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A review of environmental news reporting in South Africa: case studies on climate change and energy, fracking, and acid mine drainage

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2018

https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27069

Suliman, Lutfiyah (2018) A review of environmental news reporting in South Africa :|bcase studies on climate change and energy, fracking, and acid mine drainage, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, https://hdl.handle.net/10539/27069

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Abstract

Environmental communication in media has been studied largely in American and European contexts, since the 1990s. These studies have revealed the trends in reporting on the greatest environmental threats of our time, and the predominant framing of environmental risks, most notably those posed by climate change. Despite the crucial role that media plays in developing environmental narratives, few studies on environmental media reporting in developing nations, especially African nations, have been conducted. This research thus evaluates the media role in communicating environmental issues and environmental science in the South African media context. By conducting coverage and content analysis on three environmental issues at the core of the industrial development that underpins the South African economy: acid- mine drainage, fracking and climate change and energy, in five commercial newspapers, it is shown that South African media coverage of environmental issues is still limited by demographic factors which influence the news agenda of publications; that social framing of environmental news is important to environmental journalists and raising the environmental agenda in the newsroom; and government voices speak loudest on these important environmental issues.