

Women's Participation In Climate Action For Sustainable Development In Nigeria: Challenges, Opportunities, And Policy Implications

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Abstract: *Climate change presents profound social, economic, and environmental challenges, disproportionately affecting women due to socio-economic vulnerabilities and critical roles in resource management. In Nigeria, women are central to agriculture, natural resource management, and community resilience, yet their formal participation in climate action remains limited. This paper examines women's participation in climate action as a catalyst for sustainable development, exploring challenges, opportunities, and policy implications. Guided by Ecofeminism and Gender and Development (GAD) theories, the study highlights how gender inequalities, socio-cultural norms, and intersectional vulnerabilities restrict women's engagement in climate initiatives. Drawing on existing literature, policy documents, and theoretical perspectives, the study identifies socio-cultural constraints, economic limitations, policy gaps, low awareness, and limited access to education and technology as key barriers to women's involvement. Nevertheless, opportunities exist through targeted capacity building, gender-responsive policy implementation, community engagement, ICT integration, and multi-stakeholder partnerships. The paper concludes that empowering women enhances environmental sustainability, strengthens community resilience, and promotes inclusive socio-economic development. Recommendations include mainstreaming gender in climate policies, improving access to education and resources, fostering grassroots advocacy, leveraging digital platforms, and supporting women-led climate initiatives through policy and institutional support. By addressing barriers and maximizing opportunities, Nigeria can harness the full potential of women as agents of climate action, advancing both national development objectives and global Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 13 (Climate Action).*

Keywords-Women's Participation, Climate Action, Sustainable Development, Gender Equality, Nigeria and Environmental Governance

INTRODUCTION

Climate change is a major global challenge with significant social, economic, and environmental consequences. Its impacts, including extreme weather events, flooding, desertification, and rising temperatures, disproportionately affect vulnerable populations, particularly women (UNFCCC, 2022). Women in Nigeria play crucial roles in managing natural resources, agriculture, and community resilience, yet their participation in formal climate action programs remains limited. Evidence shows that including women in climate mitigation and adaptation initiatives improves environmental sustainability, strengthens community resilience, and contributes to economic development (UNDP, 2023). In Nigeria, climate-induced challenges threaten agriculture, water resources, and livelihoods, making women's involvement in climate action critical for achieving sustainable development goals (SDGs), especially SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) (United Nations, 2015). Despite supportive policies, gaps persist in implementation, awareness, and capacity building, limiting

the full potential of women as catalysts for sustainable development. Although women contribute substantially to environmental management and community development, their representation in formal climate action programs in Nigeria is constrained by socio-cultural norms, limited access to education and technology, economic challenges, and insufficient policy enforcement. This underrepresentation reduces the effectiveness of climate adaptation strategies and limits opportunities for leveraging women's knowledge and leadership in promoting sustainable development. Hence, it is necessary to examine ways to enhance women's participation in climate action in Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to: examine the role of women in promoting climate action in Nigeria. Identify the challenges limiting women's participation in climate action initiatives. explore opportunities and strategies to enhance women's engagement in climate action for sustainable development and assess the implications of women's participation in climate action for achieving national and global sustainable development goals.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Climate Action:

Climate action refers to deliberate efforts, policies, and interventions aimed at mitigating the causes and impacts of climate change, including reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy, and enhancing resilience to climate hazards (UNFCCC, 2022). It is crucial for safeguarding ecosystems, sustaining livelihoods, and ensuring socio-economic stability, particularly in countries like Nigeria that are highly vulnerable to climate variability and extreme weather events. Climate action involves an efforts to combat climate change and its adverse impacts. This includes reducing greenhouse gas emissions, promoting renewable energy, improving resilience, and adopting sustainable practices in agriculture, industry, and natural resource management (IPCC, 2023; Adewuyi & Ezeamaka, 2023). In Nigeria, climate action encompasses both policy-driven initiatives and grassroots programs aimed at reducing vulnerability, enhancing community resilience, and promoting sustainable livelihoods.

Women's Participation:

Women's participation is defined as the active engagement of women in decision-making, planning, and implementation processes across social, economic, and environmental spheres. In the context of climate action and sustainable development, it entails the contribution of women's skills, knowledge, and labor to initiatives aimed at mitigating climate change, enhancing adaptive capacity, and promoting environmental sustainability (Oluwaleye et al., 2024; Agbogidi & Ofuoku, 2007). Such participation can occur at individual, community, organizational, and policy levels and is critical for ensuring inclusive and effective climate governance.

Conceptual Linkages

Sustainable development, as defined by the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987), is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet theirs. It integrates economic growth, social equity, and environmental protection. In the Nigerian context, sustainable development involves policies and practices that foster economic opportunities, social inclusion, environmental conservation, and resilience to climate change (Adewuyi & Ezeamaka, 2023; Raimi et al., 2019).

Intersectionality in Climate Action and Gender

Intersectionality examines how overlapping social identities such as gender, socio-economic status, ethnicity, and location shape individuals' experiences and vulnerabilities (UNDP, 2023). In climate action, intersectional perspectives highlight that women, particularly from marginalized communities, face unique challenges and opportunities in responding to

climate change. Understanding these dynamics is essential for designing inclusive climate policies that foster equitable participation and maximize sustainable development outcomes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This paper is anchored on Ecofeminism and Gender and Development (GAD) theory, which together provide a lens to understand the relationship between gender, environmental sustainability, and societal development. These frameworks underscore the importance of gender equality in achieving sustainable development and offer a perspective for examining women's roles and contributions to climate action in Nigeria.

Ecofeminism posits a close link between women's marginalization and environmental degradation, arguing that both arise from patriarchal and hierarchical systems that prioritize power and profit over equity and sustainability (Roy, 2024). Scholars such as Karen Warren, Maria Mies, Vandana Shiva, Ynestra King, Susan Griffin, Charlene Spretnak, Mary Daly, Rachel Carson, and Françoise d'Eaubonne have contributed to this perspective. Ecofeminism emphasizes that women possess unique knowledge and skills essential for environmental preservation due to their intimate connection with knowledge and skills essential for environmental preservation due to their intimate connection with nature through caregiving, resource management, and agricultural responsibilities. By advocating for the inclusion of women's voices in decision-making at all levels, ecofeminism highlights the critical role women play in promoting sustainable development and climate resilience (Roy, 2024). Complementing this, Gender and Development (GAD) theory focuses on systemic inequalities that hinder women's full participation in development processes. Prominent proponents, including Jane Parpart, Patricia Connelly, Eudine Barriteau, Caroline Moser, and Barbara Bailey, advanced the framework, emphasizing how traditional gender norms and power imbalances affect resource distribution, labor division, and agency within households and communities (Parpart et al., 2000). GAD theory advocates for gender-responsive policies and the integration of women's perspectives in decision-making, highlighting the importance of addressing social, economic, and political disparities to achieve inclusive development. Together, these frameworks illuminate the dual role of women in climate action as both vulnerable to climate change and agents of change. Women are disproportionately affected by climate-related hazards due to their reliance on natural resources for livelihoods, yet their traditional knowledge of resource management, adaptation practices, and community organization positions them as key actors in climate mitigation and adaptation. In Nigeria, ecofeminism provides insight into how indigenous practices and women's lived experiences can inform climate strategies, while GAD theory demonstrates the pathways for empowering women through education, financial inclusion, policy reforms, and

political access. Moreover, GAD theory emphasizes the inclusion of men as allies to promote sustainable practices and gender justice, while ecofeminism critiques the systemic exclusion of women from climate governance. By integrating these perspectives, the study highlights how gender-responsive climate policies can strengthen the nexus between gender equality and environmental sustainability, thereby advancing SDG 13 (Climate Action). These theoretical lenses are particularly relevant for understanding and addressing the challenges and opportunities of women's participation in climate action in Nigeria, providing a foundation for transformative policy and practice.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Global Perspectives on Women and Climate Action

Globally, women play a central role in advancing sustainable development and accelerating progress toward Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 13, which emphasizes climate action (Adewuyi & Ezeamaka, 2023). In many African countries, women are primary managers of natural resources such as water and energy. Yet, they are disproportionately affected by climate-related challenges, including droughts, floods, desertification, and food insecurity (Adewuyi & Ezeamaka, 2023). Women contribute significantly to both climate adaptation and mitigation through roles as caregivers, farmers, and community organizers. For instance, women constitute a large share of the agricultural workforce in Africa and play key roles in water management, soil conservation, and sustainable agricultural practices (Chikwendu, 2008; Muthuki et al., 2013). Initiatives such as Kenya's Green Belt Movement and Uganda's WISE program exemplify how women can drive climate education, tree planting, and renewable energy adoption across Africa (Fairtree.org, 2023). In Nigeria, especially women are often perceived as victims of climate change due to their reliance on natural resources. However, they are also powerful agents of change, implementing renewable energy solutions, community-based adaptation strategies, and sustainable farming practices to address environmental challenges (Onoh et al., 2023; Robert et al., 2022). Despite these contributions, women's full engagement in climate action is constrained by systemic gender inequalities, including limited access to education, financial resources, land rights, and political decision-making (Ferdous & Uddin, 2021; Ugwu & Okoye, 2022; Okunade et al., 2023). Challenges such as political exclusion, cultural norms, restricted educational opportunities, and unequal access to resources hinder women's effectiveness in climate initiatives (Adebayo et al., 2020; Onoh et al., 2023). Conversely, opportunities exist for women to enhance their participation through access to education and training, leadership in cooperatives, involvement in renewable energy projects, and active engagement in policy advocacy (Begum et al., 2024; Delica-Willison & Sevilla-Alvarez, 2022; Allen et al., 2019). These opportunities enable women to play pivotal roles in community-based climate adaptation,

mitigation strategies, and sustainable development programs. Understanding women's participation, the challenges they face, and the opportunities available is essential for designing gender-responsive, inclusive, and effective policies that advance sustainable development in Nigeria (Ferdous & Uddin, 2021; IPU, 2025; Okunade et al., 2023). Empowering women in climate action is therefore not only a matter of social equity but also a strategic imperative for achieving SDG 13 and ensuring environmental sustainability.

Across Africa, women are disproportionately affected by climate change due to their reliance on natural resources for livelihoods, such as agriculture and water management (World Bank, 2022). Studies highlight that women's engagement in climate adaptation initiatives like agroforestry, clean energy adoption, and community-based disaster risk management has strengthened household food security and local ecosystem sustainability (UNDP, 2023). However, socio-cultural norms, limited access to resources, and gender biases continue to constrain women's effective participation.

In Nigeria, women play a pivotal role in climate action at local and community levels, particularly in rural areas where they manage water, food, and energy resources (Nigerian Environmental Study/Action Team [NEST], 2022). Programs such as women-led tree planting initiatives and renewable energy projects in northern and southern Nigeria have demonstrated that female participation enhances environmental stewardship and community resilience. Despite these successes, challenges like inadequate policy support, funding gaps, and limited technical capacity hinder the scalability of these interventions.

Policy Frameworks and International Guidelines

Global and regional frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) notably SDG 5 (Gender Equality), SDG 13 (Climate Action), and SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) emphasize the importance of integrating gender in climate policies (United Nations, 2015). International agreements such as the Paris Agreement (2015) and UNFCCC gender action plans advocate for women's empowerment and inclusive decision-making in climate action, linking gender equality directly to sustainable development outcomes. While evidence underscores the critical role of women in climate action globally and in Africa, there is limited empirical research documenting Nigeria-specific data on the effectiveness, challenges, and long-term impacts of women-led climate initiatives. In addition, intersectional analyses that consider socio-economic status, regional disparities, and local governance structures remain sparse, highlighting the need for context-specific studies to inform policy and program design.

CHALLENGES TO WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE ACTION

Women's involvement in climate action in Nigeria is constrained by multiple, interrelated challenges that limit their capacity to contribute effectively to sustainable development. These challenges can be grouped into socio-cultural, policy and institutional, economic and resource, educational and informational, and political dimensions.

1. Socio-Cultural Barriers

Deeply entrenched socio-cultural norms and patriarchal gender roles in many Nigerian communities confine women to domestic and caregiving responsibilities, restricting mobility, decision-making power, and public participation (UN Women, 2022; Basiru et al., 2022). Societal perceptions about women's leadership and technical capacities often marginalize them from forums where climate policies and community adaptation plans are discussed. These norms intersect with pre-existing gender inequalities, making women more vulnerable to climate impacts and reducing their ability to participate fully in climate governance (Ologeh & Ekanade, 2020).

2. Policy and Institutional Gaps

Although Nigeria has established climate, gender, and sustainable development policies, implementation remains inconsistent. Weak coordination among government agencies, inadequate integration of gender-responsive strategies, and limited representation of women in climate governance hinder effective participation (NEST, 2022). Many programs lack mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating gender inclusivity, while women's perspectives are often excluded from decision-making at local, state, and national levels (Springer, 2021; Guardian, 2024).

3. Economic and Resource Constraints

Economic barriers significantly limit women's engagement in climate action. Many women, particularly rural and smallholder farmers, face unequal access to land, credit, agricultural inputs, technology, and climate information, which are crucial for adaptation and mitigation initiatives (Anugwa et al., 2022; Basiru et al., 2022). Limited financial capital, poor access to training programs, and structural inequalities in land tenure rights restrict women from adopting climate-smart practices or scaling up adaptation projects, further increasing their vulnerability to climate-related shocks (Premium Times, 2025; World Bank, 2022).

4. Educational and Informational Gaps

Low levels of formal education and limited access to climate knowledge reduce women's capacity to understand, anticipate, and respond to environmental changes (Basiru et al., 2022; Ologeh & Ekanade, 2020; UNDP, 2023). Restricted access to extension services, training programs, and technical skills such as renewable energy technologies, water

management, and sustainable farming limits women's ability to participate meaningfully in climate initiatives or advocate for adaptation strategies.

5. Increased Workload and Domestic Burdens

Climate-related stresses, including water scarcity, erratic rainfall, and resource depletion, intensify women's domestic and caregiving responsibilities (Basiru et al., 2022; JAEISS, 2025). These additional labor demands reduce the time available for education, economic activities, civic engagement, and participation in community-level adaptation planning, thereby constraining women's agency in climate action.

6. Political and Leadership Exclusion

Women remain underrepresented in political, community, and environmental leadership roles, despite policies advocating gender inclusivity (UN Women, 2022). This exclusion limits their influence in policy formulation, planning, and resource allocation. Without direct involvement in governance structures, women's lived experiences, indigenous knowledge, and adaptation priorities are often excluded from decision-making, weakening the effectiveness of climate strategies (Ologeh & Ekanade, 2020).

7. Intersectional Vulnerabilities

Women's participation is further affected by intersectional factors such as age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geographic location. Young, poor, or rural women face multiple layers of marginalization, which impede access to information, resources, and decision-making platforms. Addressing these intersectional vulnerabilities is critical to ensuring climate action strategies do not reinforce existing inequalities but empower women as agents of sustainable development (Basiru et al., 2022; Anugwa et al., 2022).

OPPORTUNITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR ENHANCING WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN CLIMATE ACTION

Despite the challenges identified, there exist significant opportunities and strategic approaches that can strengthen women's involvement in climate action in Nigeria. Leveraging these opportunities is crucial for advancing gender equality and achieving sustainable development goals.

1. Capacity Building and Education

Investing in education and capacity building is foundational to empowering women in climate action. Training programs on climate science, sustainable agricultural practices, renewable energy, disaster risk reduction, and environmental management can equip women with the technical knowledge and skills necessary to engage effectively. Capacity building should also include leadership and decision-making training,

enabling women to participate in governance and policy formulation (UN Women, 2022). Furthermore, integrating climate literacy into formal and non-formal education programs can create a generation of informed women who can contribute to both local and national climate initiatives.

2. Policy Strengthening and Implementation

Strengthening existing policies and ensuring effective implementation is critical. Gender-responsive climate policies, inclusive governance frameworks, and equitable resource allocation mechanisms should be enforced to guarantee women's participation at all levels of climate action. Institutional reforms that mandate women's representation in decision-making bodies, climate committees, and project leadership roles can bridge gaps in political and organizational inclusion. Monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should also be incorporated to assess policy outcomes and ensure accountability (NEST, 2022).

3. Community Engagement and Advocacy

Grassroots engagement is essential for mobilizing women in climate action. Community-based programs, women's cooperatives, local advocacy groups, and faith-based organizations can serve as platforms for raising awareness, sharing knowledge, and fostering collective action. Encouraging male allies and community leaders to support women's initiatives can help dismantle socio-cultural barriers. Advocacy campaigns that highlight the economic, environmental, and social benefits of women's participation can create an enabling environment for sustained engagement (UNDP, 2023).

4. ICT and Media Integration

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and media platforms offer innovative avenues for empowering women. Mobile applications, social media, radio programs, and online learning platforms can disseminate climate information, provide early warning systems, and facilitate networking among women-led initiatives. Digital tools can also enable women to access funding opportunities, technical guidance, and mentorship, particularly in remote and underserved areas. Integrating ICT into climate education and community programs can enhance women's visibility, participation, and impact in climate action initiatives (World Bank, 2022).

5. Partnerships and Resource Mobilization

Collaborations between government agencies, non-governmental organizations, development partners, and the private sector can provide women with financial, technical, and logistical support for climate projects. Grant programs, microfinance schemes, and entrepreneurship initiatives targeted at women can enable them to implement climate-

resilient projects and scale their impact. Partnerships that prioritize gender mainstreaming in climate funding and project design strengthen sustainability and inclusivity.

CONCLUSION

Women's participation in climate action in Nigeria is both a critical necessity and a strategic opportunity for achieving sustainable development. This study demonstrates that, despite women's significant contributions to agriculture, natural resource management, and community resilience, their engagement in formal climate initiatives is constrained by socio-cultural norms, economic limitations, policy gaps, and intersectional vulnerabilities. These barriers hinder the full realization of women's potential as agents of change in addressing climate-related challenges. Nevertheless, the study highlights numerous opportunities to enhance women's involvement, including targeted capacity building, gender-responsive policy implementation, community mobilization, ICT integration, and multi-stakeholder partnerships. Empowering women not only strengthens environmental stewardship and climate adaptation but also fosters social inclusion, economic growth, and equitable governance. Integrating women into climate decision-making ensures that their indigenous knowledge, leadership skills, and innovative capacities are harnessed to address environmental challenges effectively. The findings underscore the urgent need for comprehensive policies and programs that remove structural and socio-cultural barriers while promoting women's education, access to resources, and leadership in climate governance. Ultimately, advancing women's participation in climate action aligns with national development priorities and global Sustainable Development Goals, particularly SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 13 (Climate Action), positioning women as pivotal drivers of sustainable development in Nigeria.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the discussions, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance women's participation in climate action in Nigeria:

1. Capacity Building and Education: Implement targeted training programs for women on climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable resource management. Integrate climate change education and gender perspectives into both formal and non-formal education systems to enhance women's knowledge, skills, and leadership capacities.
2. Community Engagement and Advocacy: Mobilize women's groups, cooperatives, youth organizations, and community leaders to promote awareness, knowledge-sharing, and collective action on climate initiatives. Encourage male allies and local influencers to support women's participation, helping to dismantle socio-cultural barriers.
3. Economic and Resource Support: Facilitate access to microfinance, grants, and climate adaptation funds for

women-led projects. Establish incentives for private sector partnerships that support women's engagement in climate-resilient activities, ensuring equitable access to land, inputs, and technology.

4. ICT and Media Integration: Leverage digital platforms, mobile applications, radio, and social media to disseminate climate information, provide early warning systems, and enhance networking among women-led initiatives. Use online training and virtual communities to expand women's technical capacity and visibility in climate action.

5. Policy Strengthening and Gender-Responsive Governance: Mainstream gender in national climate policies, ensuring women's representation in decision-making bodies, climate committees, and project leadership roles. Establish monitoring and evaluation frameworks to track women's participation and policy outcomes effectively.

6. Partnerships and Resource Mobilization: Foster collaboration between government agencies, NGOs, international partners, and private sector stakeholders to provide technical, financial, and logistical support for women's climate initiatives.

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