had stopped the dumping.<sup>21</sup>

Following a number of stories and editorials about disposal of sludge in the wetland near Bugolobi and Namuwongo, Kampala City Council gave a piece of land it owns at Wankoko to the contractors as an alternative site for dumping. However, subsequent coverage indicated that the ministry had rejected the new site because the land at Wankoko was a source of a tributary which feeds into the main channel and the main wetland.<sup>22</sup> The stories also said that dumping at the new site was a threat to Kampala sewerage system because three big manholes were located at Wankoko. “The manholes are critical in the smooth flow of sewerage between the city centre and the treatment plant operated by National Water and Sewerage Corporation.”<sup>23</sup> The paper reported that before dumping was shifted to Wankoko, the manholes stood above the

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<sup>17</sup> *New Vision*, May 23, 2001

<sup>18</sup> *New Vision*, May 23, 2001

<sup>19</sup> *New Vision*, May 24, 2001

<sup>20</sup> *New Vision*, May 24, 2001

<sup>21</sup> *New Vision*, May 25, 2001

<sup>22</sup> *New Vision*, June 11, 2001

<sup>23</sup> *New Vision*, July 10, 2001

surface and marked the highest points in the valley, but they now lay below heaps of soil. The story was accompanied by a photograph showing a heap of soil around one of the manholes.<sup>24</sup>

Government subsequently banned dumping at Wankoko to protect the source of the tributary and the manholes. Later Kampala City Council looked for other sites like old quarries and called on people with private plots who wished to backfill them to get in touch.<sup>25</sup> New and environmentally friendly spots were found but neither were they publicised by KCC nor did *New Vision* pay any attention to them.<sup>26</sup>

### 5.2.2 Cultivation of crops

The stories highlighted the fact that coco-yams and sugarcane were fast replacing papyrus in the wetland as poor town dwellers encroached on the wetland to grow crops for a living.<sup>27</sup> The paper said papyrus is an excellent filter of sewage while crops, like yams, are not.<sup>28</sup> Papyrus was reported to provide an effective filtering system that traps silt and binds toxic elements. Therefore, the more papyrus there is in the wetland, the cleaner the water will be at the outflow. The importance of cleaning the water before it enters Lake Victoria was summarised in a feature article as follows:

Water hyacinth (weed), for instance, thrives on sewage water. Likewise, blue and green algae love nutrient rich water, and can turn Murchison bay into a slimy green soup that would destabilise oxygen availability in the lake, which is crucial for the survival of fish. It also clogs National Water and Sewerage Corporation's (NWSC) water filters at the Ggaba water treatment plant. NWSC is already confronted with severe difficulties to maintain the water safety standards due to increased pollution of Murchison Bay. Eventually, the extra costs of water treatment will be passed on to ordinary people in the city. So by taking out the fringing wetlands that sit between the city and Lake Victoria, you slowly but effectively kill an ecosystem on which millions of people depend.<sup>29</sup>

The stories said that the ridges and little channels built for yam cultivation push the water directly into the lake. The stories further said that for the wetland to work at maximum

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<sup>24</sup> *New Vision*, July 10, 2001

<sup>25</sup> *New Vision*, May 29, 2001

<sup>26</sup> Interviewees said dumping subsequently shifted to old quarries in Kirekka, a Kampala suburb

<sup>27</sup> *New Vision*, October 2, 2002

<sup>28</sup> *New Vision*, May 29, 2001

<sup>29</sup> *New Vision*, May 29, 2001

capacity for sewage treatment, the dirty water had to be retained in the wetland for a long time. Yet, unlike papyrus, yams let the water slip through quickly into the lake.

### **5.2.3 Encroachment by private developers**

*New Vision*'s coverage indicated that several hectares of Nakivubo wetland were lost every year because of houses being built on the edges. It said the wetland was being attacked by developers from all sides, each filling in 20 or 30 metres from the edges inwards, for putting up houses and utility buildings.<sup>30</sup> The paper reported that the poor were erecting shanties mainly on the Namuwongo side and the wealthy lining up bungalows mainly on the Bugolobi side, all encroaching on the wetland and reducing its size. Yet, the paper said, what was needed was not a small wetland but a bigger one for dealing with increasing filth from the city. The paper also reported that government ministers and their spouses were among the encroachers. While calling for a declaration that Nakivubo wetland was a protected area, the paper reported that it was unfortunate that the boundaries of the wetland were being redrawn or being adjusted inwards so that powerful officials are not affected when the wetland is gazetted as a protected area.

In short, *New Vision* stories and editorials talked about the dangers posed by encroachment on the wetland and the expansion of the channel. The dangers are summarised in the following passage extracted from a feature article in the paper:

Every day, [the channel] delivers waste equivalent to raw sewerage from 100,000 people, according to the 1998 report of the Murchison Bay Water Quality Project. And the rate will increase when the expansion is complete. The expanded terminal part of the Nakivubo Channel brings dirty brown water, black sediment and a faint smell of manure. Heaps of faded plastic bottles, polythene bags, used and unused condoms, as well as various articles litter the banks. It gets worse: Unlike before, a lot of the filth now goes into Lake Victoria intact: semi-treated sewage, industrial wastes and whatever rain water washes off the ground. Day after day, the disabled wetland has larger amounts of waste to deal with. The wetland that previously filtered the waste water before it flowed into Lake Victoria is now devastated. Crops like sugarcane, which have replaced the original wetland vegetation, cannot filter the waste effectively. Five kilometers away from the mouth of Nakivubo channel, is the Ggaba water treatment plant, which pumps 120 million litres of fresh water into the city daily. As the lake gets more polluted, water treatment becomes more expensive and

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<sup>30</sup> *New Vision*, May 29, 2001

more difficult. Already the amount of aluminium sulphate used in treating the water has increased by about 20 percent since 1995 because the lake is now polluted. As a result, the plant spends an extra 94 million shillings a year on aluminium alone, water engineers say.<sup>31</sup>

*New Vision* reported that National Water and Sewerage Corporation feared that increased pollution of Lake Victoria could increase the cost of treating Kampala's piped water by US \$500,000 annually. This would lead to an increase in water prices. In addition, larger amounts of water-treating chemicals would have to be applied, posing a health risk to the consumers.<sup>32</sup> In all this, Kampala City Council officials were depicted as not doing their job.

### **5.3 KCC to blame**

*New Vision's* coverage generally portrayed Kampala City Council officials as the bad guys. The paper gave a lot of coverage to officials in the ministry of Water, Land and Environment who frequently accused Kampala City Council authorities of allowing the dumping of sludge in the wetland. The city authorities, who were the immediate supervisors of the contractors, were supposed to find a suitable site for dumping the sludge. The paper blamed the dangers to the lake and people's health on greed of swamp encroachers, poor design of the channel's mouth and poor enforcement of laws:

The Nakivubo wetland has been severely encroached upon under the noses of city law enforcers. Houses and crops have replaced most of the natural vegetation that otherwise would filter the waste before it flows into Lake Victoria. The Nakivubo channel, now being expanded with World Bank funding, has been designed in such a way that much of the waste water bypasses the swamp that would otherwise filter it.<sup>33</sup>

*New Vision* said the minister in charge of environment blamed Kampala City Council for refusing to enforce laws and regulations put in place to safeguard wetlands.<sup>34</sup> The paper highlighted the National Environment Statute (NES) as the law that provides for restrictions on the use of wetlands. The law forbids anyone from reclaiming or draining wetlands without written permission from the National Environment Management

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<sup>31</sup> *New Vision*, October 2, 2002

<sup>32</sup> *New Vision*, May 16, 2003

<sup>33</sup> *New Vision*, October 2, 2002

<sup>34</sup> *New Vision*, April 30, 2003

Authority (NEMA). It is also forbidden to build structures in the wetlands, to destroy or disturb the plants and animals living in wetlands and to introduce any exotic species.<sup>35</sup> In general the reasons for blaming KCC as the “bad guys” were mainly two. Possible corruption was mentioned as the likely reason for allocating plots in wetland and approving plans of houses to be built there. Secondly, inefficiency was cited as the reason for failure to enforce relevant laws by evicting encroachers and ensuring a good design of the channel.

#### **5.4 Government interventions**

The major objective of this research is to study perceived impact of *New Vision*'s coverage on government actions. Therefore, it is important to look at government actions regarding Nakivubo wetland and Lake Victoria and how *New Vision* covered these actions. This information informed my interviews when I asked subjects whether they thought the actions were prompted by the coverage. Government interventions were in form of directives to KCC which took three forms: to stop dumping sludge in the wetland, to demolish houses and crops in the wetland and to re-design the channel's mouth. The paper reported about the directives extensively. Follow-up stories were published to confirm whether the dumping had continued, stopped or resumed.

On April 30, 2003, *New Vision* reported that the minister for environment, Dr Kezimbira Miyingo, had directed Kampala City Council to demolish houses and other structures erected in city wetlands.

The paper also accorded prominence to a directive by the same minister to Kampala City Council to redesign Nakivubo Channel's mouth. This story appeared on the front page on May 16, 2003 under the “Spotlight” banner usually given to investigative exposés. The positioning of the story on page one and the banner showed that the paper took the directive seriously. Moreover, the paper had previously reported about the poor design of the channel's mouth several times and had been campaigning for it to be re-designed.<sup>36</sup> The newspaper also reported that the minister had directed Kampala City Council and the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to

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<sup>35</sup> *New Vision*, May 8, 2003

<sup>36</sup> *New Vision*, May 16, 2003

form a technical committee to ensure that the end of Nakivubo Channel was reticulated.<sup>37</sup> Reticulation involved splitting the channel mouth into three fingers instead of one stream so that water spreads and stagnates in the wetland for purification before it enters into the lake.

The paper published various follow-up stories about Kampala City Council's reaction to the central government's directives. The follow-ups showed that Kampala City Council implemented the directives. It reported the demolition of houses built in the wetland by Kampala City Council law enforcement agents and the police.<sup>38</sup> The agents also arrested the site engineer and subsequently charged him in court for building in a wetland. A photograph of his demolished house accompanied the story. The paper reported that Kampala City Council had stopped authorising construction of structures and buildings in city wetlands following the ministerial directive.<sup>39</sup>

*New Vision* also reported that Kampala City Council was destroying food crops grown in the wetland and that the garden owners would not be compensated because they were not authorised to carry out agricultural activities in the wetland.<sup>40</sup> It also reported that Kampala City Council was evicting people who had built homes in the wetland. The paper said Kampala Town Clerk, Gordon Mwesigye, issued a directive on September 13, 2003 ordering residents/encroachers to vacate within 21 days.<sup>41</sup> Razing of crops and eviction of encroachers was done and reported ahead of the re-designing of the channel's mouth. An examination of the paper's editorials below shows that *New Vision* supported the steps taken to conserve the wetland and protect Lake Victoria against pollution.

## 5.5 Editorials

The editorial is the voice of the newspaper. Through editorials a newspaper expresses its opinion on issues and tries to stimulate the thinking of its readers (Udofia, 1996). Six editorials were selected using purposive sampling technique discussed in the previous chapter. Below are the headlines of relevant editorials in the newspaper.

- KCC, control dumping – May 24, 2001

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<sup>37</sup> *New Vision*, May 16, 2003

<sup>38</sup> *New Vision*, August 28, 2003

<sup>39</sup> *New Vision*, September 9, 2003

<sup>40</sup> *New Vision*, August 29, 2003

<sup>41</sup> *New Vision*, September 18, 2003

- Prevent catastrophe – June 12, 2001
- Gazette Nakivubo swamp – May 7, 2002
- Fix Nakivubo channel – October 3, 2002
- Nakivubo mistake fixed – August 28, 2003
- Well done – August 30, 2003

A look at the body text of the editorials shows that *New Vision* was opposed to dumping sludge scooped from the channel in the wetland and called the action “madness”.<sup>42</sup> It argued that the compacted clay would create a dam in the swamp that would block the discharge of water from the channel and turn an environmental crisis into a catastrophe.<sup>43</sup> The paper said dumping at Wankoko as an alternative site was “equally crazy”<sup>44</sup> because the sludge would block a tributary that feeds into Nakivubo channel and make the problem of flooding worse. It called on Kampala City Council to get the contractor to dump the soil where it would not perpetuate flooding. It suggested the old clay pits at Kajjansi as an alternative dumping site.

In another editorial, *New Vision* called on government to gazette Nakivubo wetland (as a protected area) which had shrunk from 4.8 square kilometres to 1.3 square kilometers.<sup>45</sup> It noted that even the remaining area was under assault from slum dwellings, Kampala City Council plot allocations and the new Nakivubo Channel which had brought the point of discharge closer to Lake Victoria. The paper emphasised the swamp’s role in filtering sewage and the often-polluted drainage from Kampala’s industry and road run-off. It noted that an additional US \$10 million was needed to purify Kampala’s drinking water because of the reduction in the size of the swamp. The paper argued that the legal instrument gazetting the swamp should include all areas of existing illegal encroachment.

The newspaper hailed plans to reticulate the channel’s mouth by splitting it into three fingers instead of one stream. It argued that the new design meant that Kampala’s wastewater would take longer in the swamp and be purer when filtering into Lake

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<sup>42</sup> *New Vision*, May 24, 2001

<sup>43</sup> *New Vision*, June 12, 2003

<sup>44</sup> *New Vision*, May 24, 2003

<sup>45</sup> *New Vision*, May 7, 2003

Victoria. *New Vision* noted that consequently National Water and Sewerage Corporation would not have to apply more chemicals to treat piped water and the cost at consumption point would remain down. The paper argued that while mistakes had been made in the first phases of the project “all is well that ends well” and that a mistake is never a disaster so long as it is accepted and corrected.<sup>46</sup> It said the fact that all parties had recognised the original design flaw and rectified it was cause to celebrate.

## 5.6 Overview of stories and editorials

Three major angles emerged from *New Vision* (selected) stories and editorials:

- Dumping of sludge by contractors, growing of crops and building houses in the wetland would destroy it.
- Poor design of the channel’s mouth meant that foul liquid was not scattered in the wetland for filtering before it enters Lake Victoria.
- The above processes meant that sewage, effluents and other dirty liquids carried by the channel would pollute Lake Victoria, the only source of piped water for Kampala city, thereby not only hiking water treatment costs and consumption prices but also endangering the lives of people.

The paper advocated for the following solutions through the stories and editorials:

- Gazetting Nakivubo wetland
- Evicting settlers or encroachers
- Destruction of food crops grown in the wetland
- Razing of houses built in the wetland
- Re-designing of the channel’s mouth

As mentioned in Chapter One, section 1.1.6, the solutions advocated in the newspaper were similar to the measures later taken by government officials. This study will establish whether, in the view of research subjects, government actions were a result of *New Vision*’s coverage.

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<sup>46</sup> *New Vision*, August 28, 2003

## **5.7 Character of reporting**

As mentioned in Chapter Four, this research involves a quantitative content analysis of *New Vision's* coverage of the project. This was meant to establish the nature of the paper's reporting on the project. By studying the major features of selected stories, it was possible to establish whether the coverage fits the characteristics of environmental journalism discussed in Chapter Three. Participants were also subsequently asked whether, in their view, the coverage implied a special kind of reportage and whether they thought government actions were prompted by the coverage. Content analysis helped to identify and count the occurrence of specified characteristics of the stories like genre, type of source, source context, frame, value dimensions and position (See Appendix A) as I discuss below.

### **5.7.1 Genre**

The analysis revealed that in terms of genre, most of the selected stories were news reports. A total of 43 articles, including editorials, were analysed. Sixty-five percent of selected articles were news reports, 19 percent were features, editorials represented 14 percent and letters to the editor comprised two percent.

The findings accord with the observation by several authors (Berger, 2002b; Stocking and Leonard, 1990; Hannigan, 1995) that most environment stories are event oriented, as discussed in section 3.3.2. It was observed that event-centered reporting that concentrated on immediate environment problems leads to inconsistent reporting because it does not give enough attention to future problems that may pose even greater dangers. This means that much of *New Vision's* coverage concentrated on immediate problems or issues that came up as construction of the channel progressed. However, it can be argued that the paper addressed future problems in the feature articles and editorials which together comprised 33 percent of the coverage. There was little in regard to letters to the editor by members of the public.

In all, dominance of news reports in the coverage means that the reporting was mainly event-centered, which was noted earlier as a common characteristic of environmental journalism – as indeed it is of most journalism.

GENRE (STORY TYPE)					
	2001	2002	2003	Total	%
News Report	09	04	15	28	65%
Editorial	02	02	02	06	14%
Letter to editor	01	-	-	01	2%
Feature article	03	02	03	08	19%
Total	15	08	20	43	100%

**Table 1: Distribution of articles according to genre**

### 5.7.2 Type of source

The majority of the articles (77 percent) relied on government officials as their sources of information (see Table 2 below). The officials are in two categories: central government officials working under the ministry of water, lands and environment and local government officials from Kampala City Council. The coverage looked like a struggle between the two groups of officials, with ministry officials especially those in the Wetlands Inspection Division accusing Kampala City Council of poor disposal of sludge and failure to enforce laws for protection of wetlands. National Water and Sewerage Corporation officials also blamed Kampala City Council for the poor design of the channel's mouth. Kampala City Council officials were in most cases on the defensive whenever they were quoted. Apart from government officials, the only other types were activists and researchers. The latter were quoted about a study that revealed that crops grown in the wetland were poisonous and therefore unfit for human consumption.<sup>47</sup> Only one activist was quoted once throughout the coverage, representing two percent of the sources. This was the executive director of National Association of Professional Environmentalists who expressed fears at a seminar that the expansion of Nakivubo Channel would increase pollution of Lake Victoria.<sup>48</sup> This means that *New Vision's* reporting over-relied on elite and government officials as authoritative sources of its information. This is a common feature of environmental journalism, and, again, of much

<sup>47</sup> *New Vision*, July 17, 2003

<sup>48</sup> *New Vision*, June 6, 2002

journalism in general as mentioned in section 3.3.1. This highlights a view which downgrades the importance of representing the views of grassroots sources such as those cultivating and building on the edges of the wetland. This finding has some relevance to the issue of how stories were framed – i.e. as “green” or “brown”. It suggests that the coverage was not presented as a specialist “green” issue. On the other hand, while there was concern about the quality of water for all residents of Kampala, there was no sympathy for the people involved in cultivating or settling in the wetland.

TYPE OF SOURCE					
	2001	2002	2003	Total	%
Government	13	05	15	33	77%
Activist	-	01	-	01	2%
Individuals	-	-	-	-	-
Researchers	-	-	03	03	7%
Editorial	02	02	02	06	14%
Unspecified	-	-	-	-	-
Total					100%

**Table 2. Distribution of articles according to type of source**

### 5.7.3 Source context

As shown in the table below, much of the information came from interviews with government sources (54 percent) followed by official meetings (18 percent) and press releases (14 percent). Researchers formed three percent of the sources and Statutes (Acts of Parliament) one percent. This was in line with Berger’s (2002b) observation that environment reporters sometimes resort to reproducing press releases from elite sources. Although in this case press releases do not account for the highest percentage of source context, the interviews were from the same elite sources mentioned in section 5.7.2 which could choose to issue a press release or call a reporter for an interview. Over-reliance on elite and official sources sometimes results in reproducing their one-sided accounts of

issues. This is blamed on expertise deficits (see section 3.3.1) among environment reporters who lack knowledge to digest complex scientific and environment matters.

Therefore, it is possible that *New Vision* reporters did not have the skills to enable them assess the risks involved in the Nakivubo Channel project and resorted to press releases and interviews for simplified information.

<b>SOURCE CONTEXT</b>					
	2001	2002	2003	Total	%
Interview	08	02	10	20	54
Official meeting	01	03	04	08	21
Press release	03	01	01	05	14
Research report	-	-	03	03	8
Act of Parliament	-	-	01	01	3
Total	12	06	19	37	100

**Table 3: Distribution of articles according to source context**

#### **5.7.4 Frame**

As mentioned in 5.7.1 most of the stories were news reports compared to feature articles. The majority of the stories centered on immediate events (also see section 3.3.2) and took on a short-term frame. For example, 67 percent of all stories had short-term frames compared to 33 percent with long-term frames. As mentioned earlier, short-term frames mean that reporting is inconsistent and sometimes allows issues to slip off the media agenda even when the problems have not gone away. Long-term frames are usually found in feature articles which are characterised by deep analysis and story-narratives (Barnett 2002) and focus on future or long-running problems. Therefore, *New Vision* focused mainly on short-term problems (see table 4 below).

FRAME					
	2001	2002	2003	Total	%
Short-term	10	02	17	29	67
Long-term	05	06	03	14	33
Total	15	08	20	43	100

**Table 4: Distribution of articles according to frame**

### 5.7.5 Value dimension

In this study, value dimension refers to whether the message in a story is negative, positive or neutral. Determining value-dimensions or stance was done in line with Hansen et al's (1998) observation that this quality can be got from overall impressions the coder gets from the story as explained in section 4.3.1. It is clear that *New Vision* was mainly negative as per conventional news values. Seventy-seven percent of the coverage was negative compared to 21 percent for positive articles and two percent for neutral or mixed articles (see table 5 below). However, even the stories that were coded as positive are not strictly speaking examples of positive reporting because they arose from negative comparison. For example, stories praising KCC for evicting encroachers or planning to reticulate the channel, though coded as positive, followed earlier stories about the dangers posed by encroachment and lack of reticulation. This is in line with Lowe and Morrison's (1984: 78) observation that even where positive elements exist in environment news, "such as the cleaning of the River Thames and the return of salmon, the positive only lives by negative comparison; that is, the Thames was once not polluted, salmon did live there and man reduced it to an uninhabitable state". In the same way stories about evicting encroachers from Nakivubo wetland, though positive in the sense that they highlight a step taken to protect the wetland, also contained negative comparison; that is, the wetland was once free of human activities, it used to filter dirty water properly and man reduced its filtering capacity by extending cultivation of food crops and settlements there. "The overall message therefore veers towards the negative" (Lowe and Morrison, 1984: 78). The dominance of negative dimension in *New Vision's* coverage is in line with

the observation that negative news is preferred over positive news in environmental journalism, as is in other kinds of reporting (Berger, 2002b; Campbell, 1999; Hannigan, 1995; Lowe and Morrison, 1984). Participants were later asked whether negativism in *New Vision*'s coverage implied a special kind of journalism and whether they think it had impact on government actions.

VALUE DIMENSION					
	2001	2002	2003	Total	%
Positive	01	01	07	09	21
Negative	14	07	12	33	77
Neutral	-	-	01	01	2
Total	15	08	20	43	100

**Table 5: Distribution of articles according to value dimension**

### 5.7.6 Positioning

Almost all the selected stories except two appeared on the inside pages of the newspaper (see table below). This means that 95 percent of the selected articles were on the inside pages and only five percent on the first page. This was probably because environment issues, in particular issues related to Nakivubo channel project, were low on the priority lists of *New Vision* editors (also see Chapter Three, section 3.5). It is also important to note that only 12 percent of the articles were on the environment page which often runs in the newspaper every Tuesday. Most of the stories (41 percent) appeared on the National News page, which is usually page three.

This study took the amount of space allocated to stories about Nakivubo Project and positioning of the stories to be an indicator of how much prominence editors attached to Nakivubo Project and used this to probe perceptions about agenda-setting as discussed in the next two chapters.

POSITIONING									
	National	City	East	Envir.	Edit.	Feature	Letter	Law	Total
2001	05		04		02	03	01		15
2002	03		01	01	02	01			08
2003	10	01		04				01	20
Total	18	01	05	05	04	04	01	01	43

**Table 6: Distribution of articles according to positioning**

### 5.8 How advocacy-oriented was the coverage?

My view is that the coverage was to a large extent an advocacy campaign (see section 3.1) because of the style of reporting where the paper took a position to champion the cause of protecting the wetland and the lake. The coverage was one-sided (against swamp destruction and lake pollution) and critical of Kampala City Council as the local authority responsible for enforcing environment laws in the city. Therefore, my view is that the reporting was partisan or ‘biased’ in the sense that the voices of KCC officials and encroachers were missing in much of the coverage. It is difficult to say that the coverage was balanced because the paper took a position and campaigned against all practices that threatened the wetland and the lake. In short, the coverage depicted traits of advocacy journalism in as far as it went beyond reporting facts and identified people in the wrong and advocated solutions.

### 5.9 Framing

KCC officials were framed as the main problem for failing to prevent encroachment while the encroachers were depicted as opportunists either bribing enforcement officials, using their power to violate the law or taking advantage of laxity in KCC law enforcement system in the case of the illegal farmers.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> All journalists said during field interviews (November 2003) that encroachers, poor or rich, deserve no sympathy and that the paper was concerned about conserving the environment than addressing the plight of poor or homeless people.

### **5.10 Preferred readings**

As mentioned in section 5.2, the tone of the stories emphasised two options: to protect the wetland and the lake or wait for a looming catastrophe that could put lives of city dwellers in danger. Thus the coverage contained preferred readings which I can group under the following themes: Encroachment is bad; all encroachers should be evicted and their houses and crops destroyed; Ministers abusing power to destroy environment; KCC inefficient; a looming health hazard because of potential pollution; the channel should be re-designed; dumping sludge in the wetland should stop; and so on. Thus the language used in the stories is what I can describe as mainly prescriptive because it gave seemingly authoritative recommendations rather than merely presenting facts. This was probably because the paper aimed at changing public opinion and mobilising necessary forces and resources to “save the environment”.

### **5.11 Agenda-setting and priming**

*New Vision* paid much attention to the Nakivubo Project judging from the frequency of stories. As mentioned in section 5.1, the frequency of more than one story per week means that the paper considered the issue important and portrayed it as such. The view that *New Vision* paid much attention to Nakivubo Project is supported by the findings in section 5.7.6 which show that 41 percent of the stories were on page three which is the second most important page after page one.<sup>50</sup> Thus the paper gave prominence to Nakivubo Project. By paying much attention to the Nakivubo Project *New Vision* neglected some other issues which were competing for space. This shows that the paper primed the Nakivubo issue. Priming has effect on public because, as discussed in Chapter Two, people may tend to think that the issues given much attention in the media at a particular time are the most important at the time. Consequently, people may begin to treat primed issues as important. As a result such issues become part of public discussions. Thus media sets the public agenda. The next two chapters show that the Nakivubo Project became part of public discussions after the coverage.

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<sup>50</sup> The deputy editor-in-chief said during the interview in November 2003 that stories which they think are important but cannot increase sales are put on page three.

## **5.12 Conclusion**

This chapter first gave the general picture of *New Vision*'s coverage in terms of the space devoted to stories about the project. The chapter then discussed how and why some stories were selected for analysis, which was because of their relevance to the research. The message in the stories was discussed in three categories: dumping sludge in the swamp, cultivation of crops in the swamp and encroachment by private developers. The major features of the stories were discussed and were seen to fit in the characteristics of environmental journalism discussed in Chapter Three, section 3.3. The findings give a clear picture of the nature of the coverage and helped to structure questions for interview research in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **INTERVIEW RESEARCH FINDINGS**

#### **6.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the interview component of the study. The findings are presented in two categories: journalists and government officials. This categorisation helps to compare the responses of the two groups. The next chapter interprets and discusses these in relation to theories and other scholarly findings (as deliberated in Chapter Two and Chapter Three) on the perceived impact of environmental journalism on government policy and practice.

#### **6.1 Process of establishing findings**

As mentioned in section 4.4.3, after the interviews I transcribed tapes to transform the responses into text. I marked the text that was relevant to the research question and then categorised relevant excerpts according to themes and topics set out in the interview guide. For easy comparison of views from the two groups of respondents, I counted the categorised excerpts to determine the extent of each group's view about a particular theme. This counting enabled me to establish whether all, a majority or a minority in either group perceive effects of media coverage in a particular way. Below I present the responses according to the themes.

#### **6.2 How *New Vision* knew about the dangers and solutions**

Participants were asked to say how Nakivubo channel became a subject of *New Vision*'s coverage. This would help to determine whether the paper or sources initiated the stories. As shown in the next chapter, this information helped in determining the policy-making model applicable to the Nakivubo Project.

##### **6.2.1 Journalists**

The responses indicate that all the six journalists think that to a large extent *New Vision* knew about the dangers facing Nakivubo Channel and Lake Victoria and possible

solutions from government officials. For example, the newspaper learnt about the need for reticulation of the channel's mouth from the Wetlands Inspection Division, which is an organ of the state.

On the reticulated channel mouth actually my wife had impact on getting information because she was working with the wetlands management people. I think Paul Mafabi (commissioner) was the one who brought some of these issues to my wife's attention. She brought them to my attention and then NEMA (National Environment Management Authority) also developed an interest in this ..... Once it came to our attention we pursued it vigorously (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

The paper also reportedly learnt about the likelihood of increase in water tariffs from National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), another state organ. NWSC had interest in a reticulated mouth because without it the company would have to spend more on chemicals to treat the water before distributing it to consumers.

Journalists further said they also learnt about the other dangers like dumping of sludge and poisonous yams and the solutions from seminars for stakeholders, project documents and research findings. Thus, the journalists believe that the paper did not discover the problems nor was it prescribing solutions because concerned officials had already raised the issues with Kampala City Council (KCC) before *New Vision* reported about them:

They knew it before *New Vision* reported it but I don't know if they would have taken action if we did not report. I'm sure they knew because almost each story I would do, if I would go the ministry people to get a comment it was if they already knew about it. It's not that I was informing them of anything new (Interview with health editor, November 2003).

This is why all the journalists believe that without *New Vision* government officials would still have known about the dangers and problems.

### **6.2.2 Government officials**

All the ten government officials said that they knew about the dangers facing the two protected areas before *New Vision* reported about them. The officials said that before the project started an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) was done and was approved by the National Environment Management Authority with a number of conditions.

Among the conditions was that before the dirty water reaches the lake it has to go through the wetland to allow as many pollutants as possible to be taken out. Thus the project implementers were required to reticulate the channel so that water spread through the wetland to be cleaned before it goes into the lake. Therefore when *New Vision* reported that reticulation was needed, the officials already knew that lack of reticulation was a problem and they are the ones who tipped off the paper.

Officials in the WID said that they knew about dumping of sludge in the wetland from their routine inspection tours.

Our work as Wetlands Inspection Division is to inspect. As part of our regular monitoring we came across this dumping that was going on as a result of the rehabilitation. In practice we have teams that go out regularly to collect information, to monitor how people are managing or mismanaging wetlands. We have a routine monitoring. The Nakivubo channel has an EIA on which we commented and we are under obligation to monitor implementation of the EIA (Interview with Commissioner, November 2003).

Responses from both journalists and government officials show that the latter were aware of the dangers before the newspaper reported about them mainly because it was their (government officials) responsibility to protect the environment. Although journalists could have seen some of the visible problems like encroachment and dumping of sludge, government officials were the main sources of *New Vision* about these problems.

### **6.3 Generating stories**

This research sought to establish how pro-active *New Vision* was in generating the stories. It was important to know whether the reporters responded to ministry statements or whether they initiated the queries that led to comments from government officials. This also helps to determine the policy-making model.

#### **6.3.1 Journalists**

All the journalists believe that newspapers are not all-knowing omniscient organs but someone has to tell them before they can investigate. However they said that in addition to information from the sources mentioned in 6.2.1, *New Vision* was to some extent also

pro-active in generating the stories. That is, it did not entirely rely on discussions in seminars, project documents, press releases and tips from government officials.

I think we were pro-active. We did things that NEMA and WID can't do. For example, when we were investigating ministers getting plots inside the wetland, NEMA and Wetlands people said they can't tackle those actively the way the newspaper can. A newspaper can publish a story on the front page, put a picture of that minister's house and write a leader saying this is wrong. But these guys have to follow bureaucratic procedures. So they are limited. We went out to find information on our own. There is a lot of information we found (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

Another example the journalists gave to show how pro-active they were was of the health editor who walked along the channel for two hours to talk to the illegal farmers and to inspect the channel following a tip off from National Water and Sewerage Corporation about the channel's mouth. In general the respondents believe that they were not getting stories from sources but only tips which they would follow up and determine the scope and direction of the investigation independently. They said in most cases it was after such independent investigations that journalists would seek comments from government officials including those who gave the tips. In general government sources would give leads and then journalists would go ahead to dig deep using investigative methods.

### **6.3.2 Government officials**

All government officials interviewed believe that *New Vision* drove the whole story once it started reporting on a particular aspect of the project. They said that once the newspaper got a tip or a story from a workshop, documents or an interview, it followed up the story on its own to conclusion.

Because they had put out the story they wanted to follow it up. In a way you wanted to keep yourself abreast on the developments so that the public was informed. I think it is proper that once you bring out a story in the paper then it is important that the public knows what has happened. There is no point in reporting that this has happened and then you go to other things. In a way the continuation of *New Vision* helped to inform the public what actions were being taken (Interview with Commissioner, November, 2003).

Therefore, government officials and journalists share the view that *New Vision* was active in its reporting because it was only getting leads and following them up on its own.

#### **6.4 Role of civil society**

The respondents were asked whether civil society played a part in the coverage. Were they driving the whole story, for example tipping off the media or issuing press statements? This information was also needed to determine the policy-making model.

##### **6.4.1 Journalists**

All journalists believe that civil society groups did not play any role in the coverage and the way the project was implemented. This view is supported by the absence of activists among the sources (see section 5.7.2). Thus apart from a few individuals who volunteered information to the newspaper about encroachment, at no point did civil society drive the story. There were no press statements from civil society nor did they tip off the media. Journalists see the absence of civil society in relation to lack of interest in environmental issues among the general public and low levels of awareness.

With the Nakivubo Channel we and the government have been fighting the battle alone. As far as wetlands are concerned, we have had a problem of lack of participation from civil society. I think because of lack of understanding. People understand easy things like deforestation. People, despite the fact that we have lived near the lake for a long time, don't understand the interaction between human habitation and lake management. Because in schools they teach deforestation people understand those things. But how the swamp filters the sewage, how much pollution comes from industries, all these things people don't know and they don't bother (Interview with news editor, November, 2003).

Therefore, in the journalists' view, civil society and the public were left out of the policy process thereby leaving the "triangle" incomplete.

##### **6.4.2 Government officials**

Government officials also said civil society did not play a role in the implementation of Nakivubo Project. The officials said Uganda lacks strong civil society groups to push an agenda and challenge government on any issue.

Our civil society organisations are still in formative stages and very few of them have reached that level of competence and confidence to be able to go in public and defend an issue. To go in public to defend an issue they need confidence. That is what GreenPeace does in Europe, that's what Green Watch does in US. They have really been developed over the years and reached a level where they can challenge a government programme and they challenge it with basic information. But our organisations are still in the formative stages. We have a few that can now go out and either issue press releases, issue statements, but we believe there is still a lot of work for them to do to reach a level where they can be able to speak with confidence and be able to challenge an issue (interview with Commissioner, November, 2003).

Therefore government officials also think that civil society was absent in the policy making process in regard to Nakivubo Project.

### **6.5 Did the Nakivubo Project overshadow other issues?**

This research asked respondents whether they thought the Nakivubo Project was given enough prominence in *New Vision* and to what extent the project overshadowed other issues (e.g. political, social, economic, technological, etc) as regards what was key public opinion at the time. This information was used to probe perceived agenda-setting effect of the coverage.

#### **6.5.1 Journalists**

The Journalists believe *New Vision* gave enough prominence to the project as part of its history in covering environmental issues.

*New Vision* has got a long history of covering environmental issues started by the late Ndyakira Amooti.<sup>51</sup> And it's part of our tradition and history to cover environmental issues. As part of the tradition, it becomes a habit; it is part of our job to follow environmental issues (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

However, all the journalists except one believe that the special attention the paper paid to Nakivubo Channel did not make the project overshadow other issues. The exception said:

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<sup>51</sup> The late Ndyakira Amooti was a reknown environmental journalist who won international awards in recognition of his efforts in exposing degradation and pollution. He died in the late 1990s.

Whenever we cover anything on Nakivubo swamp we get at least page three, sometimes page one and these are important pages. So whenever we highlight this issue it overshadows the rest because each space in a newspaper is competed for. So if such issues are persistently covered it also means it overshadows other issues (interview with environmental reporter, November 2003).

Most of the journalists were of the view that the issue did not overshadow other issues (social, economic, political or technological) as regards what was the key public opinion at the time. They also said they did not think that Nakivubo Channel trumped other potential environmental issues. For example, the editor-in-chief said that the good thing with newspapers is that one can have a lot of parallel issues running side by side: “You can have the issues that are of concern to the public but you also cover issues that are of special interest to the newspaper.”

The journalists said that while Nakivubo Channel was never a lead story and was rarely on the front page, it was given enough prominence as a special consideration. They said the fact that most of the stories on the project were lead stories on page three<sup>52</sup> meant that the editors recognized that the issue was very important but not suitable for front page because it could not raise sales.

### **6.5.2 Government officials**

All government officials also believe that *New Vision* gave enough attention to Nakivubo Project. They said that editorials about the issue reinforced regular coverage and meant that the paper took the issue seriously.

People respect the editorial quite a lot. The fact that it (Nakivubo Project) was brought to the level of editorial was a positive element because it meant that the entire *New Vision* publishing machinery was focusing on this particular issue. The editorial does in a way highlight an issue which the publishers think needs urgent attention. Even one article appeared on front page. That gave it enough attention (Interview with Commissioner, November 2003).

However, like the journalists, all government officials think that the issue did not overshadow other issues at the time in regard to what was key public opinion at the time.

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<sup>52</sup> Page three is treated as the second most important page in the newspaper because page two is mainly for jumps (continuations) from front page (Interview with deputy editor-in-chief).

## **6.6 Did coverage cause fear, alarm or anger?**

This research set out partly to establish perceived impact of *New Vision*'s coverage on the public. Respondents were asked whether they thought coverage caused fear, alarm, anger or changed attitudes among the public. This information helped to determine perceived media effects with relevance to public opinion (see Chapter Two, sections 2.3 and 2.4).

### **6.6.1 Journalists**

All the journalists who were interviewed shared a perception that *New Vision*'s coverage caused fear and alarm among the public. They argued that this was reflected in the fall of prices of yams in Kampala immediately after the newspaper highlighted research findings indicating that yams grown in the wetland were poisonous because of the chemicals that came down the channel.

There was alarm among the public. Yes, like the issue of yams. We highlight the research about how these yams are poisonous and immediately prices of yams fell in town. People said 'ah these yams in the swamps!' We actually helped a lot to awaken people (Interview with news editor, November 2003).

The story about potential pollution of Lake Victoria and the likely consequence of higher water tariffs is also believed by journalists to have caused concern among the public. However, the concern was reportedly expressed on individual level rather than in form of mass action:

The day I wrote that water prices were going to go up, the day the story was published, I got a lot of comments from people. There is some kind of constructive anger among people who read it, at least the few people who spoke to me. I could see that constructive anger that makes you want to take action. I am not sure how many people developed that constructive anger but I would meet somebody and says 'oh that was a good story, you did good to raise that issue'. (Interview with health editor, November 2003)

The journalists believe that fear and alarm caused by coverage did not lead to mass action like demonstrations, mass rallies or riots because of low levels of awareness. They believe Ugandans in general are still not sensitive on environment issues and do not

understand the importance of conserving the environment. They said it is only a few activists and informed members of the public who were concerned about environment issues and these individually contacted journalists seeking clarification on certain issues or expressing concern:

There are few members of the public who are interested in these environment issues. I think Ugandans in general are still not sensitive on environment issues and don't really see the importance of the environment. But obviously there are activists and informed members of the public who were concerned about these issues. It's people like that who contact us but a lot of Ugandans are not that bothered (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

Lack of interest in environmental issues is also blamed on poverty, complexity of environmental issues and the long-term nature of the issues' consequences.

The individual is worried about tomorrow. If there is no money tomorrow they will riot but the swamp is there, they were born when it was there, they don't know whether it is growing smaller or bigger. Those are issues for government and scientists to worry about. Not the ordinary person. You wouldn't expect demonstrations because of environment. The issue is a complex one. Politics, they understand but sophisticated things like that you find them in seminars (interview with news editor).

The health editor also expressed a similar view.

We are living in a situation of poverty where people are preoccupied with day-to-day living than conserving the environment. Which is a very unfortunate thing because then they are looking at tomorrow but to care about the environment you have to look ahead twenty years, fifty years, a hundred years. This man who is concerned about tomorrow has no time to think about 100 years to come. That is a bit of a problem in that people rarely get concerned (Interview with health editor, November 2003).

In general, journalists said that because of lack of interest in environment issues among the public they pursue things that are part of the newspaper agenda more than the public agenda.

### **6.6.2 Government officials**

The majority government officials share the view that the coverage caused fear among the public. They also cited the fall of prices of yams as a reflection of the fear:

It caused alarm. Many people are now hesitant to eat yams. People who know that I work with Wetlands Inspection Division asked me about the issue of the poisoned yams. They asked me whether they should continue to eat yams. Even in some of the seminars we conduct as we try to sensitize people, this issue of yams has come up. People have asked for clarification. In one seminar a lady said she was going to tell people to stop eating yams from wetlands because according to her yams are poisoned. This was a result of this newspaper article. Unfortunately this lady did not understand the issue properly (Interview with monitoring officer, November 2003).

Like the journalists, government officials also cited stories about the likelihood of higher water tariffs among those that are believed to have caused concern among the public.

I personally met people who were asking whether they would manage to pay more than what they were paying. But I don't think that kind of panic lives on for a long time. They were isolated voices about tariffs (Interview with quality control manager, November 2003).

The government officials also said they were approached individually by people who knew them and knew where they worked.

## **6.7 Framing**

This study probed perceptions on issues of framing in relation to Kampala City Council officials, settlers/evictees and illegal farmers. This also helped to probe the wider agenda-setting effect of the coverage.

### **6.7.1 Journalists**

All the journalists who were interviewed said the paper was critical of KCC for encouraging or failing to prevent encroachment. The journalists said KCC officials were partly to blame for encroachment because they approved some of the plans for houses built in the wetland. The officials were also blamed for failing to enforce the law because they did not use their powers to destroy the houses in case they had been built without their knowledge or approval. The houses, together with illegal farms and shanty settlements, were only destroyed after the coverage. Therefore, KCC officials were framed as villains (also see Chapter Five section 5.3 and section 5.9). The reasons for this frame were mainly perceived corruption and inefficiency. The subjects believe that

Kampala City Council officials who were allocating plots in the wetlands and approving plans for houses to be built there were benefiting corruptly from these illegal activities. The poor design of the channel and failure to enforce environmental laws were seen as a result of inefficiency.

The journalists believe that encroachers were taking advantage of corruption among KCC officials or weak law enforcement mechanisms to acquire plots of land at low cost or no cost at all. Thus, in the view of journalists, all encroachers deserved no sympathy.

Our position is that an encroacher, be it rich or poor, is bad. In fact I remember writing an editorial myself when they talked of demolishing houses in the wetland. We said yes, go ahead. If people did it illegally, it doesn't matter how expensive a house is. In fact our view is that even if you bring down a mansion these people shouldn't demand compensation. (Interview with deputy editor-in-chief, November 2003).

All the journalists believe that encroachers were framed as opportunists and not victims.

### **6.7.2 Government officials**

Ministry officials (in WID and NEMA) shared the journalists' view that *New Vision* portrayed KCC officials as villains for failing to protect the wetland.

As you are aware, environment management is decentralised in this country. Local authorities are supposed to manage the environment. But they (KCC officials) could go ahead and allocate plots in areas where such activities are not supposed to take place (interview with EIA co-ordinator, December 2003).

The government officials further believe that *New Vision* framed KCC officials as villains for failing to reticulate the channel's mouth.

Like the journalists, the ministry officials believe that the encroachers, especially the rich ones who built expensive bungalows on the Bugolobi side, were portrayed as opportunists or wrongdoers collaborating with Kampala City Council officials to secure plots in the protected area. They were of the view that encroachers knew that they were acting illegally and were taking advantage of possible corruption in KCC and the weak law enforcement machinery to acquire cheap plots in the wetland. The officials thought that *New Vision* was also not sympathetic to the poor settlers and illegal farmers.

Some could even go to the wetland well knowing that I am going in a wrong place but thinking they (KCC) will not catch me. Just trying to break the law. We have people who take advantage of the laxity in the enforcement mechanism. You have people who start building on Friday evening and by Sunday they have filled up the area because they know that during weekend those in charge of the inspection function are not so vigilant. Or during Christmas holidays the guy starts building on 23rd December and by the time you come back after almost a week the house is already up. There shouldn't be any sympathy. (Interview with EIA coordinator, December 2003)

The ministry officials said that while the illegal farmers and poor settlers claimed that they had no alternative places of abode or other means of survival they must have had before they came to the wetland.

KCC officials said that they could not enforce the law to protect the wetland because the wetland was not gazetted as a protected area. They said it was important for the ministry to first gazette the wetland with clear boundaries before they could identify who the encroachers were. While these agreed that they were framed as villains, they believe the paper was unfair to them because it was the ministry to be blamed for failing to gazette the wetland as a protected area. They also believe that encroachers were not framed as victims but opportunists.

All respondents in both categories perceived the coverage as a conservation crusade rather than undermining real estate development or the general development of the country.

## **6.8 Impact on public in relation to government policy and practice**

This research sought to establish whether respondents thought government officials were responding to their own emotions and opinion and assessment of responsibilities or to what they believed would be public opinion on the issue. This helped to establish whether respondents thought government officials acted the way they did because of fear of either media-reflected or media-generated public opinion.

### 6.8.1 Journalists

Two journalists believe that government officials acted because they wanted to do what they thought was right regardless of public opinion or their perception of such.

You have to assume that the government wants to do what is right. Government was trying to do what it thinks is right. Okay it's publicly embarrassing to have a story saying things are going wrong and it pressures them to do something different. But basically governments are not just there to steal and rampage around the country. In general, governments are trying to do the right things, I believe (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

However, the majority of the journalists said they believe that by adopting corrective measures government officials were responding not to their emotions and responsibilities but to what they believed would be the public opinion on the issue. The four journalists think that government officials knew about the problems and solutions but decided to ignore them in order to cut costs or to benefit corruptly, hoping that nobody would know. They said that when issues arise in the newspaper government officials can no longer ignore them because they want to be seen to be active.

My thinking is people know what is the right thing to do and they know what the wrong things are and they allow the wrong things to go on as long as they are not brought out in public. The wrong things go on silently but as soon as you expose the wrong things, one, there is a way it increases their sense of guilt but also, two, you make everybody know that they have done something bad. For their own public relations they want to be seen doing better so they will try to put in place corrective measures and they will even look for the press to cover that so that everybody knows that now they have done the right thing. (Interview with health editor, November 2003).

The journalists gave the example of a cholera outbreak in the mid-1990s that led to the downfall of the Mayor for Kampala at the time. The cholera outbreak killed several people in the city and was attributed to poor drainage and inefficiency on the part of Kampala City Council. Subsequently the epidemic became an important campaign issue and is thought to have contributed to the Mayor's defeat.<sup>53</sup> Therefore, the journalists think that Kampala City Council officials acted because they feared that public opinion

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<sup>53</sup> Christopher Yiga was the mayor when the cholera broke out. He later sought another term in office but lost elections to Nasser Ssebagala.

would turn against them and put their seats<sup>54</sup> in jeopardy. It is worth noting that journalists' perceptions, in my view, are likely to reflect their self-interested posing and conceited belief that they do, in fact, influence policy and practice. However, there was nothing in the interviews to prove or disprove this kind of assumption. The point is that either way they express this view.

### **6.8.2 Government officials**

Government officials from KCC said they did not act due to fear of what they thought was media-public opinion link at the time, but because they knew it was their responsibility to manage the environment.

Public opinion is not there to be feared. As an authority we should be seen to be doing what is correct. These issues are being addressed by Kampala City Council as a matter of right and as a matter of law. That's why the role of mobilising the community is given to us as far as the law is concerned. As a local authority we are also supposed to mobilise people to become aware of their environmental concerns. If we knew that by mobilising people they turn against us then we wouldn't mobilise. (Interview with Town Clerk, December 2003)

My view is that KCC officials would say this kind of thing even if the opposite was true. The lesson here is that it is hard to get beyond public relations "speak" when interviewing such officials. However, the Town Clerk and the Project Coordinator said *New Vision* helped to bring out issues of encroachment and reticulation more clearly thereby showing that these issues needed urgent attention.

Officials in Wetlands Inspection Division and National Environment Management Authority disagree with those in Kampala City Council that a fear of mediated public opinion did not play a role in implementation. They said coverage helped to put more pressure on Kampala City Council to implement what had been agreed during the project planning phase. The officials believe Kampala City Council officials acted faster after the coverage because they did not want to be blamed for problems that could occur in future.

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<sup>54</sup> Kampala City Council has both elective and non-elective offices. Elected officials are the policy-makers for the city and supervisors of non-elected officials. The latter are bureaucrats and the ones who implement the policies and approved programmes but they are also advisors to the politicians.

## **6.9 Impact on government policy and practice**

This study partly sought to establish whether the coverage caused a change in government policy and practice. To probe this issue, respondents were asked whether they thought the coverage centered on a lack of a policy, poor implementation of an existing good policy or existence of a flawed policy leading to poor implementation.

### **6.9.1 Journalists**

All journalists who were interviewed believe that Uganda's policy on environment is sufficient and that *New Vision's* coverage was centered on poor implementation of existing policy and not lack of a good policy or existence of a flawed policy.

Uganda's policy or legislation on wetlands is probably one of the most progressive in the world. It is certainly the most progressive in Africa. So therefore the problem is not legislation but implementation. (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003)

In this line, the journalists thought *New Vision's* coverage changed a few ad hoc actions and did not go further to affect the broader policy regarding future development and water issues in the city. The ad hoc solutions that could be linked to coverage were evictions, erasing houses, gazetting the area, reticulation changes and stopping dumping. Respondents believe these actions were within the general policy framework of protecting wetlands and lakes and therefore did not mean a change in policy.

### **6.9.2 Government officials**

All government officials shared the journalists' view that the coverage did not focus on absence or existence of a good policy but poor implementation of existing policy.

There is a very clear policy framework for environment in Uganda. We have the National Environment Policy, National Environment Action Plan and National Environment Statute, so the policies are very clear. It was the issues of implementation. (Interview with EIA co-ordinator, December 2003)

Therefore, like the journalists, government officials, said the coverage and the project could not lead to change of policy. The potential significance of changed implementation for policy was not something that was perceived by the respondents.

## **6.10 Perceived connection between coverage and government actions**

In probing perceptions about the impact of coverage on government practice, respondents were asked what they thought would have happened if *New Vision* did not report about Nakivubo Project the way it did. This information helped to establish whether respondents thought government actions were a result of the coverage.

### **6.10.1 Journalists**

Two of the journalists interviewed believe that government officials would not have implemented remedial measures without *New Vision's* coverage.

My experience shows that probably nothing would have been done because there would be no pressure. Whenever *New Vision* mounts a sustained vicious campaign action follows. For example, we used to carry pictures of potholes everyday and afterwards Kampala City Council moved very fast and sealed those potholes. After the project is finished the problem would not have been solved. (Interview with chief sub-editor, November 2003)

The majority view among journalists was that the government officials would have taken action even without *New Vision's* coverage. They believe that the scale of the problems and the gravity of the issue were intensified by *New Vision* and as a result the coverage changed the time frame within which some officials would have known about the problems and taken appropriate action.

I think what would have happened is that in about three or four years the swamp would have been in a crisis situation, there would have been a lot of encroachment along the side of it, it would cease to have any retaining effect on the water exiting the channel and essentially we would reach a stage where water would be going straight into the lake .... in the end government would have done these things but to some extent it would be late, the encroachment would have been much greater, you would probably have to find more expensive solutions. If the newspaper hadn't reported about it, the solutions the government would have been eventually forced to adopt would be too little too late. (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003)

However, even those who think that government would have acted even without the coverage believe that *New Vision's* coverage caused officials to act quickly and therefore

prevented a possible catastrophe that would probably result from pollution of the lake. Perceived connection between the coverage and government actions among most of the journalists is summed up as follows:

I think they are very closely linked. .... You know sometimes people have to be pushed to do things. They may know what is right to do but you know governments don't often do the right things because they don't want to tread on someone's toes or they are apathetic. I think *New Vision* really pushed to have these done and I think if they hadn't been done, if we hadn't pushed there would have been more delays and these things would have been done much later if at all (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

In short, the majority of journalists thought that impact of coverage was not in terms of making government officials act, but to act faster.

#### **6.10.2 Government officials**

A few government officials thought KCC would not have implemented remedial measures without *New Vision's* coverage:

Once the media is involved, you see people starting to do what they are supposed to do. Media makes people act and also to act faster than they would. It makes people put priority where they wouldn't according to their schedule of work. I'm 80 percent convinced that nothing would have happened without media. (Interview with quality control manager, November 2003)

In this line, two government officials said they tipped off the media to put more pressure on KCC to implement corrective measures which had been agreed upon. The majority of government officials, especially those in WID and NEMA, shared the majority view among journalists that without *New Vision's* coverage implementation would still take place though at a later time:

The newspaper brought issues in the limelight and Kampala City Council felt they were being exposed. .... Once something appears in the papers there is always a tendency for people to quickly try and respond to it especially if it a sensitive matter. So in a way it helped Kampala City Council to move much faster. (Interview with commissioner, November 2003)

The Commissioner thought that coverage also had impact on China Civil Engineering Corporation and that the contractors reacted to save their image internationally:

They [contractors] are part of an international community and if the press brings out a problem that they are doing in one country I am sure it jeopardises their own efforts to seek a job elsewhere because *New Vision* is read worldwide. It reflects on their reputation, not necessarily on the civil public. (Field interview)

Other government officials said there was a technical committee composed of experts from Wetlands Inspection Division, National Environment Management Authority and Kampala City Council with a specific mandate to ensure that all environment aspects of the project which were agreed upon at the planning phase were implemented. The officials said even without *New Vision*'s coverage pressure from the committee would lead to implementation.

Therefore, the majority view among government officials (and journalists) was that government actions were not a direct result of the coverage because the remedial measures had been discussed and agreed on before *New Vision* reported them. Measures to ensure that remedial measures are implemented were also put in place before the coverage. Thus the majority of respondents in both groups believe that government would still have acted without the coverage, though later.

## **6.11 Similarity between coverage and government actions**

Respondents were asked why, in their view, did government officials act in ways similar to those advocated by *New Vision* (e.g. re-designing of the channel's mouth, evicting of wetland encroachers, etc)? This was intended to probe possible connection between *New Vision*'s coverage and government reactions.

### **6.11.1 Journalists**

All journalists thought that the kind of sources for the stories explains the similarity between solutions advocated by *New Vision* and the actions of government. Journalists said that the government sources they spoke to were experts who would convince the journalists on the basic principles. The journalists would then publicise the arguments of the experts. For example, the editor-in-chief said they did not know anything about

reticulation before government experts informed them about it. The environmental reporter said:

When *New Vision* is writing the story we quote these very sources. So there is no surprise that what we have been suggesting in the paper is what government institutions are saying. We just continue reminding them that you committed yourself to do these things. When the scientists say the mouth should be reticulated, then the media reports it and then in the end that is what is done, I am not surprised about that similarity because those are the sources we continue quoting. (Interview with environment reporter, November 2003)

This, in my view, strengthens the view that government officials already knew the solutions before the paper reported them.

### **6.11.2 Government officials**

The government officials attributed the similarity between solutions advocated by *New Vision* and their actions to the same factor: the sources of *New Vision*'s stories.

Already there was a process of gazetting Nakivubo wetland whereby encroachers are going to be evicted. So *New Vision* was only spreading message further, not that they were thinking ahead of us. All these were solutions we had already thought of but these things take time. Gazettement takes time because it involves surveying and marking boundaries. So they were only reporting widely, but all these things had already been thought of. These are solutions we had already put on paper only that implementation was taking a bit of time. Maybe *New Vision* had access to some of the communications. (Interview with EIA coordinator, December 2003)

Other government officials said *New Vision* reporters also used to attend seminars for stakeholders where the solutions were discussed. Therefore the paper in their perception did not prescribe solutions but only spread the messages further.

### **6.12 Other factors**

This study asked respondents what other factors, other than media, they thought prompted government actions. The information generated about this theme also helped to establish, in the respondents' view, the extent of media impact on government policy and practice.

### 6.12.1 Journalists

All the journalists said there might have been pressure from donors especially World Bank. For example, the news editor mentioned the Lake Victoria Environment Management Project (LVEMP) whose primary task is to prevent degradation in the Lake Victoria basin. The World Bank funds LVEMP.

There are protocols between East African states to protect the environment. The protocols are covered under Lake Victoria Environment Management Programme. Fisheries organisations are also concerned about the quality of marine life, so there was pressure brought to bear from those quarters. It becomes a serious issue if negative reports about Nakivubo Channel Project reach Washington. You must realise that the 13 World Bank facets of development emphasise environmental protection. The donors say we are going to give you so much money in the future depending on how you handle the current projects. (Interview with news editor, November 2003)

The World Bank funded the Nakivubo project and was involved in the designs because Kampala City Council officials were not technical experts. The journalists said they think the World Bank influenced KCC to accept reticulation because the former did not want to be associated with anything that is likely to degrade the environment since it reflects negatively on the funding institution.

What the respondents meant was that the World Bank monitors emphasises sustainable development and would withhold aid if the Nakivubo Channel Project was not implemented in line with the Bank's guidelines. The respondents think that government bowed to pressure from the World Bank to implement remedial measures for fear of losing funding for other projects.

Personal involvement of the editor-in-chief of *New Vision* was mentioned as another factor that influenced implementation. The editor-in-chief raised the issue of Nakivubo Channel with the President verbally and followed it with a letter (See Appendix C).

I personally brought this issue to the attention of the President. The President asked the Prime Minister to look into the issue. In this country it is very important what action the President takes (Interview with editor-in-chief, November, 2003).

The editor-in-chief was the only journalist who mentioned the letter to the President because other journalists did not know about it. The editor-in-chief also said he raised the issue personally with the Town Clerk<sup>55</sup> although the latter downplayed the dangers.

All the journalists also believe that government officials' stand prior to the coverage is another factor that explains why government officials acted the way they did. The journalists said the government officials already knew that there was a risk of polluting Lake Victoria and had agreed on remedial measures before the coverage. Moreover the job of the government officials is to protect the environment and as such they would do anything to prevent degradation. Therefore, according to the journalists, coverage cannot be said to be the only factor that influenced government actions.

### **6.12.2 Government officials**

Government officials in WID and NEMA also believe that the World Bank was a big factor in the ongoing implementation of the Nakivubo Project.

World Bank is concerned when it comes to environmental issues. Lake Victoria is shared by three countries and pollution has no boundaries. At the initial stage money had not been budgeted for things like reticulation but I think the World Bank exerted pressure on KCC to find funding from their own sources. The Bank was also concerned because they don't want to be associated with a project which is going to be a disaster. (Interview with EIA co-ordinator, December 2003)

However, KCC officials said the World Bank was not embarrassed and did not exert pressure on them. My view is that KCC officials would say this even if the pressure was there (also see section 6.7.2). It would be interesting to scratch beneath the surface to find out how much World Bank concern and pressure from other donors resulted in the decision to have a reticulated mouth. However, this is not within the scope of this study.

The minister for environment also believes that the editor-in-chief's personal involvement played a part in the implementation of the project. The minister is the only government official who mentioned the editor's letter to the President because the others did not know about it. He said he received a copy of the letter when he had already directed Kampala City Council to implement corrective measures. He said that while the

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<sup>55</sup> At the time of this study that person had left to take a new office in the United States. The Town Clerk who is among the respondents is the successor.

letter did not prompt his actions, it made his work easy because Kampala City Council officials took the issue more seriously after learning that the president was also concerned:

The assistance of the word of the president was very instrumental in that Kampala City Council got to know that it is not only the minister who is petitioning us but the president has come to know. The communication from Pike was timely. (Interview with minister, January 2004)

Thus although the minister said he had already intervened to rein in Kampala City Council, the editor's letter helped not only to make Kampala City Council more willing to implement corrective measures but also to act faster.

Government officials also believe that their stand prior to the coverage influenced implementation. As mentioned in section 6.10, the government officials say they had discussed the remedial measures and agreed to implement them before *New Vision* reported about them. The study reveals that government officials supported the solutions advocated by *New Vision* before the coverage because their job is to protect the environment. The newspaper's role, according to the government officials, was to take the issues to the wider public and to put KCC on constant pressure to implement what had been discussed and agreed with ministry officials.

### **6.13 Role of *New Vision*'s coverage**

This research probed perceived roles of *New Vision*'s coverage in relation to the general roles of environmental journalism (see section 3.2). This helped to establish whether perceived roles of *New Vision*'s coverage fit in the general roles of the practice.

#### **6.13.1 Journalists**

All the journalists said that the newspaper played a watchdog role by pointing out the areas that were going wrong in the project and calling for corrective measures.

We came to point out some loopholes, areas that were going wrong. This is the watchdog role. You look at something where it is going wrong and you point out that this is wrong and needs to be rectified (Interview with health editor, November 2003).

The journalists said that by identifying those responsible for the mess during the construction of the channel, *New Vision* held the government officials accountable for their actions and exposed them to public scrutiny.

The journalists believe that the coverage raised environmental consciousness among the public and government officials and therefore played awareness role.

We played the general role of highlighting environment issues, making people think the environment is important, not just in Nakivubo Channel but a lot of things: Trees being cut down in Kampala, forests upcountry, wetlands encroachment and so on (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

The journalists believe that the awareness created by coverage of Nakivubo Channel also created awareness in other places. They said that as people kept on reading about one swamp in the city they related it to other swamps in their own areas and how those swamps are important.

Journalists also thought that by pointing out problems in the project the coverage brought issues that would otherwise have escaped public notice into the public domain and therefore played agenda-setting role.

...in bringing the issue into the public sphere for discussion, we set the agenda for debate, and we kept the issue on the agenda. Up to now we periodically go to check to see what is going on (Interview with news editor, November 2003).

The journalists' view was that the prominence given to the project raised the importance that citizens attached to Nakivubo wetland. The journalists said that while there were no public discussions about Nakivubo Channel through *New Vision* itself<sup>56</sup>, the issue formed part of the agenda for *Bimeeza*<sup>57</sup> and phone-in programmes on FM radio stations.

Here we have a limitation in that it is not easy to get feedback when you do a story. But after highlighting some of these issues in the papers some of the FM stations organise talk shows and when you tune in to some of these programmes you hear reactions on the radios and some of the issues which touch on health and increase in prices of water tickle the public

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<sup>56</sup> Lack of public discussions about the project through the newspaper is reflected by lack of letters to the editor discussed in section 5.7.1 and shown in table 1.

<sup>57</sup> *Bimeeza*, also called people's parliaments, are live talk shows where people gather around tables (*meeza*) to discuss national issues.

where it is sensitive. So there are usually good reactions especially on the FM stations. (Interview with environmental reporter, November 2003)

This means that journalists believe that the coverage not only set the public agenda but also set the agenda for other media especially FM radio stations.

### **6.13.2 Government officials**

All government officials said coverage played the role of informing and educating the public about the importance of wetlands. For example, officials in WID said that through their routine tours across the country they realised that people became more vigilant in conserving wetlands.

Government officials in Wetlands Inspection Division and the National Environment Management Authority said coverage also set the public agenda because many people kept on raising the issue of Nakivubo Channel in seminars held nationwide to sensitise local leaders and communities about conservation. The government officials also said Nakivubo Project became a major topic for public discussions on FM radio talk shows because of the coverage.

Most government officials also said that by pointing out things that were going wrong, the coverage played a watchdog role:

It played that role of watchdog by bringing out issues that sometimes bypass public attention. And even government attention, because government is doing a lot of things, if something is reported in the papers it will draw some attention. It means it is important. In that case it was playing the role of watchdog. (Interview with Commissioner, November 2003).

It is worth noting that KCC officials did not mention this role on their own but accepted that coverage played the watchdog role when asked about it in particular. In my view, the lesson here is that it is difficult to interview such people because they are reluctant to say negative things about themselves.

## 6.14 Reportage

This research asked respondents whether they thought the coverage was biased, special or different from other kinds of journalism. This helped to establish the extent to which they thought the coverage was advocacy-oriented.

### 6.14.1 Journalists

Journalists believe that *New Vision*'s coverage of Nakivubo Project and environmental journalism in general is not 'biased' reporting nor is it different from other kinds of reporting. The journalists said that being an environmental reporter is like being a health journalist or a business journalist because it is just a specialist area. They said that all kinds of reporting are based on facts.

Even in environmental journalism you have to separate fact and opinion. You can be a campaigning journalist but whatever area you are campaigning in, whether it is environmental journalism, social journalism, business journalism, you should always keep facts and opinion separate or make it clear what is opinion and what is fact. I think even in our environmental journalism although we campaign on issues as professional journalists we try to keep fact and opinion separate and I don't think any branch of journalism should ever break this strict separation. (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003)

The journalists believe that environmental reporting may be described as 'biased' only to the extent that it is pro-conservation and is allied to environmentalists.

If you are writing a general story you can be fair, but when you are advocating for something you must know where your priorities lie and what you should highlight. People may see you as biased but in advocacy that is what it means. You advocate by bringing up your strong points which are going to shoot down the points which I'm trying to bring up. Because the environment is the most unfortunate area in journalism. It is the area which is regarded least among all our priorities. When I'm doing an advocacy story, most of the issues I'm going to bring up will be on the side of environment and not these encroachers whose side is known in terms of economics, employment, foreign exchange and so on. (Interview with environment reporter, November 2003)

The journalists said the advocacy aspect of the coverage was in form of the paper's decision to take stand against potential pollution and to launch a sustained campaign to

save the two protected areas. Constant repetition of related stories and investigation of new dimensions was also perceived as part of advocacy journalism:

If you just have one or two complaints, one or two stories, government can probably shrug off and say we shall solve the problem next year and sweep it under the carpet. It was not repetition of opinion but constant repetition of factual investigation, adding a new angle, piling up the evidence bit by bit that this project needs to be re-designed. It is that process of repetition that is essential in making government accept and realise that something is fundamentally wrong. (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003)

Other journalists agreed with the editor-in-chief that consistency and constant follow-ups are a major characteristic of advocacy journalism and environmental journalism.

#### **6.14.2 Government officials**

Ministry officials shared the journalists' view that the coverage was not biased because it was reporting the truth. Like the journalists, they said it was different because it took a stand unlike general reportage where media present facts without necessarily making conclusions, taking a stand or guiding the audience.

Advocacy reporting is different because it consists of people who take a stand. So in a way the paper should have its stand to guide decision-making. For instance, if the paper says there is a proposal for third-term<sup>58</sup> but we (paper) feel the conditions are not ripe for it. So the paper has given an opinion which guides the public. In this way it plays the role of analysing the issues and giving informed position. They should continue to play the role of guiding the public. (Interview with commissioner, November 2003)

However, some Kampala City Council officials said the coverage was biased against the local authority.

The media is good at picking anything they think and they put it the way they want. .... We put up a committee with Wetlands people, KCC and NEMA and we identified different places where that kind of soil could be dumped. There was no haphazard dumping as someone would put it. The press tried to create the impression that the contractor is dumping the soils anyhow (Interview with project coordinator, November 2003).

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<sup>58</sup> Government has proposed to amend the Constitution to lift the two-term limit for a president so that somebody can be elected president more than twice.

In general, all journalists and government officials believe that *New Vision*'s coverage was not biased but it exhibited advocacy reporting. They said environmental journalism is not fundamentally different from other kinds of reporting because they are all about getting facts right, raising important issues, making the reader understand what the issue is about and then coming up with reasonable conclusions. They said the coverage was advocacy-oriented to the extent that the paper took a position to campaign against inefficiency and encroachment using investigative tactics for the protection of the wetland, the lake, marine life and in the process preventing a possible health problem.

### **6.15 Perceived impact of environmental journalism in general**

This research set out to probe perceived impact of environmental journalism on policy and practice. In this line, respondents were asked whether they thought environmental journalism in general affects policy and practice.

#### **6.15.1 Journalists**

All journalists believe that environmental journalism affects government policy and practice in as far as it reflects public opinion. For example, the editor-in-chief thinks that *New Vision* had impact on other projects before Nakivubo Channel:

I think *New Vision* was partly responsible for Bwindi Forest<sup>59</sup> becoming a national park. Because of our coverage Hima cement factory ended up being forced to put on a big expensive filter to stop the dust polluting the countryside. I think we have a track record of success and highlighting environmental issues and the same issue happened with Nakivubo Channel (Interview with editor-in-chief, November 2003).

#### **6.15.2 Government officials**

All government officials share the view that media and environmental journalism in general has the effect of making those responsible take action even when they are reluctant to act. Some of them said that media makes implementation of policy easy because violators get a sense of guilt when their names are mentioned in media.

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<sup>59</sup> Bwindi Forest in Uganda is one of the only two natural habitats for mountain gorillas in Uganda. It was gazetted into a national park in 1993. The other home for gorillas is the nearby Mgahinga National park shared by Uganda, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo (*New Vision*, March 31, 1993).

People have become so hard but the moment one sees his name in the newspaper he says ‘eh my name is in the newspaper’ and vanishes, then I come in. You see the way you have helped me? Just get a paragraph, add there a name and put in the newspaper. You have softened the ground for me. You soften that one, you have softened many others. (Interview with regional coordinator, November 2003)

The minister shares the same view and believes that everybody is accountable to the public regardless of whether or not they hold public office. He said that even private citizens who degrade the environment react to media exposure even though they are not worried about losing votes:

There is public accountability everywhere. If you are draining a wetland and it is put in the media and they say when you drain wetlands you are going to cause scarcity of water, or you are going to pollute the water which is going into the lake and which is eventually coming back for people to drink then the people get concerned. Then you realise that everybody knows that you one person want to destroy lives of so many thousands. Then implementation becomes easy because it is easy to curtail such people from continuing with acts which are illegal. (Interview with minister, January 2004)

The government officials also believe that media awakens officials to do what they are supposed to do because they do not want to be seen to be inefficient.

An article in the newspaper makes people do their work because you are aware that everybody has known what your responsibility is and what you have been doing. It works on minds of people who are responsible and want to avoid being in headlines. It works on both those who are in politics and those who wish to preserve their names (Interview with quality control manager, November 2003).

In general, perceptions of journalists and government officials regarding the impact of environmental journalism were similar. Both categories believe that coverage makes those responsible do what they are supposed to do even if they did not intend to act at that particular time.

## **6.16 Conclusion**

This chapter has presented the findings of the research. The process of establishing the findings was given. The findings were presented in two categories representing responses

from journalists and government officials. The responses are interpreted and discussed in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **INTERPRETATION, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

#### **7.0 Introduction**

This chapter gives interpretation and discussion of the findings which were presented in Chapter Six. The discussion shows the respondents' perceptions in relation to the theories outlined in Chapter Two and Chapter Three. For a smooth flow of ideas, the findings are not discussed in the same order in which they were presented in the previous chapter. I begin with discussion of the perceived roles of the coverage and its impact on public opinion. This leads on to the major focus of the thesis: perceived impact of coverage on government policy and practice. The chapter ends with the policy-making models applicable to the Nakivubo case.

#### **7.1 Roles of coverage**

It was stated in Chapter Six section 6.13 that by exposing wrongdoing (e.g. dumping and encroachment), raising environmental consciousness and bringing the Nakivubo issue into public domain, the coverage is believed to have played the watchdog, awareness and agenda-setting roles respectively. These roles accord with the general roles of environmental journalism (see Chapter Three, section 3.2) although they are not unique to the practice. This was one of the tasks of this research – to compare perceived roles of the coverage to general functions of environmental journalism.

#### **7.2 Effect on public**

This section discusses the perceived effect of *New Vision's* coverage on people's attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. This discussion is centered on media and effects theories with relevance to public opinion as presented in Chapter Two, section 2.3 and section 2.4. Therefore, this section analyses the findings in relation to direct (primary) and indirect (secondary) effects theories. As mentioned in Chapter Two, indirect effects include

agenda-setting and framing theories while direct effects cover stimulus-response and uses and gratifications models.

### **7.2.1 Agenda-setting effect**

The findings indicate that journalists and government officials shared the view that *New Vision* gave sustained coverage and prominence to the project (see previous chapter, section 6.5) although it did not trump other important issues. This reveals the perception that the paper paid enough or a lot of attention to the project. Therefore, there was perceived priming (see Chapter Two, section 2.4). All respondents further thought that by paying a lot of attention (priming) to the Nakivubo project, *New Vision* raised the importance citizens attached to Nakivubo wetland and other wetlands in the country (see Chapter Six, section 6.13). Consequently, the coverage helped to make the Nakivubo project part of public discussions especially on FM radio talk shows. This means that coverage is thought to have brought the issue into public domain and this is a sign of perceived agenda-setting effect. This is in line with Berger (2002a) who notes that in addition to determining the agenda for public discussions, some media also set the agenda for others. This is an inter-media agenda-setting where some powerful titles set the story for others.

Ministry officials said that because of the coverage many people kept on raising the issue of Nakivubo channel and pollution in general in seminars held nationwide to sensitise local leaders and communities about conservation (see Chapter Six, section 6.13). Thus both categories of respondents seem to agree that coverage had an agenda-setting effect.

### **7.2.2 Framing**

It was mentioned in Chapter Six (section 6.7) that all respondents in both categories thought KCC officials were portrayed as villains because of alleged corruption and incompetence. It was also stated that all respondents in both groups believe that encroachers were depicted as opportunists and not victims while the coverage was perceived as a conservation crusade rather than undermining real estate development or the general development of the country. This shows that all respondents thought that *New*

*Vision* used a specific language in priming the Nakivubo issue and this is a sign of perceived framing effect of coverage. This framing is believed to have served to structure public debate and to influence the public's reactions (emotions and attitude) as shown below.

### **7.2.3 Effects on emotions and attitudes (Stimulus-response model)**

Chapter Six (section 6.6) shows that all journalists and majority of government officials believe that *New Vision*'s coverage led to the fall in prices of yams. They said this was a result of the media reports that yams grown in Nakivubo wetland were poisonous because of absorbing chemicals and other effluents in the wetland. This caused fear and alarm and subsequently people stopped buying or eating the yams. Stories about the possibility of increase in water tariffs were also reported in Chapter Six (section 6.6) to have caused concern among the public, according to most respondents. This, together with the belief that prices of yams fell as a result of the coverage, means that most respondents think that the coverage had an effect on emotions and behaviour.

The fact that citizens are believed to have started to view wetlands as more important than before (Chapter Six, section 6.13) shows perceived impact in changing attitudes. That is, previously many people viewed wetlands as wastelands but after the coverage it was perceived that they now realised that wetlands were important and needed to be protected. This is supported by the general belief among all respondents that citizens became more vigilant about protecting wetlands following the coverage. Perceived effect of changing attitudes is also a manifestation of perceived impact on public opinion.

In short, all respondents perceive impact of the coverage in stimulus-response terms because, as mentioned in Chapter Two (section 2.3.1), they think readers responded directly to the coverage by stopping to eat yams and started valuing wetlands. The finding that public response to coverage in relation to yams was viewed as a result of fear or alarm is in line with Berger (2002a) that direct media effects are immediate and can be seen in emotional responses. Thus, this research shows perceived direct media effect in relation to the perception about public opinion.

### **7.3 Impact of public opinion on policy and practice**

The findings (Chapter Six, section 6.8) show that majority of respondents in both categories believe that by adopting corrective measures government officials were responding not to their own emotions, opinions and pace of action but to what they believed would be the public opinion on the issue. The example of the cholera outbreak also given in Chapter Six, section 6.8, shows that the journalists believe that fear of public opinion forces government officials to act in a certain way. This means that, in view of respondents, media-created or media-reflected public opinion has impact on government practice. Thus, the policy and practice “triangle” is viewed to be complete when looking at perceived media-created public opinion. However, the triangle remains incomplete in terms of real public opinion because of absence of an active civil society or outraged public forcing action, as the findings in Chapter Six, section 6.4 show.

### **7.4 Impact of coverage on policy and practice**

The findings show that there was no perceived impact of coverage on the broader policy framework regarding environment. This was because all respondents in both groups thought that Uganda’s policy on environment is sufficient. In this line, they said coverage centered on poor implementation of existing policy and not lack of a policy or existence of a flawed policy (See Chapter Six, section 6.9). Thus they believe the coverage did not cause a change in policy or formulation of a new policy. Impact of coverage was viewed on a few specific actions in the form of corrective measures. Therefore, perceived impact of coverage was not on policy. This is also explained by the finding that respondents think coverage affected only a number of remedial measures. This leads to the question of perceived actual impact of coverage.

### **7.5 Actual impact on policy and practice**

Chapter Six shows that majority of respondents believe that government would have implemented remedial measures even without the coverage. This is because the government officials knew about the problems and had already resolved to implement them. Section 6.10 further shows that the majority of respondents thought that KCC acted faster because of coverage. Therefore, it is right to argue that perceived impact was

viewed in terms of timing of implementation. That is, coverage is believed to have accelerated the speed at which KCC implemented corrective measures and in the process it (coverage) prevented a potential environmental catastrophe. My view is that viewing impact in terms of reducing time for implementation also shows perceived media effects in stimulus-response terms.

## **7.6 Policy-making model**

The findings in Chapter Six, section 6.2 and section 6.3, indicate that all journalists and government officials believe that the reporting on the dangers did not amount to a media exposé because the issues had already been discussed by concerned officials and agreed upon. While exposés are a major feature under Active Media model (see Chapter Two, section 2.6.1), it would not be right to argue that the model does not apply in the Nakivubo channel case. This is because the findings show that the coverage was viewed as a campaign (also see Chapter One, section 1.1.6). All respondents believe that the coverage brought issues into the public domain and also that the paper was pro-active in generating the stories. The above three factors (coverage as a campaign, bringing the issue into the public domain and pro-active reporting) show some action. Therefore, my view is that the Active Media model applies to the Nakivubo case although partially because of lack of exposé and absence of an outraged public.

Lack of involvement of civil society and the general public (see section 6.4) means that “Bypassing civil society” model (Chapter Two, section 2.6.3) is appropriate in describing the policy-making model in the Nakivubo case. This model is also supported by the personal involvement of the editor-in-chief. My view is that the editor-in-chief’s letter brings in the aspect of “coalition journalism” as explained in the home health care study (Chapter Two, section 2.8.1) where actual policy changes resulted from direct pressure for reform from journalists themselves rather than from demands by the public.

It is worth noting that the manipulation model (see Chapter Two, section 2.6.4) also applies to the Nakivubo case because ministry officials used the media to expose Kampala City Council officials’ failure to implement corrective measures which had been agreed upon. The ministry officials were tipping off the newspaper so as to put more pressure on KCC to act (see Chapter Six, section 6.10.2). Therefore, in my view, they

manipulated the media to achieve their objective which was to make KCC to act in the way they wanted. However, this model is applicable only partially because the paper did not entirely depend on information from ministry officials nor did it reproduce their press releases or what they said at press conferences. Rather, the paper was pro-active and drove the whole story on its own after getting the tips (see Chapter Six, section 6.3)

Thus the Nakivubo case and related coverage has the ingredients of three different policy-making models. However, in my view, Bypassing civil society is the most applicable because Active Media and Manipulation models apply only partially.

It is worthwhile to note that the coverage is not perceived to be the only factor that influenced government actions. As indicated in Chapter Six, respondents thought there were external factors other than the coverage that could explain why government officials acted in ways similar to those advocated by *New Vision* (pressure from donors, editor's personal involvement and government officials' stand prior to the coverage). This is in line with the empirical studies on home health care and drunk-driving (Chapter Two, section 2.8.2) which concluded that it was not media coverage alone that led to related policy actions at the time because there were other external factors that came into play. As in Yanovitzky's drunk driving study, these external factors are seen to explain why government officials acted in ways similar to those advocated by *New Vision*.

### **7.7 Impact of environmental journalism on policy**

The findings in Chapter Six, section 6.14, indicate that the coverage was viewed as advocacy-oriented because the paper took a stand and campaigned against certain practices during the implementation of the project. However, the paper's stance was not viewed by majority of respondents as meaning that the reporting was biased. Thus, environmental journalism was not perceived to be biased reporting, but was seen to be different from general reportage in that it identified problems or issues, compared arguments from both sides and drew conclusions which formed the basis for the media's position on the issue. In this model, the media then campaigns for the position it has chosen based on facts, and it guides the public on the best way forward. This is unlike general reportage which presents facts without necessarily drawing conclusions or taking a stand on an issue.

Environmental journalism (as discussed in Chapter Three) is thought to impact on policy and practice because of its advocacy stance in that those blamed for degradation get a sense of guilt and tend to act accordingly to escape being seen as the ones responsible for the problems. In this study, respondents believe that environmental journalism can change the course of action by exposing practices that could lead to degradation. For the case of Nakivubo channel, for example, KCC officials are believed to have acted in a particular way partly because of the coverage, while timing of actions is attributed to the coverage (by all subjects except KCC officials).

## **7.8 Conclusion**

This chapter has interpreted and discussed the findings of this research. The focus has been on perceptions of *New Vision*'s impact on the implementation of Nakivubo Channel Rehabilitation Project. It was stated that respondents in both categories believe that in addition to causing fear or alarm and changing attitudes among the public, the coverage set the agenda for public discussions and for other media especially FM radio stations.

It was also mentioned that the majority of respondents in both groups believe that government officials implemented remedial measures for fear of public opinion. This chapter also discussed other factors that are thought to have influenced government actions. Thus media alone is not the only perceived cause of government practice.

The chapter showed that all journalists and government officials believe that coverage was centered on poor implementation of existing policy rather than lack of a good policy. This is why all subjects believe that coverage did not lead to formulation of a new policy or review of existing policy.

This chapter also showed that the majority of respondents in both categories believe that without coverage government would still have acted but probably too late. Thus, the perceived actual impact of coverage is in accelerating the speed of implementing measures thereby preventing a possible disaster.

In assessing the policy-making process, it was observed that three policy-making models apply, but "Bypassing civil society" was seen as the most appropriate to describe the Nakivubo case. This was because, in view of all respondents, civil society and the

general public did not play a direct role in influencing government actions. This leaves the policy-making process or the 'triangle' incomplete.

It was shown that the majority of respondents view effects of coverage in direct terms and in particular within the stimulus-response model because they believe that actual time of implementing remedial measures and the fear, alarm and change of attitudes among the general public were a direct result of coverage. Perceived indirect effects were also established from the majority view that coverage brought the Nakivubo issue into public domain and set the agenda for public discussions.

Poor practice in the Nakivubo case was not viewed as a reflection of policy omissions. In addition, perceived media impact on practice was not viewed to track back to impact on policy. However, it is possible that in many cases, including Nakivubo channel, poor practice could reflect policy omissions. It is also possible that another study on a different subject could probe whether media impact on government practice has a bearing on the original policy itself.

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## APPENDIX A

CODING SCHEDULE		
<b>CODE NUMBER</b>		
<b>DATE</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
<b>POSITION OF ITEM (PAGE)</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Front page</li> <li>2. National News</li> <li>3. Local East</li> <li>4. Local West</li> <li>5. Local Central</li> <li>6. Environment page</li> <li>7. Letters</li> <li>8. Features</li> <li>9. Law report</li> <li>10. Editorial</li> </ul>		
<b>TYPE (GENRE)</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>11. News report</li> <li>12. Editorial</li> <li>13. Letter to the editor</li> <li>14. Feature article</li> </ul>		
<b>TYPES OF SOURCES</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15. Government sources</li> <li>16. Pressure groups/Activists</li> <li>17. Individuals not representing institutions</li> <li>18. Researchers</li> </ul>		
<b>SOURCE CONTEXT</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19. Interview</li> <li>20. Officials meeting</li> <li>21. Press release</li> <li>22. Letter</li> <li>23. Editorial</li> <li>24. Research reports</li> <li>25. Act of Parliament</li> </ul>		
<b>FRAME</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>26. Event-centered</li> <li>27. Long-term</li> </ul>		
<b>VALUE-DIMENSIONS</b>	<input style="width: 100%; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>28. Positive</li> <li>29. Negative</li> <li>30. Neutral</li> </ul>		

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. Is *New Vision*, being a government paper, able to play the watchdog role of the press? Does it have any editorial independence? Would criticising government be possible?
2. *New Vision* covers environmental issues regularly and has an environment page most Tuesday. Why is it so? Is there any editorial policy or editor's interest in this?
3. How did *New Vision* know about the dangers facing Nakivubo wetland and Lake Victoria and solutions?
4. How did government officials know about dangers facing Nakivubo wetland and lake Victoria and the solutions? From *New Vision* or vice-versa? Do you think without *New Vision*'s coverage they would have known about the dangers and solutions?
5. How pro-active was *New Vision* in generating stories? Did reporters respond to ministry statements, primarily, or did they initiate the query that led to comment. How much was the media active or the source?
6. What role did civil society play in the coverage? Were they driving the whole story at certain points, e.g. tipping off media or giving press statements?
7. To what extent do you think the Nakivubo project overshadowed other issues (e.g. social, political, economic, technological) as regards what was key public opinion matter at the time?
8. Did *New Vision*'s coverage have impact on the public? If yes, in what way? Did it cause fear, anger or alarm? Did it change attitudes towards environment?
9. What do you think impact on the public meant for you in relation to policy and practice. To what extent do you think government officials were responding to their own emotions and opinion or to what they believed would be public opinion on the issue?

10. Do you see a connection between the media's reporting and actions of government officials? Would government have acted the way it did without the coverage?
11. In your view, why did government officials act in ways similar to those advocated by the media (e.g. re-designing of the channel's mouth, evicting of wetland encroachers etc)?
12. What other factors, other than media, do you think prompted government actions?
13. Do you think coverage changed a few ad hoc actions or went further and affected the broader policy which may apply to further development and water issues in the city?
14. Do you think *New Vision's* coverage centered on absence of a policy on wetlands, poor implementation of an existing policy or presence of a flawed policy leading to poor implementation of the project?
15. Did media's coverage lead to a review of existing policy or formulation of a new one?
16. Why did *New Vision* portray KCC officials as bad guys? How do you think the paper portrayed the settlers/evictees and illegal farmers? As opportunists or victims?
17. What roles do you think *New Vision* played in implementation of the project and in relation to environmental journalism?
18. Do you think coverage was special and different from other kinds of journalism? What does this kind of journalism suggest to you in terms of government policy and practice?

THANK YOU

## APPENDIX C

HE Yoweri Museveni  
President of Uganda

06 May 2003

Dear Mr. President,

Re: **Nakivubo channel discharge**

Thank you for visiting the Capital Gang on Saturday 19 April. It was greatly appreciated by listeners all over Uganda.

As you were leaving, we briefly discussed the increasing pollution of Lake Victoria by the Nakivubo Channel and you requested that I send you the details through your secretary Miriam Kankunda.

This is a **BIG PROBLEM** with a **SIMPLE SOLUTION**. With political will and approximately \$250,000, the government can resolve an issue that will otherwise end up costing the country millions of dollars.

I attach for your consideration a brief summary of the issue and photocopies of two articles from the *New Vision*.

Yours faithfully,

William Pike  
**Managing Director/Editor-in-chief**

*c.c Dr Ruhakana Rugunda, Minister of Water, Lands and Environment*

### **NAKIVUBO CHANNEL CRISIS – EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

#### **Background**

Historically the city's storm **water was filtered by Bugolobi swamp** and took about one month to reach lake Victoria. The water was then absolutely pure as a papyrus swamp is one of the most effective filters of pollution known to man.

The World Bank funded Nakivubo Channel project has increased the volume and velocity of water coming into the swamp. As a result, especially during the rainy season, storm **water can reach the lake almost immediately** without being filtered by the swamp.

The problem is exacerbated by increasing cultivation of yams along the banks of Nakivubo Channel which undermines the filtration capacity of the swamp.

### **The problem**

**Lake Victoria is now being increasingly polluted by unfiltered storm water and rubbish and sewage dumped in the channel.**

- a. The National Water and Sewage Corporation estimates that this will result in **additional annual costs of \$500,000** for purification chemicals for the next five years. It may then become necessary to **move Kampala's water intake** away from Gaba at an estimated cost of \$5 million. All these costs will be passed onto water consumers in Kampala. In addition, the increased use of chlorine and aluminium sulphate by NWSC to purify the water poses **health risks** for the population of Kampala.
- b. The swamp is also no longer retaining silt coming through the Nakivubo Channel. It is also likely that in the medium-term that **Murchison Bay will become silted up** and entrance to Port Bell impeded.

### **The Solution**

There are two simple actions that will completely remedy this disastrous situation.

- a. Kampala City Council should **'reticulate' the final discharge** of Nakivubo Channel. Instead of having a single final outlet, the channel should end like the five digits of a hand. This will make it easier for water to settle in the swamp so that it takes longer to reach the lake. The Nakivubo Channel upgrade has already cost \$17 million. **This additional work will only cost \$250,000**. All that is needed is for **KCC to request the World Bank** to provide the funding and technical assistance in design.
- b. **All yam growers should be expelled from the Bugolobi swamp**. KCC and the National Environment Management Authority already have the powers to do this. This will cost nothing.

### **Contact Persons**

1. Dr William Muhairwe, Managing Director, National Water and Sewerage Corporation. Tel: 077 200264
2. Paul Mafabi, Assistant Commissioner of Wetlands, Ministry of Water, Lands and Environment. Tel: 235452