

THE CHALLENGE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN CLIMATE CHANGE MITIGATION AND ADAPTATION IN NIGERIA: X-RAYING THE POLICY GAP

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Abstract

Climate change mitigation and adaptation has been on the mainstream discussion at the global level in recent times. This has not been the case in most developing nations including Nigeria where the government and its citizens are yet to confront this global threat with the needed attention it deserves. This paper investigated the challenge of effective community engagement in climate

change mitigation and adaptation in Nigeria. Qualitative methodology is adopted as data were gathered through secondary means, while documentary content study was used for analysis. The study employed structural-functionalism theory as a heuristic device for conceptual analysis. The study revealed that lack of participatory public policy process by the government on climate change mitigation and adaptation has hampered community engagement and functions of various stakeholders in creating eco-friendly environment. It recommended among others bottom-top policy approach that facilitate effective community engagement for climate mitigation and the creation of sustainable eco-friendly environment.

Keywords: Climate change, public policy, community engagement, and structural functionalism theory

Introduction

One of the biggest threats to human societies is climate change, which is having an increasing impact on many different areas, particularly in vulnerable areas like Nigeria, a nation with rich natural resources, diverse ecosystems, and wide socioeconomic gaps. Nigeria is affected by climate change in a variety of ways, from unpredictable rainfall patterns and high temperatures to increased flooding and desertification. Effective climate mitigation and adaptation strategies are crucial for protecting people and the planet because these impacts put not only the environment but also food security, public health, and overall socioeconomic development at

risk. However, developing responsive policies that address these urgent climate issues has proven difficult, and a key to overcoming these difficulties is the idea of community engagement, which entails actively involving local populations in environmental action decision-making. In Nigeria's diverse cultural landscape, where traditional practices frequently collide with modern governance, communities' role in developing effective climate responses must be acknowledged as crucial.

In this understanding, a number of obstacles stand in the way of meaningful community engagement: a lack of information about climate-related issues; a lack of opportunities for participation; cultural stigmas associated with environmental discussions; and systemic inequalities that marginalize particular groups within society. This lack of engagement poses serious risks to mitigation efforts, which aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, as well as adaptation strategies, which aim to increase resilience against climatic changes. For example, without input from local communities, who have invaluable knowledge about their environments and creative coping mechanisms developed over generations, Public policy frameworks in Nigeria must not only encourage but institutionalize meaningful participation at all levels of governance related to climate action.

Public policy plays a crucial role in this regard by establishing mechanisms through which community voices can be amplified within national dialogues on climate change (Anyanwu, Jeremiah, and Nso, 2025).

Policies may falter due to a lack of contextual relevance or acceptance on the ground level. Additionally, neglecting to take community perspectives into account can lead policymakers astray in identifying viable solutions tailored to unique regional challenges (Mutillah and Anyanwu, 2020). Furthermore, effective public policy must address the systemic barriers that impede community engagement, such as promoting transparency in governance processes, ensuring equitable distribution of resources necessary for climate action, and fostering partnerships between governmental entities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that specialize in grassroots mobilization. These partnerships can improve communities' ability to actively participate in decision-making processes while giving them access to technical support and funding opportunities. This dual focus on education and empowerment is crucial to fostering a sense of ownership among community members and ensuring that climate initiatives are not perceived as external impositions but rather as collaborative efforts tailored to local realities. Notably, the challenge of effective community engagement in climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts within Nigeria is undeniably complex which forms the thrust of this study in investigating the need for a clear public policy intervention.

Statement of Problem

Nigeria faces a serious threat from climate change, which will affect its varied ecosystems, agriculture, water supplies, and general socioeconomic stability.

Nigeria, one of the nation's most susceptible to climate-related problems, has severe weather events including droughts and floods that worsen food insecurity and poverty. Although it is generally acknowledged at the national and international levels that these issues must be addressed immediately, however, there is still a severe lack of effective community involvement in climate change adaptation and mitigation. The possibility of long-lasting solutions that are adapted to local conditions is threatened by this gap, which poses a serious obstacle. In order to ensure that responses to climate change are not just solid from a scientific standpoint but also socially and culturally appropriate, community engagement is crucial. Effective community involvement in Nigeria's climate action plans is hampered by a number of variables, though. First of all, communities frequently lack awareness about the consequences of climate change and their part in mitigating its effects as well as adjusting to them. The grassroots knowledge required for informed involvement is hampered by limited access to environmental education. Furthermore, local information or viewpoints from communities who are directly impacted by climate change are frequently overlooked in current public policy. Governmental organizations typically use top-down approaches in their decision-making processes, designing strategies without soliciting significant input from local stakeholders. In addition to producing ineffectual policies, this disconnects breeds distrust between communities and decision-makers. Socioeconomic differences can also make it more

difficult for communities to participate fairly in climate initiatives.

In discussions about the creation of policies pertaining to their settings, vulnerable groups—such as women, youth, rural farmers, and disadvantaged groups—frequently do not have enough representation. There is a chance that solutions will not be in line with the requirements of the grassroots if specific measures are not made to include their voices in engagement frameworks or provide fair access to resources for involvement, including money for training workshops or inclusive forums.

Furthermore, insufficient institutional capacity makes effective community mobilization efforts regarding participatory planning exercises or climate action education programs at various governance levels—from local councils up through state structures—thereby impeding coordinated responses across sectors. Therefore, the issue is the combination of societal injustices that exclude crucial elements, a lack of awareness among communities themselves about their roles in addressing climate issues, and an inadequate integration of indigenous knowledge into public policy.

Research Questions

Following the problem stated research questions the study considered are as follows:

- 1) How has unawareness and non-mobilization of local stakeholders affected effective community

engagement on climate change mitigation and adaptation?

- 2) To what extent has non-inclusive public policy impacted on climate change mitigation and adaptation in Nigeria?

Research Objectives

The research objectives of the study are indentified as follows:

- 1) To ascertain the effects of unawareness and non-mobilization of local stakeholders on community engagement on climate change and adaptation
- 2) To identify how non-inclusive public policy impacts on climate change mitigation and adaptation in Nigeria

Methodology

The study adopted qualitative research method as data is generated through secondary means, mainly official documents, literatures and studies conducted. Documentary content analysis is used for explaining and analyzing documentary information. In addition, structural-functionalism theory is deployed as a theoretical framework

Conceptual Clarifications

Climate Change

Climate change is a global environmental phenomenon that has attracted lots of discuss at the world level, engaging scholars and intellectuals on theoretical and empirical investigations. There is global consensus even among scholars and investigators that climate change is

one of the greatest environmental threats that confronts the world. While there exist a shift in the earth's weather patterns for eons which are considered natural, the change in climate for the past few hundred years is overwhelmingly driven by human activities (EESI, 2023). Such activities include – burning fossil fuels increasing the concentration of greenhouse gases, example is carbon dioxide in the atmosphere, the trapping of more heat from the sun and raising global temperatures. Among all these, Cheudo (2024) indentified carbon dioxide as the primary greenhouse gas that drives global climate change but noting that the likes of hydro-fluorocarbons, methane and other gases contribute to the planet warming.

In no doubt, climate change has resulted to humanitarian emergencies across the globe. This is re-echoed in the World Health Organization document that climate change has in a direct means contributed to humanitarian emergencies ranging from wildfires, heat waves, floods, tropical storms, to hurricanes, and are always increasing in scale, frequency and intensity, (WHO, 2023). Research has indicated other key facts about climate change to include that 3.6 billion people are living in area that can be highly affected by climate change, where between 2030-2050 climate change may cause approximately 250,000 additional deaths indirectly from malaria, under nutrition, diarrhea and heat stress alone, with direct damage costs to health estimated to be between US\$2.4 billion per year by 2030, while areas with weak health infrastructure especially developing

countries will face health response challenges (WHO, 2023).

Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation

At the global level, there is constant call for concerted efforts by global actors and stakeholders to mitigating and adapting to the climate change. The mitigation and adaptation involves actions that are needed to be taken in order to reduce the greenhouse emissions and as well limit the severe nature of climate change in a way of prevention, while making efforts towards adjusting to the already existing effects of climate change.

Odili (2022) argues that the mitigation and adaptation of climate change is not within theoretical realm by practical which demands action. Corroborating this, Ademola (2023) observes that there are key actionable approaches to ensure climate change mitigation and adaptation, these include – efforts in ensuring proper recycling of waste products (in other words, no product should be seen as waste), supporting women and girl-child education, using renewable energy, green up the communities, planting of trees and divesting from fossil fuels.

Public Policy

The importance of public policy in the socio-economic and political society cannot be over emphasized. Beyond individual level, with the existence of social contract whether of Thomas Hobbes or John Locke's perspective, public policy is central in the life of government and

governance. It is the medium the state and its agent (the government) keep to their own side of the contract as they interface with the environment (the people). Anyanwu (2024) in line with this position maintains that public policy is institutionalized or approved proposal or elements such as laws, guidelines, regulations and actions to solve a social problem. Kilpatrick (2021) holds that public policy generally involves a system of laws, regulatory measures, causes actions, funding priorities concerning a given area or topic fronted by a governmental entity or its representatives.

Public policy in any political space is confronted by group or individual influences which shape the objective, implementation and outcomes of policies. For Kilpatrick (2021), individuals and groups often attempt to shape public policies through education, advocacy or mobilization of interest groups. He argues that even as this happens in every political setting, but shaping of public policy is different in Western-style democracies than in other forms of government, but it is reasonable to assume that the process always involves efforts by competing interest groups to influence policy makers in their favour. Most climate change policies are as a result of group protests at world level which necessitated and influenced the policy formulations.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted structural functionalism theory. It is basically a sociological theory that can be fittingly deployed across disciplines including political science in

the effort to explain socio-political phenomenon. The theory was introduced into social sciences by Talcott Parsons as that which views society as a system that is complex in nature consisting of different parts which are naturally interdependent, working together to attain stability and solidarity (Anyanwu and Ekot, 2024).

The theory focuses on the structures of the political society which includes political and social institutions, roles, customs and beliefs that contribute to the functioning of the entire political society. This gives justification to the adoption of this theory as any efforts made towards mitigation and adaptation of climate change requires concerted efforts from every relevant structure of Nigerian political society, rather than the government alone. Community engagement that is identified as key towards achieving climate change mitigation and adaptation creates room for the inclusion of local stakeholders in making significant inputs in the policy-making which makes the local communities partners in the efforts of climate change mitigation and adaptation, rather than a mere recipient of imposed policies and decisions by government.

Unawareness and Non-mobilization of local stakeholders and the Challenge of Community Engagement on Climate Change and Adaptation

Climate change has posed serious threats to Nigeria as a country, exacerbating inequalities in rural and urban communities, and undermining the country's efforts to realize the 2023 Agenda for Sustainable Development,

and impeding the smooth implementation of development policies of the federal government. Okeke (2024) argues that the risks posed by these natural events as a result of climate change have led to massive food shortages, high infant mortality rates, farmer-herders crises and increasing cases of socio-political unrest and therefore requires the integration of local communities for mitigation and adaptation.

The local communities where the unfolding threats of climate change are largely felt are not carried along, indicating poor awareness and non-mobilization of local stakeholders in the drive for its mitigation and adaptation. The Africa Policy Research Institute (APRI, 2021) argues that lack of awareness and mobilization of the local communities on climate change impacts and adaptation measures, including co-benefits beyond climate action undermines the policy interventions of both the state and federal government. In a similar vein, Odiwe (2023) acknowledges the impact local awareness and mobilization could have on climate change mitigation and adaptation. For him, the frontline communities in all agro-ecological zones of Nigeria can in a large extent mitigate vulnerability and build resilience against the impacts of climate change. Beyond the action of government and its policies, Odiwe observes that local research and technical institutes have not done enough to establish synergy and partnership with the local stakeholders and frontline communities, which has alienated and put in doubt the reliability of their research findings and outcomes.

Non-inclusive Public Policy and Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in Nigeria Research Findings

It is no longer doubt that there exists climate change, especially considering the overwhelming global threats and therefore demands urgent world response. The world has responded to this natural emergency through policies both at the global and national levels. In Nigeria, the efforts to mitigate these threats are seen in the government's policies on climate change which include – National Climate Change Policy 2021-2030 (which aims to foster a low-carbon economic development path and build a climate resilient society targeting mitigation and adaptation), Climate Change Act (which was passed into law providing the legal framework for climate actions), Net-Zero Commitment (through which Nigeria pledged to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060), others include – Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), the National Adaptation Plan Framework (NAPF), the National Strategy and Plan of Action on Climate Change in Nigeria (NASPA-CCN), the Climate Change Act (CCA) and the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP), among others.

In the myriad of the domestic policies and laws on climate change in Nigeria, the challenge lies on its level of inclusiveness beginning from the formulation to the stage of implementation, in other words, making the policies and laws alien to the people. The African Policy Research Institute in its position paper of 2024 observes that the government does not involve the people in the

policy-making process on climate change and therefore does not have a clear idea of the status of adaptation activities especially at the local level, and no clear evaluation of implementation gaps and locally-led processes. This is emphasized by Adeleke (2024) that local governments have a greater responsibility to take action to adopt effectively, and for this to happen it must be included in the policy-making processes. This means that federal government must come into cognizance the place of local stakeholders in achieving the goals of climate change policies. Akobundu (2023) argues that the non-participatory climate change policy approach is a bizarre, especially considering the fact that local governments are in a stronger position to tailor climate change preparedness strategies to their specific circumstance and identify how it impacts in their communities.

In another vein, Adeleke (2024) further pointed out that just like many other policies in Nigeria, the aims and timelines set in the various climate change policies and frameworks are likely to be elusive as the excluded the local stakeholders from the formulation process, maintaining that over 95% of Nigerians are not aware of the climate change mitigation and adaptation policies. This view is upheld by the APRI (2024) as it identifies the local communities as the main drivers of climate change mitigation and adaptation who should work in partnership with the government.

Research Findings

The study reveals that:

- 1) For the global community, Nigeria has created the necessary policy framework to drive climate change mitigation and adaptation which has no much impact due to
- 2) There is lack of mobilization and awareness of majority of Nigerian citizens in the effort towards climate change mitigation and adaptation
- 3) And the climate change policies are not inclusive as the policy process was not participatory. The local communities and stakeholders were not integrated to own up the mitigation and adaptation drive.

Conclusion

The study interrogated the real challenges against effective community engagement in the effort towards climate change mitigation and adaptation. This is due to the understanding that the success of this effort lies on the involvement of the local stakeholders as main drivers of the process. However, the policy process that supposes to create the platform for effective community engagement lacks participatory process and rather adopting top-bottom approach thereby creating an imposition system instead of partnership.

Recommendations

Following the findings of the study, bellow are the recommendations:

- 1) The government both at the federal and state level should ensure participatory policy process

on climate change mitigation and adaptation, thereby making the local communities own up the process

- 2) The federal government in conjunction with the state and local level should carryout aggressive climate change mitigation and adaptation campaign and mobilization policy targeting the rural communities to encourage concerted effort that is required.

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