

The Role of Environmental Policy in Nigeria's Climate Resilience: Evaluating the Impact of Political Will and Policy Implementation

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Abstract

Climate change poses significant threats to Nigeria, exacerbating environmental challenges such as desertification, flooding, and biodiversity loss. While Nigeria has developed several environmental policies, including the National Policy on Environment (2016) and the Climate Change Act (2021), the effectiveness of these policies remains limited due to weak implementation and insufficient political will. This study examines the role of environmental policy in enhancing Nigeria's climate resilience, focusing on the impact of governance structures, leadership commitment, and enforcement challenges. Using a qualitative research approach, this study analyzes policy documents, case studies, and thematic literature to assess Nigeria's environmental governance. Findings reveal that while legal frameworks exist, enforcement mechanisms are inadequate, often hindered by institutional inefficiencies, financial constraints, and corruption. The study also highlights that strong political will is a decisive factor in successful policy implementation, as demonstrated by case studies of both effective and failed environmental policies.

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Background to the Study

Climate change is a significant global challenge, with adverse impacts on ecosystems, economies, and human livelihoods (IPCC, 2021). Nigeria, as the most populous nation in Africa, faces severe climate risks, including rising temperatures, desertification, coastal erosion, flooding, and irregular rainfall patterns (Nwafor, 2020). These environmental challenges threaten food security, water resources, public health, and overall economic stability, particularly in climate-sensitive sectors such as agriculture and fisheries (Adelekan, 2018). The country's geographical diversity exacerbates its climate vulnerability. The northern region experiences increasing desert encroachment due to prolonged droughts, while the southern coastal areas are at risk of sea-level rise and recurrent flooding (Oladipo, 2019). Extreme weather events, such as the 2012 nationwide flooding that displaced over 2 million people, highlight the urgency of climate resilience strategies (NEMA, 2013). Despite Nigeria's commitment to international climate agreements, such as the Paris Agreement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the country continues to struggle with weak environmental governance and policy enforcement (Okonkwo et al., 2022).

Environmental policy serves as a critical tool for addressing climate change by promoting sustainable resource management, emissions reduction, and climate adaptation measures (Schoenefeld & Jordan, 2017). In Nigeria, key legislative and policy frameworks, such as the National Policy on Environment (1989, revised in 2016) and the Climate Change Act (2021), outline strategies for mitigating climate risks (Federal Ministry of Environment [FME], 2021). These policies aim to regulate land use, reduce deforestation, promote renewable energy, and strengthen institutional frameworks for environmental protection.

However, the success of these policies depends on effective implementation, which requires political commitment, adequate funding, and institutional coordination (Olawuyi, 2020). Weak governance structures, corruption, and limited technical capacity have hindered policy enforcement, reducing Nigeria's ability to build long-term climate resilience (Agboola & Emmanuel, 2021).

Despite the presence of comprehensive environmental policies, Nigeria continues to experience environmental degradation and climate-induced disasters. A critical factor undermining policy effectiveness is the lack of strong political will and poor implementation mechanisms (Ibrahim & Ajibade, 2022). Political leaders often prioritize short-term economic gains over sustainable environmental practices, leading to inadequate policy enforcement (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2019). Furthermore, bureaucratic inefficiencies, weak institutional coordination, and corruption have contributed to poor policy outcomes (Okonkwo et al., 2022).

This study investigates the extent to which political will and policy implementation influence Nigeria's climate resilience. It explores the barriers to effective environmental policy execution and assesses the role of government commitment in achieving sustainability goals.

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To examine the effectiveness of Nigeria's environmental policies in promoting climate resilience.
2. To evaluate the role of political will in the implementation of environmental policies.
3. To identify key challenges hindering policy enforcement and propose solutions.
4. To achieve these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:
5. How effective are Nigeria's environmental policies in addressing climate change?
6. What role does political will play in the success or failure of policy implementation?
7. What are the major barriers to effective environmental policy enforcement in Nigeria?
8. How can policy implementation be improved to enhance climate resilience?

This study contributes to the growing discourse on environmental governance and climate resilience in Nigeria. By evaluating the relationship between political will and policy implementation, the research provides insights into the structural weaknesses in Nigeria's environmental policy framework. The findings will be valuable for policymakers, environmental advocates, and researchers seeking to improve policy enforcement mechanisms. Additionally, the study will offer recommendations for strengthening institutional capacity and promoting accountability in environmental governance.

As Nigeria continues to face increasing climate threats, understanding the role of political commitment in shaping policy outcomes is crucial for developing long-term solutions. This research aims to bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation, ultimately supporting Nigeria's transition towards sustainable climate resilience.

Literature Review

This section reviews existing literature on Nigeria's environmental policies, their role in climate resilience, and the influence of political will on policy implementation.

Environmental Policy in Nigeria

Overview of Key Environmental Laws and Policies

Nigeria has developed several environmental policies to address climate change and environmental degradation. The National Policy on Environment (1989, revised in 2016) serves as the foundation for environmental governance in Nigeria, outlining strategies for sustainable development and resource management (Federal Ministry of Environment [FME], 2016). The Climate Change Act (2021) represents a significant legislative step towards institutionalizing climate action, establishing the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) to oversee mitigation and adaptation strategies (NCCC, 2022).

Other notable policies include the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act (1992), which mandates environmental assessments for development projects, and the National

Adaptation Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change (NASPA-CCN) (2011), which provides guidelines for climate adaptation across sectors (Olawuyi, 2020). However, weak enforcement and regulatory inefficiencies continue to hinder the effectiveness of these policies (Okonkwo et al., 2022).

International Commitments: Paris Agreement and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Nigeria is a signatory to international environmental frameworks, including the Paris Agreement (2016) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change [UNFCCC], 2016). Under its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), Nigeria committed to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% unconditionally and 47% with international support by 2030 (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2021). The SDGs, particularly Goal 13 (Climate Action), align with Nigeria's policy agenda, emphasizing climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction, and sustainable land use (United Nations Development Programme [UNDP], 2020). However, challenges such as inadequate funding, weak institutional coordination, and lack of political commitment have slowed progress in achieving these international goals (Ibrahim & Ajibade, 2022).

Climate Resilience and Policy Implementation

Definitions and Key Dimensions of Climate Resilience

Climate resilience refers to the ability of a system, community, or economy to anticipate, absorb, and adapt to climate-related shocks and stressors (IPCC, 2021). It encompasses three key dimensions:

1. **Adaptation Capacity** – The ability to adjust policies, practices, and infrastructure to minimize climate risks.
2. **Mitigation Strategies** – Efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit climate change impacts.
3. **Disaster Preparedness and Response** – The ability to manage and recover from climate-induced disasters, such as floods and droughts (Adelekan, 2018).

In Nigeria, resilience strategies include afforestation programs, renewable energy investments, and community-based adaptation projects (Nwafor, 2020). However, the effectiveness of these strategies is often undermined by poor policy implementation, which weakens the country's ability to build long-term resilience.

Role of Effective Policy Implementation in Resilience-Building

Effective policy implementation is a critical determinant of climate resilience. Countries with strong institutional frameworks, sufficient funding, and transparent governance tend to have better climate adaptation outcomes (Schoenefeld & Jordan, 2017). In Nigeria, however, implementation gaps persist due to factors such as:

- i. **Weak Regulatory Enforcement** – Agencies like NESREA and the NCCC face limited capacity to enforce compliance (Akinola, 2021).
- ii. **Inadequate Funding** – Climate adaptation programs receive insufficient budget

allocations, affecting long-term sustainability (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2019).

- iii. **Fragmented Governance** – Lack of coordination between federal, state, and local governments hinders policy coherence (Okonkwo et al., 2022).

These implementation barriers reduce the effectiveness of climate policies, making Nigeria more vulnerable to climate risks.

Political Will and Environmental Governance

Case Studies of Successful and Failed Environmental Policies in Nigeria

The success or failure of environmental policies in Nigeria is often linked to political will. For instance, the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI), aimed at combating desertification in northern Nigeria, has had mixed results. While the project has helped in afforestation and land restoration in some areas, corruption and mismanagement have hindered its overall impact (Nwafor, 2020).

Similarly, the Nigerian Gas Flare Commercialization Program (NGFCP), introduced to reduce gas flaring and promote clean energy, has faced significant implementation delays due to regulatory inconsistencies and lack of investor confidence (Ibrahim & Ajibade, 2022). Conversely, policies such as the Renewable Energy Master Plan (REMP) have seen moderate success due to increased private-sector engagement, demonstrating that government commitment and stakeholder participation are crucial for policy effectiveness (Agboola & Emmanuel, 2021).

Impact of Leadership Commitment on Policy Enforcement

Leadership commitment plays a crucial role in environmental governance. Studies show that countries with strong political leadership are more likely to implement climate policies effectively (Post et al., 2010). In Nigeria, political leaders often prioritize economic growth over environmental sustainability, leading to weak enforcement of environmental laws (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2019). Additionally, the influence of oil and gas lobbyists has slowed the transition to clean energy and delayed climate action (Olawuyi, 2020).

Successful climate governance requires:

1. **Sustained Political Commitment** – Consistent leadership focus on climate issues beyond election cycles.
2. **Institutional Accountability** – Strengthening agencies responsible for environmental regulation.
3. **Public Engagement** – Involving civil society and private actors in policy implementation (Schoenefeld & Jordan, 2017).

Without these elements, Nigeria's environmental policies will continue to face enforcement challenges, reducing the country's ability to build climate resilience.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on three key theories that explain the relationship between environmental policy, governance, and implementation: Environmental Governance Theory, Political Will Theory, and Implementation Theory. These theories provide a conceptual lens for understanding how Nigeria's climate resilience is shaped by policy decisions, leadership commitment, and the effectiveness of policy execution.

Environmental Governance Theory

Environmental Governance Theory explains how institutions, policies, and governance structures influence environmental outcomes. It emphasizes the role of governments, private entities, and civil society in managing environmental resources and responding to climate challenges (Lemos & Agrawal, 2006). According to this theory, environmental governance is effective when policies are inclusive, transparent, and well-coordinated across different sectors (Jordan et al., 2018). In the Nigerian context, environmental governance has been undermined by weak institutional capacity, fragmented regulatory frameworks, and inconsistent policy implementation (Akinola, 2021). Although Nigeria has enacted several environmental policies, such as the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) Act (2007) and the Climate Change Act (2021), governance challenges have hindered their effectiveness. Weak coordination between federal and state institutions, coupled with corruption and political interference, often leads to poor policy outcomes (Okonkwo et al., 2022). By applying Environmental Governance Theory, this study examines how governance structures shape Nigeria's climate resilience efforts and identifies governance weaknesses that hinder policy effectiveness.

Political Will Theory

Political Will Theory highlights the role of leadership commitment in policy success, emphasizing that strong political will is necessary for effective environmental governance (Post et al., 2010). Political will refers to the determination of government actors to initiate and sustain policy reforms despite opposition or obstacles (Brinkerhoff, 2010). In the context of climate resilience, political will is reflected in government actions such as funding allocation, enforcement of environmental laws, and prioritization of sustainable development goals. Nigeria's environmental policy landscape has been marked by fluctuating levels of political will. While some administrations have demonstrated commitment to climate action, others have deprioritized environmental sustainability in favor of economic growth driven by fossil fuel exploitation (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2019). For instance, despite signing the Paris Agreement in 2016, Nigeria's implementation of climate adaptation policies has been slow, largely due to inconsistent government commitment (Ibrahim & Ajibade, 2022). Political interference, short-term electoral considerations, and vested interests in the oil and gas industry further weaken policy execution (Agboola & Emmanuel, 2021). This paper applies Political Will Theory to assess the extent to which Nigeria's leadership has influenced the success or failure of environmental policies and to explore ways to enhance political commitment to climate resilience.

Implementation Theory

Implementation Theory examines the barriers to effective policy execution, focusing on institutional capacity, funding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). It argues that policy success depends not only on well-designed legislation but also on the practical mechanisms available for enforcement (Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980). Key factors affecting policy implementation include:

- i. **Institutional Capacity:** Adequate human and technical resources for policy execution.
- ii. **Financial Resources:** Sufficient budgetary allocation for environmental projects.
- iii. **Bureaucratic Efficiency:** Effective coordination among government agencies.
- iv. **Public Participation:** Engagement of stakeholders in policy execution.

In Nigeria, implementation gaps have significantly weakened environmental policies. The Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act (1992), for example, mandates rigorous environmental assessments before development projects are approved, yet enforcement remains weak due to inadequate monitoring and corruption (Olawuyi, 2020). Similarly, the Great Green Wall Initiative, which aims to combat desertification in northern Nigeria, has been hindered by mismanagement and insufficient funding (Nwafor, 2020). By applying Implementation Theory, this study evaluates the institutional and financial constraints affecting environmental policy execution in Nigeria and explores strategies to improve implementation effectiveness.

The integration of these three theories provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing Nigeria's climate resilience policies. Environmental Governance Theory helps explain the structural challenges in policy formulation and enforcement, Political Will Theory highlights the role of leadership commitment in driving policy success, and Implementation Theory identifies the practical barriers to effective execution. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for strengthening Nigeria's climate resilience strategies and ensuring that environmental policies translate into meaningful action.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to explore the role of environmental policy in Nigeria's climate resilience, with a focus on political will and policy implementation. Qualitative research is appropriate for analyzing policy effectiveness as it allows for an in-depth examination of governance structures, institutional frameworks, and leadership commitment (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Research Design

The research employs an exploratory qualitative approach, which is well-suited for investigating complex governance and policy issues. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the challenges associated with environmental policy implementation in Nigeria (Bryman, 2016). By using qualitative methods, the study captures nuances in policy frameworks, governance structures, and the influence of political will on environmental decision-making.

The study utilizes policy document analysis as the primary method of data collection. This involves a systematic review of key environmental policies, laws, and international agreements, such as:

- i. National Policy on Environment (2016)
- ii. Climate Change Act (2021)
- iii. Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Act (1992)
- iv. Nigeria's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement (2021)

Additionally, reports from international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and the World Bank was analyzed to assess Nigeria's climate governance performance. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis, a widely used method in qualitative research that identifies, analyzes, and interprets patterns within textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis will be employed to:

1. **Identify key themes** related to environmental policy implementation, governance challenges, and political will.
2. **Examine policy gaps** in Nigeria's climate resilience framework.
3. **Assess the effectiveness of leadership commitment** in enforcing environmental laws.

This methodology is justified based on the following considerations:

- i. **Suitability for policy analysis:** Qualitative research allows for a contextualized understanding of policy effectiveness and governance structures (Mason, 2017).
- ii. **Rich, Descriptive insights:** Thematic analysis enables the identification of patterns and trends within environmental policy frameworks (Nowell et al., 2017).
- iii. **Applicability to governance studies:** Document analysis is widely used in public policy research to assess legislative effectiveness and institutional capacity (Bowen, 2009).

Findings and Discussion

Assessment of Policy Implementation

Nigeria has made significant progress in developing environmental policies, particularly through the Climate Change Act (2021) and the National Policy on Environment (2016) (Federal Ministry of Environment [FME], 2016; National Council on Climate Change [NCCC], 2022). Some successes include:

- i. The establishment of the **National Council on Climate Change (NCCC)** to coordinate climate actions.
- ii. **Renewable energy initiatives**, such as the Solar Power Naija program, aimed at increasing access to clean energy (Ibrahim & Ajibade, 2022).
- iii. **Afforestation projects** under the Great Green Wall Initiative (GGWI), designed to combat desertification in northern Nigeria (Nwafor, 2020).

Despite these advancements, implementation remains weak and inconsistent due to several challenges:

1. **Institutional Barriers** – Regulatory agencies such as the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) often face a lack of autonomy and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Okonkwo et al., 2022).
2. **Financial Constraints** – Many environmental programs suffer from inadequate funding and over-reliance on donor support rather than sustainable government investment (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2019).
3. **Weak Law Enforcement** – Despite legal frameworks, non-compliance with environmental laws is widespread due to corruption, limited monitoring capacity, and political interference (Akinola, 2021).

Influence of Political Will

The role of political will in environmental governance is evident in Nigeria's mixed record of policy success. Two contrasting case studies illustrate how government commitment (or the lack of it) influences environmental outcomes.

1. **Success Case: Nigeria's Renewable Energy Policy** – The Renewable Energy Master Plan (REMP) has seen relative success due to private sector engagement and international partnerships, leading to increased investment in solar and wind power (Agboola & Emmanuel, 2021).
2. **Failure Case: The Gas Flare Commercialization Program (NGFCP)** – Despite policies aimed at reducing gas flaring, weak enforcement and the influence of oil lobbyists have stalled progress, with Nigeria remaining one of the highest gas-flaring countries in the world (Ibrahim & Ajibade, 2022).

Leadership commitment is a key determinant of environmental policy success. Political leaders who prioritize economic growth over environmental sustainability often undermine climate action (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2019). For example:

- i. The delay in implementing carbon pricing mechanisms despite Nigeria's commitments under the Paris Agreement illustrates political reluctance to regulate high-emission industries (UNFCCC, 2021).
- ii. In contrast, countries like South Africa have demonstrated stronger political commitment by implementing a carbon tax policy, which has encouraged industries to invest in cleaner energy solutions (Post et al., 2010).

Implications for Climate Resilience

Effective environmental policy implementation directly affects Nigeria's ability to adapt to climate change. Countries with robust environmental governance structures tend to exhibit greater resilience by reducing disaster risks and improving adaptive capacity (Schoenefeld & Jordan, 2017). However, in Nigeria:

- i. Flood-prone areas such as Lagos and Bayelsa continue to experience severe urban flooding due to poor enforcement of environmental regulations (Adelekan, 2018).
- ii. Deforestation and land degradation persist in northern Nigeria, exacerbating food insecurity and displacement (Nwafor, 2020).

Without stronger political will and improved policy implementation, Nigeria will remain vulnerable to climate-related shocks, reducing its ability to meet global climate adaptation targets.

Lessons from other developing nations provide insights into improving Nigeria's environmental governance:

1. **South Africa** – Successfully introduced a carbon tax policy, encouraging industries to adopt cleaner production technologies (Post et al., 2010).
2. **Rwanda** – Enforced a ban on plastic bags, demonstrating how strong political will can lead to effective environmental governance (Munyua, 2019).
3. **Ghana** – Implemented community-based adaptation projects, integrating local knowledge into climate resilience strategies (Acheampong, 2020).

The findings highlight that while Nigeria has established environmental policies, implementation challenges persist due to weak political will, financial constraints, and governance inefficiencies. Stronger leadership commitment, policy enforcement, and institutional reforms are necessary to enhance Nigeria's climate resilience.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study examined the role of environmental policy in Nigeria's climate resilience, with a focus on political will and policy implementation. The key findings highlight that:

1. Policy frameworks exist but are poorly implemented – Nigeria has established several environmental policies, such as the Climate Change Act (2021) and the National Policy on Environment (2016). However, their effectiveness is hampered by weak enforcement, inadequate funding, and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2016; Okonkwo et al., 2022).
2. Political will is a decisive factor in policy success – Case studies show that strong leadership commitment leads to successful environmental initiatives (e.g., renewable energy programs), while lack of political backing results in policy failure (e.g., stalled gas flare reduction efforts) (Ibrahim & Ajibade, 2022).
3. Institutional and financial barriers hinder climate resilience – Limited funding, corruption, and regulatory weaknesses prevent the effective execution of environmental laws and climate adaptation programs (Eze & Chukwuemeka, 2019).
4. Lessons from other countries indicate that political accountability, financial investment, and community involvement enhance environmental policy outcomes – Examples from South Africa, Rwanda, and Ghana demonstrate the importance of policy enforcement, stakeholder engagement, and adaptive governance (Post et al., 2010; Munyua, 2019; Acheampong, 2020).

Policy Recommendations to Enhance Implementation Effectiveness

To improve the execution of environmental policies and strengthen Nigeria's climate resilience, the following measures are recommended:

1. Strengthen Regulatory Institutions – Empower agencies like the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency (NESREA) and the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) with greater autonomy, funding, and enforcement capacity.
2. Increase Financial Investment in Climate Resilience – Allocate a higher proportion of the national budget to environmental initiatives, reduce dependency on donor funding, and establish a Climate Resilience Fund supported by carbon taxes and green bonds.
3. Enhance Monitoring and Accountability – Introduce performance-based evaluation systems for government agencies to track environmental policy progress, with publicly accessible reports to promote transparency.
4. Promote Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) – Collaborate with the private sector to invest in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and green infrastructure while ensuring compliance with environmental standards.

Strategies for Strengthening Political Will

Political leadership plays a crucial role in driving environmental policy success. To enhance political commitment:

1. Integrate Climate Change into National Development Agendas – Ensure that climate action is a core component of Nigeria's economic and social policies, rather than a peripheral issue.
2. Increase Political Accountability – Establish mechanisms for holding leaders accountable for environmental governance failures, such as mandatory reporting on climate commitments and legal consequences for non-compliance.
3. Engage Civil Society and Media – Strengthen the role of civil society organizations (CSOs), environmental activists, and the media in advocating for better policy enforcement and exposing cases of negligence.
4. Capitalize on International Commitments – Leverage Nigeria's participation in global climate agreements (e.g., the Paris Agreement) to attract international support and pressure political leaders to fulfill their obligations.

Conclusion

Environmental policy plays a critical role in enhancing Nigeria's climate resilience, but its effectiveness is undermined by weak implementation, institutional constraints, and political inertia. Strengthening governance structures, mobilizing financial resources, and increasing political accountability are essential to overcoming these challenges. Learning from successful international models, engaging civil society, and ensuring leadership commitment will be crucial in securing a sustainable and climate-resilient future for Nigeria.

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