

By: Laura Wiley

Multimedia journalist Bukola Adebayo talks to Scripps's students on her experiences reporting on global health, specifically describing a world where tap water carries the pungent scent of gasoline.

In her story for the Pulitzer Center, "The Poisoned Wells of Baruwa", Adebayo delves into Nigeria, the largest oil-producing country which has deeply affected communities. The community has over one million people who have abandoned their water taps and wells due to an underground oil leak.

Adebayo's journey for this story began when a friend called her to ask if she could stay in her apartment due to her water smelling like oil.

This story ignited Adebayo's curiosity which prompted her to uncover that Baruwa residents have been dealing with this problem for 30 years.

Through her interviews, Adebayo learned the importance of listening to communities and understanding their needs. She explains that compelling stories often emerge from casual conversations.

"When I was talking to an 85-year-old man, he came out with three bundles of documents containing old letters written to the government, yet they hadn't gotten any results," she said.

When the government failed to respond, the community stopped seeking help.

Initially, Adebayo faced pushback during interviews due to the community's frustration with the lack of resolutions. This setback helped fuel her drive to get more answers.

"I could see when nothing has been done, and that helped me feel ignited," she said.

Adebayo explains that the government pushed back on the sensitive issue of oil in Nigeria because the country sees the commodity as a revenue and a right.

"I had to put into consideration whether my reporting would be responsible for any backlash," she said.

She emphasizes the need for students to consider potential backlash in reporting stories.

"It is important in getting your own goal in the story, even when you're holding a system like the government accountable," she said.

By uncovering injustice in communities, such as her story on sexual harassment, Adebayo tells students that her reporting created justice by leading the Nigerian senate to take notice of the issue and use it as a case study for addressing harassment in the education system.