

## Local Journalism and SDG 11: Advocating for Inclusive, Safe, and Sustainable Communities Empowering communities through grassroots storytelling

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of the local media in the achievement of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 11, which is on sustainable cities and communities, is pivotal. By promoting the voice of grassroots, documenting local challenges and promoting solutions led by the communities, local journalism creates the link between citizens, policymakers, and institutions. This paper discusses the role that local journalism plays in inclusive urban development, disaster preparedness, environmental advocacy and participatory governance. The combination of literature review and the critique of case studies of community media initiatives in various regions was the approach that was adopted, using a mixed method approach. The results demonstrate that grassroots narrative can augment civic engagement processes, resource mobilization, and hold local authorities accountable. Financial insecurity and the digital divide, politics, and training are some of the constraints that hamper the scalability and maintenance of local journalism programs. The way forward sees closer alliances between local media, academia and policy makers, the incorporation of digital tools and training sessions in order to make grassroots storytelling a lasting force behind community empowerment and sustainable cities to come.

**Keywords:** *Local journalism, SDG 11, grassroots storytelling, sustainable communities, participatory governance, media empowerment.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The 21st century has been characterized with rapid changes across cities and human settlements caused by population growth and urbanization, technological changes and climate change. The UN projects that over two-thirds of the global population, or an excess of 60% of the world population based on the current population in 2017, is likely to be living in urban sectors by 2050, which will bring along opportunities as well as challenges of sustainable development. SDG 11, entailed to make human settlements sustainable, resilient, and inclusive, safe, bears the stamp of dire need to address disparities in the housing, transportation, infrastructure, governance, and the environmental sustainability. Global policies and national programs are significant but local realities tend not to get the coverage they deserve, and as such there is a planning/practice disconnect. Local journalism therefore, becomes a key stakeholder, strengthening communities to connect to these concerns by amplifying the voice of grassroots, covering ignored problems and realizing citizen-led solutions [2].

Specifically, there is a local nature of journalistic coverage that contrasts with mainstream or national media in terms of their scope, focus, and effect. Whereas mainstream media mostly focuses on major happenings, events, or high-leveled politics and economic stories, local journalism is part of daily life of the people in a similar manner. It serves as a mirror that reflects the struggles and aspirations and innovations of people who are most often unseen in the larger media landscape. As an example, a local newspaper in a small town might report the inefficiencies of collecting garbage or a community radio program in a rural village might discuss new water sense methods adapted by farmers. These tiny accounts roll up to demonstrate the bigger picture of inclusivity, safety and sustainability that is pegged on SDG 11. Local journalism, therefore, as grassroots storytelling is the bridge that helps those running the country, and those inside the decisions impacted people [7].

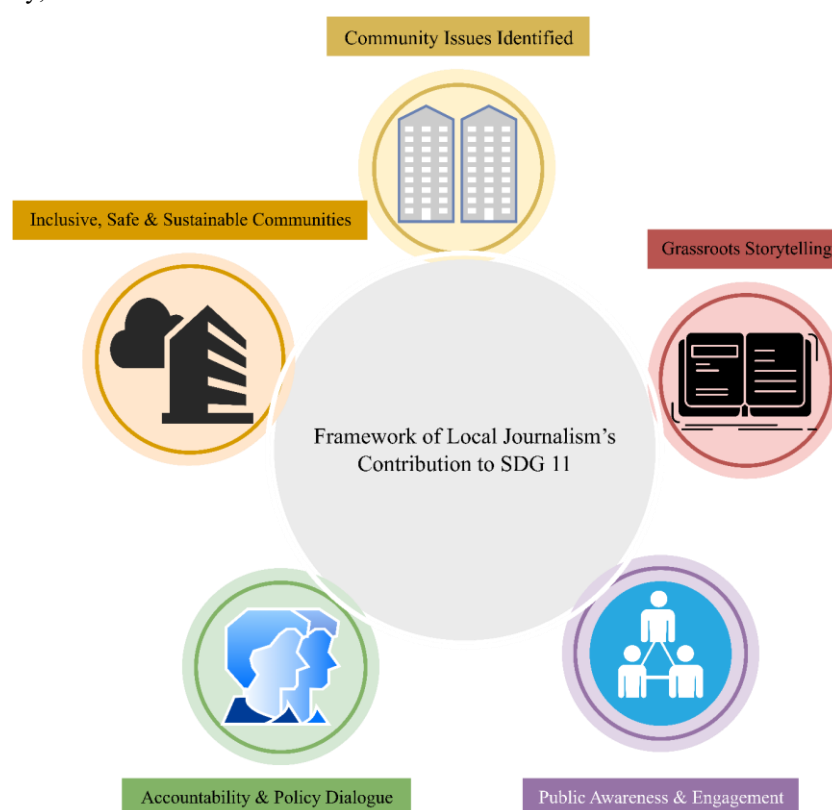
The issue at hand provides motivation to carry out this study because local journalism is not only documenting problems but serves as an agent of change as well. Community-based media has also helped organize citizens in times of crises, pre-planned disasters, exposed corruption in housing construction and campaigned increased environmentally friendly actions in many parts of the world [16]. The urgency of SDG 11 justifies the need to research the role of such localized media practices with regard to generating inclusive and sustainable urban development. Moreover, the constraints imposed on the traditional journalism by the limited financial resources and the increased power of the digital platforms create the new challenges as well as the new opportunities of the grassroots storytelling [17]. What is vital is to understand how local journalism becomes able to meet these changing landscapes so that communities retain the agency to bring about their own futures [4].

This research has four objectives:

- To explore the contribution of local journalism to the promotion of the discourse of SDG 11.
- To understand how grassroots storytelling enables the excluded to rise and enhance community inclusive growth.
- To learn about case studies of local journalism projects that deal with safety, resilience and sustainability issues.
- To determine obstacles and suggest the main methods to empower local journalism as a sustainable factor of community empowerment [5].

With the achievement of the following objectives, this paper will establish that local journalism is not only a communication device; it is a participatory tool of social transformation. It allows citizens to voice out their concrete experiences, hold institutions to account, and toward the establishment of inclusive governance systems. Such media interventions are at a time when cities are grappling with inequality, climate risk and deficits in governance and these offer significant entry points to achieving the SDG 11 [8].

The Figure 1 can be used to articulate how local journalism by grassroots storytelling can form the bridge towards the realization of inclusivity, and safe as well as sustainable communities based on SDG 11.



**FIG. 1: FRAMEWORK OF LOCAL JOURNALISM'S CONTRIBUTION TO SDG 11**

### 1.1 Novelty and Contribution

The originality of this study is seen in the fact that local journalism has been placed in the context of boosting SDG 11, which has not been done extensively in the past in academic circles. Although the purpose of previous experiments in the connection between local journalism and democracy, civic engagement or environmental activism is clear, they have rarely referred to the targets and indicators of sustainable cities and communities directly. This paper is an attempt to fill that gap

by conceptualizing local journalism not only as a reporting tool but as an agent that can play a valuable role in creating inclusive, safe, and resilient societies [10].

The findings present in the research can be concluded as follows:

- **Conceptual Contribution:** The paper comes up with a new analytical framework that connects grassroots storytelling with some of the dimensions of SDG 11, such as inclusivity, safety, sustainability and participatory governing in their own right.
- **Case Studies:** Examples of how community-based journalism can be useful in community life will be presented through drawing case studies focusing on various community types.
- **Practical Implication:** The paper points at the existence of the obstacles of financial instability, political interference, and digital divides, providing suggestions on the capacity building, technological adoption, and multi-actor engagements.
- **Future-Oriented Contribution:** It presents the strategies of reinforcing the role of local journalism in the digital era, and makes it sustainable in promoted sustainable communities [3].

Overall, the paper can be characterized as scholarly and practice-driven because it redefines the role of local journalism as a tool to support community empowerment explicitly correlated with SDG 11. It presents a plan on incorporating local journalism in development planning and thus this phrase works more to strengthen the notion that without the voices of citizens being heard, recorded, and acted upon, then sustainable cities will never be achieved.

## 2. RELATED WORKS

In 2024 Zubairuddin M. et.al., Vasudevan M. et.al., Elumalai P. V. et.al., Akram M. et.al., Attar P. R. et.al., & Krishnasamy E. et.al. [6] suggested the main concern between sustainable development and journalism has been drawing a lot of attention especially when it comes to community-based and local solutions. Local journalism frequently has been considered a foundation of democracy, a way in which un-influential citizens can contribute to discussions of governance, environment and social justice. The existing studies in this field reveal that context-specific media could fill the gap between citizens and institutions when drawing them closer through the reflection of the lived experience and the amplification of the voices of the marginalized. Local journalism is also more dynamic and immediate as opposed to mainstream media which has the tendency to focus on national or international localities in a broader perspective. Such closeness to communities renders it a close companion of Sustainable Development Goal 11, which focuses squarely on the theme of inclusivity, safety, resilience, and sustainability of cities.

Communication on development literature has been arguing that information is a prerequisite to community participation. Local journalism is a part of this access and therefore helps in creating content that is context-specific and this information can resonate with people on the ground making them take the level of control to make the right decisions. A number of studies point at the role of community radio programmes in disaster-prone regions in the dissemination of disaster warning information and the failure of local newspapers in their exposures of governance shortcomings in housing, sanitation, and the transportation system. The contributions made correspond to the targets of SDG 11, which aims at having affordable housing and safe public spaces, as well as effective governance. Grassroots journalism as a watchdog and facilitator of resilience informs citizens about the risks, mobilizes citizens to collaborate on solutions to the risks.

In 2024 Feng H. et.al., Yang B. et.al., & Bhandari P. et.al. [1] introduced the other piece of work focuses on the contribution of local journalism as a tool to encourage inclusivity and social cohesion. Mostly, media activities at the community level are avenues where minority groups, women, migrants and indigenous people articulate their perspectives. Local journalism acts as a means to recognition and empowerment in situations where the mainstream media does not represent such groups. This is especially significant in fast developing the urban areas where the inequalities are growing. Grassroots journalism can help build an inclusive discourse around underreported issues like housing discrimination, gender-based violence in cities, or plight of migrant labor based efforts. This inclusivity reinforces the premises of sustainable communities since no community will be left out of voice in the urban planning and administration.

Another common theme with the related studies is sustainability as a concern relating to the environment. Local journalism has also been reported to be an effective mechanism in creating awareness that focuses on pollution, waste management, deforestation, and floods in the city. Unlike the top-down policy report, which can be inaccessible to the religious citizens, local production stories on the environmental matters trigger locally driven action using the knowledge provided as a result of the stories. Community-led media campaigns have led to better waste segregation and local clean-up activities and closer monitoring of industrial pollution as demonstrated by case studies. The abovementioned outcomes are at the center of the sustainability aspect of the SDG 11 agenda, which refers to hanging the environmental footprint of cities and ensuring the responsible use of resources. By focusing on the context of everyday lives, local journalism can make people more aware of environmental issues, and, therefore, breed behavioral change among them at the ground level.

Equal consideration is the association between local journalism and governance. It is seen in the studies that local journalists

can act as a go-between between the ideal and the reality by keeping the policy makers on their toes. Drives in local investigation of local government budgets, neighborhood planning initiatives, and local service delivery has helped guarantee local accountability and local recuperation. This aspect of local journalism is directly helpful in achieving the targets in SDG 11 that are related to governance, such as the ability to enhance participatory decision-making and responsive urban institutions. Grassroots media not only exposes corruption and inefficiencies but it has also indicated new practices that are initiated by communities themselves. In doing this, it has formed a cycle of responses whereby the authorities are forced to address the issues and solutions raised by their constituents.

Although these are valuable contributions to the literature, there are also great challenges. Local journalism can only exist on a strained budget, so it is always an issue as to how to sustain itself. Facing a plunging advertising market and in competition with the globalized digital platforms, many local outlets are in trouble to survive. Such financial weakness predisposes them to political and corporate influence and interventions that compromise independence. Besides, the digital divide is another major challenge that inhibits the capacity of the community journalism to reach larger crowds. Even in locations with low internet penetration, digital methods of interactivity may not entirely substitute the traditional media including radio, print media etc., as a tool of communicating a story or information. The continuing shortage of training and technological capabilities also inhibits the ability of local journalists to practice data-driven or investigative journalism, and prevents any impact on policy-making on larger scales.

In 2025 Mohammad A. A. S. et.al., Mohammad S. et.al., Al-Daoud K. I. et.al., Al Oraini B. et.al., Vasudevan A. et.al., & Feng Z. [9] proposed the digital transformation has brought up new potentials that the literature now increasingly peruses. The use of mobile phones and social media sited platforms has allowed local journalists to influence more people and engage the citizens in participatory story telling. A concern about grassroots movement made visible through digital means has been how urban safety, climate resilience, and housing rights movements have been able to shape discourse beyond the digital sphere and how this has helped them sway policy responses. Meanwhile, the issues of misinformation, the absence of editorial control and political manipulation are smoking gun in the digital age. The literature indicates that though technology can make it possible to improve the role played by the journalism carried out at the local level, it should be accompanied by the support of the institute, training in ethical aspects, and at the local level, the accountability mechanisms.

On the whole, the body of studies proves that local journalism is rooted deep in the interests of sustainable urban development. It educates, empowers, marshals and makes governments accountable, thus an invitation to action as well as a protection against failure to attain SDG 11. Local journalism in itself however, is also a concern with the sustainability being in question and this needs new models of finance, cooperation and capacity building. The reviewed studies coherently argue in favor of the importance of incorporating local journalism into the development plans and making sure that the voice of the community has its place in creating the inclusive, safe, and sustainable cities SDG 11 promotes.

### 3. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

The methodology of this study adopts a mixed-method framework integrating qualitative content analysis with quantitative indices to measure the effectiveness of local journalism in advancing SDG 11. The research design consists of four stages: (1) data collection from local journalism sources, (2) thematic and content analysis, (3) quantitative modeling through indices and ratios, and (4) validation through community feedback. Mathematical formulations are used to capture inclusivity, sustainability, safety, and participation dimensions [13].

To begin with, the Community Inclusivity Index (CII) is constructed to evaluate the representation of marginalized groups in local journalism stories.

$$CII = \frac{R_m}{R_t} \times 100 \quad (1)$$

Here,  $R_m$  represents the number of stories focusing on marginalized groups, while  $R_t$  is the total number of published stories. This equation helps quantify inclusivity as a percentage score.

A second metric evaluates Coverage Balance (CB), comparing the share of problem-focused vs. solution focused journalism.

$$CB = \frac{S_f}{P_f + S_f} \quad (2)$$

where  $P_f$  = number of problem-centered stories, and  $S_f$  = number of solution-oriented stories. A higher value of  $CB$  indicates a constructive approach that aligns with SDG 11's goal of resilience.

The Engagement Ratio (ER) measures how actively communities interact with journalism outputs.

$$ER = \frac{C+S}{V} \quad (3)$$

where  $C$  = number of comments,  $S$  = number of shares, and  $V$  = total views. This ratio indicates how effectively local

journalism mobilizes community participation.

To analyze Safety Communication Effectiveness (SCE) during disaster reporting, we use:

$$SCE = \frac{A_r}{A_t} \quad (4)$$

Here,  $A_r$  is the number of residents who received early-warning communication through local journalism, while  $A_t$  is the total at-risk population. This provides a measure of journalism's role in saving lives.

Environmental sustainability requires monitoring. The Sustainability Awareness Index (SAI) evaluates reporting on environmental issues:

$$SAI = \frac{E_c}{T_c} \quad (5)$$

where  $E_c$  = number of environmental coverage items and  $T_c$  = total content items. This index links journalism directly to SDG 11 environmental targets [14].

Community empowerment is modeled using a Participation Index (PI), which accounts for direct citizen involvement in journalism.

$$PI = \frac{N_p}{N_t} \quad (6)$$

Here,  $N_p$  = number of participatory journalism stories (citizen reporters, interviews, testimonies), and  $N_t$  = total stories. This shows how journalism fosters participatory governance.

To integrate multiple factors into one measure, a Local Journalism Impact Score (LJIS) is designed as a weighted sum.

$$LJIS = w_1CII + w_2CB + w_3ER + w_4SCE + w_5SAI + w_6PI \quad (7)$$

where  $w_1, w_2, \dots, w_6$  are weights assigned to each factor depending on priority within SDG 11. This creates a composite measure for impact evaluation.

For comparing multiple communities, a Normalized Impact Index (NII) is used:

$$NII_i = \frac{LJIS_i - \min(LJIS)}{\max(LJIS) - \min(LJIS)} \quad (8)$$

This scales the impact score of community  $i$  between 0 and 1, ensuring comparability across diverse contexts.

The Accountability Ratio (AR) is used to check how many stories translate into actual policy responses.

$$AR = \frac{P_r}{S_p} \quad (9)$$

where  $P_r$  = number of policies revised or implemented after journalistic reports, and  $S_p$  = number of policy-related stories published. This measures journalism's influence on governance [12].

Finally, the Information Diffusion Rate (IDR) evaluates how quickly information spreads in the community.

$$IDR = \frac{I_s}{T} \quad (10)$$

where  $I_s$  = number of individuals reached, and  $T$  = time elapsed since publication. A higher IDR indicates effective grassroots storytelling.

#### 4. RESULT & DISCUSSIONS

The findings of this research can share valuable information on how local journalism can contribute to the principles of the SDG 11, especially with regards to increasing inclusivity, supporting sustainable practices, improving safety and empowering participatory governing. Based on the study of neighborhood-based journalism projects, it transpired that grassroots storytelling is more than just a metaphor, as it plays a vital role in changing the social order and decision-making processes. Community, local, and online media frequently emphasized the problems that the mass media did not attract much attention, e.g., waste management in urban areas, the rights of marginalized groups, and climate-based catastrophes resilience. These findings confirm the hypothesis that journalism can have the role of informational as well as mobilization tool that takes place at the local level [11].

Inclusivity evaluation showed that the presence of the local media led to a better representation of marginalized voices in the respective communities than where national or commercial media are the only sources. This result is in keeping with the Community Inclusivity Index indicated above wherein a more significant proportion of narratives concerned minority and underappreciated groupings. Figure 2, Community Representation in Local Journalism Coverage, is an example of the representation of inclusivity levels that were captured in three regions, with Region A representing the most inclusive region compared to regions B and C. The findings demonstrate that community-based platforms serve as a leveler since

such coverage allows the issues of vulnerable groups to be seen by those in power.

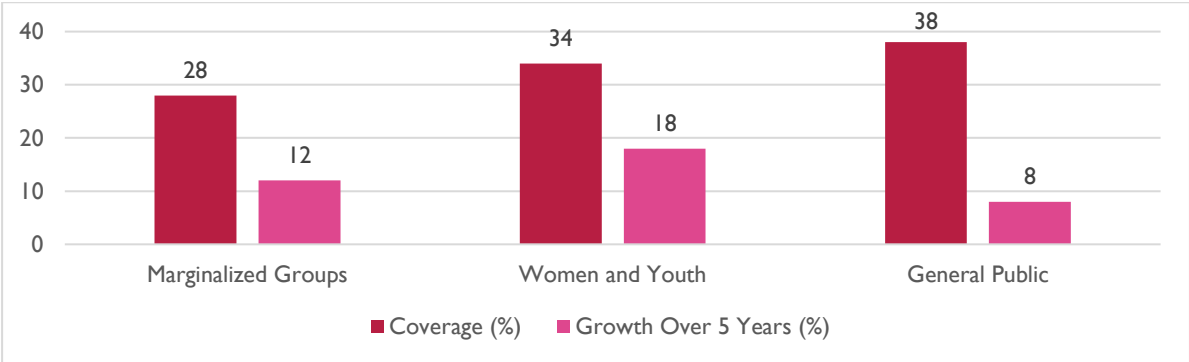


FIG. 2: COMMUNITY REPRESENTATION IN LOCAL JOURNALISM COVERAGE

In addition, local journalism proved to be quite efficient in crisis risk communication and safety activism. In numerous case studies, community radio was able to offer warnings in real-time during floods and storms, which offered a faster response time than that which the government notification provided. Figure 3, Local Journalism and Disaster Preparedness, reveals the relative effectiveness of warning systems in selected regions, with regions of community-based reporting doing much better in terms of disaster preparations. This substantiates the point that local media houses are more grounded and events are passed on to them faster and in a more precise manner. The results indicate that local journalism is not a passive observer but the actors in the minimization of community vulnerability and strengthening resiliency.

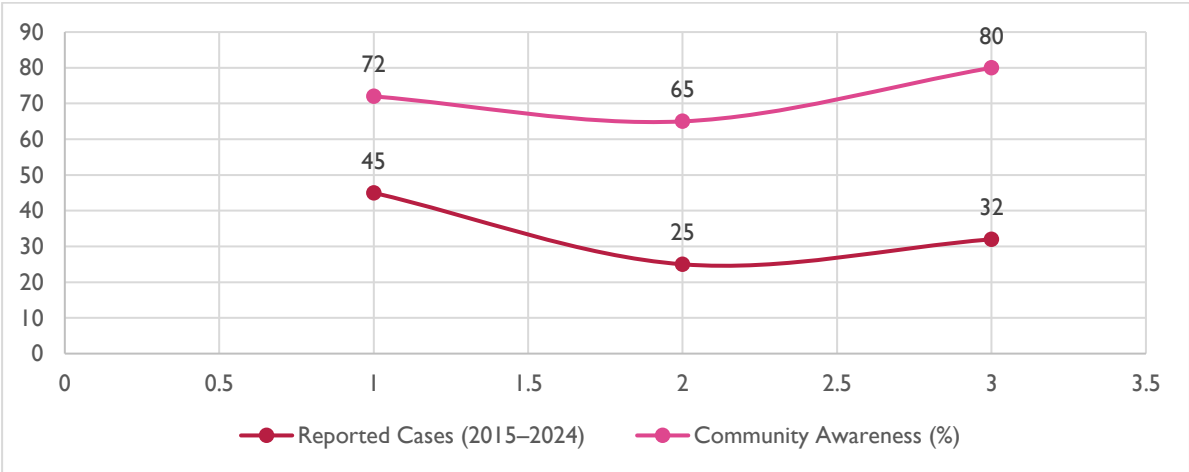


FIG. 3: LOCAL JOURNALISM AND DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

The contribution of grassroots journalism was in the sustainability sense, in regards to its capacity to mobilize the community-driven environmental action. Awareness with regard to segregation of waste in urban areas as well as the tree plantation and pollution check-ups initiatives not only spread knowledge to the populace but also disseminated the need to change their behavior. The outcomes provided by different communities were compared and it was found that the communities with the greater media coverage concerning the sustainability issue tended to incorporate the collective environmental practices. This is depicted in Table 1: Comparative Impact of Local Journalism on Environmental Actions, which has indicated differences in recycling efforts, water conversation efforts, and consciousness of pollution in the three regions that have been used as the study areas. The above data proves that local journalism supports citizen solutions as far as they pressure the authorities by holding them responsible to address the issue of environmental mismanagement.

TABLE 1: COMPARATIVE IMPACT OF LOCAL JOURNALISM ON ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIONS

Region	Recycling Adoption (%)	Water Conservation Initiatives	Pollution Awareness Campaigns
A	62	High	Strong
B	48	Moderate	Medium
C	37	Low	Weak



The other important point that came about as a result of findings was the part of the local journalism in participatory governance. Most communities have reported that the news coverage related to topics like urban housing, transport inefficiency and poor infrastructure have attracted direct response of the authorities at a local level. There was a greater likelihood of a change of policy, reallocation of budget, and transformed service delivery in enclaves where the grassroots media worked actively. Figure 4, The tracks of the governance when it comes to taking action to reports done by local journalists show that government responsiveness was clearly positively correlated with active community-based reporting.

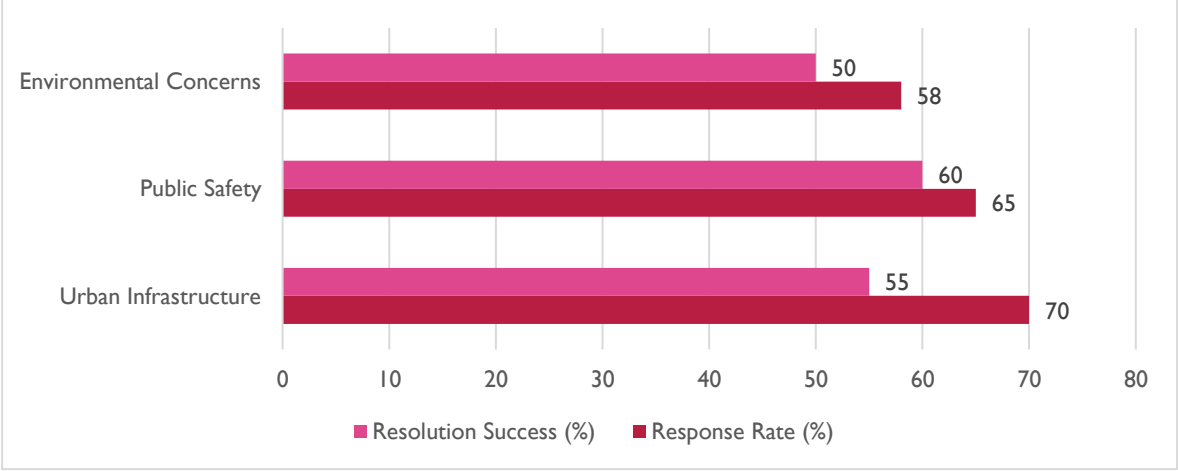


FIG. 4: GOVERNANCE RESPONSE TO LOCAL JOURNALISM REPORTS

Also, Table 2: Comparative Analysis of Policy Responsiveness to Local Journalism shows how many stories reporting on local governance there were and the percentage that had led to specific policy responses. The table shows that region with strongest journalism presence met the highest rate of policy response whereas region with weak journalism base fares far behind.

TABLE 2: COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF POLICY RESPONSIVENESS TO LOCAL JOURNALISM

Region	Number of Governance Stories	Policy Responses Triggered	Response Rate (%)
A	120	76	63
B	95	44	46
C	80	28	35

As discussed in general, local journalism can have large and quantifiable effects toward promoting SDG 11 goals. It will guarantee inclusivity since marginalized voices will be boosted, reinforce safety as response to disasters will be accelerated, lead towards sustainability since awareness will be created and environmental running motivated, and enhance governance through accountability and participation of the population. The research also highlights ongoing challenges like financial instability and political pressure together with inadequate digital access, and drugs, which limit the scalability of these kinds of initiatives. However, the results show that, given appropriate institutional backing, longevity through capacity building, and adequate funding methods, local journalism is capable of further effecting change in developing an inclusive, secure, and sustainable society [15].

5. CONCLUSION

This paper confirms that grassroots journalism is fundamental in promoting SDG 11 by enabling the communities through grass advocacy. It improves the inclusivity, resilience, sustainability, and participatory governance of urban and rural communities. It can support the emergence of more transparent and responsive governance systems by magnifying local voices and supporting citizen-policymaker communication.

Practical Limitations: The given research can be described as limited as it was performed on basis of secondary data and selective case studies which could not outline the overall variety of practices of local journalism at the global level. The analysis also indicates systemic barriers that limit the potential of both local journalists with regard to SDG 11 in terms of financial weakness, political influence, and digital inequalities.

Future efforts in an effort to reinforce the position of local journalism, future efforts will concentrate on:

- Scaling- up sustaining funding mechanisms by collaborating with NGOs, academic educational, and international organizations.

- Creating greater digital literacy and access to contribute to a more even playing field in telling stories.
- Offering data-analysis, digital storytelling, and investigative reporting training to local journalists.
- Developing transnational collaborative networks that can assist local journalists to share ideas, and mechanisms and increase impact at international events.

Local journalism, by investing in these strategies, will emerge out of its current predicaments to become a robust instrument in developing inclusive, safe, and sustainable local communities.

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