

Women's Knowledge and Gender-Responsive Knowledge Management in Nigeria's National Adaptation Plan Process

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Abstract

Gender-responsive climate adaptation remains a persistent challenge in many developing countries, despite formal commitments under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. This paper reconceptualises gender integration in National Adaptation Plans as a problem of institutional knowledge governance rather than participation alone. Drawing on feminist, institutional, stakeholder, and knowledge management theories, the study examines how women's knowledge is generated, validated, shared, and applied within Nigeria's NAP process. Based on qualitative interviews with federal decision-makers, technical officers, gender advisors, and civil society actors, the findings show that women's experiential knowledge enters adaptation planning during consultations but is progressively filtered through technocratic validation, budgetary gatekeeping, and reporting standards. Epistemic authority remains concentrated among actors with formal decision-making power and resource control. The study demonstrates that gender inequality in adaptation planning is reproduced through routine knowledge management practices, highlighting the need for institutional reform to enable genuinely gender-responsive climate governance.

Keywords: Gender-responsive climate adaptation, Knowledge management, National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Women's knowledge and participation, Climate governance in Nigeria

1. INTRODUCTION

Gender equality is central to global climate governance, yet integration within National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) remains largely procedural. Although women participate in consultations, their knowledge rarely shapes adaptation priorities or resource allocation, reflecting persistent epistemic hierarchies that privilege technocratic expertise over experiential knowledge (Eriksen et al., 2015; Djoudi et al., 2016).

This paper addresses this gap by conceptualising gender integration as a problem of institutional knowledge governance. It examines how women's knowledge is generated, validated, and applied within Nigeria's NAP process, and how institutional structures shape its influence on decision-making.

2. CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws on feminist, institutional, stakeholder, and knowledge management (KM) theories to analyse how women's knowledge is recognised and utilised in adaptation planning. Feminist theory highlights how power relations shape what counts as legitimate knowledge, often marginalising experiential forms. Institutional theory explains how such hierarchies are stabilised through bureaucratic procedures and donor-driven standards. Stakeholder theory distinguishes between participation and influence, showing that inclusion does not guarantee decision-making power.

These perspectives are operationalised through a knowledge management framework, which traces how knowledge is generated, validated, stored, shared, and applied within institutional systems, enabling identification of where women's knowledge is incorporated or marginalised.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative explanatory case study design to examine how women's knowledge is governed within Nigeria's National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process. A qualitative approach is appropriate given the study's focus on institutional processes, power relations, and knowledge practices that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the case study approach enables in-depth, context-sensitive analysis of complex governance dynamics (Yin, 2018).

Nigeria constitutes a theoretically informative case due to its high climate vulnerability, complex institutional architecture, and explicit commitment to gender mainstreaming in climate policy. Case study research is particularly suitable when examining contemporary policy processes within real-life institutional contexts (Yin, 2018). By focusing on national-level institutions coordinating the NAP process, the design allows for process-oriented tracing of how women's knowledge moves through different stages of governance.

The study is positioned as a policy-level qualitative study, focusing on elite and expert actors occupying decision-making and technical coordination roles. In elite policy research, analytical depth and institutional positioning are prioritised over large sample sizes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

3.2 Data Collection

This study is designed as a pilot qualitative policy study to generate exploratory insights into institutional knowledge governance within Nigeria's NAP process. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with actors involved in climate adaptation planning and gender mainstreaming.

Data were collected through semi-structured key informant interviews with actors directly involved in climate adaptation planning and gender mainstreaming in Nigeria. Semi-structured interviews are well suited to elite and expert research contexts, as they allow for both comparability across respondents and flexibility to probe institutional practices and experiences in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

Participants were selected using purposive sampling, targeting individuals occupying strategic roles within national climate governance structures (Patton, 2015). The selection criteria included formal involvement in NAP formulation, technical assessment, gender mainstreaming, stakeholder engagement, or related advisory roles. This approach ensured access to information-rich cases capable of illuminating institutional decision-making processes (Patton, 2015).

Participants were initially identified through official institutional documents related to the NAP process and publicly available government and policy records. Initial contact was made via formal email invitations explaining the purpose of the study. Snowball sampling was subsequently employed, whereby interviewed participants recommended additional relevant actors within the NAP governance network. This combined recruitment strategy is common in elite policy research, where access depends on institutional networks and professional referrals (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

A total of ten semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior government officials and non-state actors. Eight interviews were conducted in person, while two were held via Zoom. Interviews ranged from approximately 30 to 60 minutes in duration. With participants' informed consent, all interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed verbatim for analysis. While the number of participants is limited, small samples are methodologically appropriate in elite qualitative research when participants hold specialised expertise and occupy high levels of institutional authority (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participant descriptors were intentionally generalised to minimise deductive disclosure.

This study should be understood as an exploratory policy-focused case study rather than a basis for broad empirical generalisation. Although the interviews provide valuable insight into institutional knowledge practices, the limited number of respondents and the concentration of interviews at the national level mean that the findings capture a partial view of the NAP process. They are therefore best interpreted as analytically indicative of how gendered knowledge governance may operate within institutional adaptation planning, while requiring further validation through broader multi-level research. Ten participants included federal officials, technical experts, gender advisors, and civil society representatives.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed thematically using a framework informed by the knowledge management cycle: generation, validation, storage, sharing, application, and learning. Coding combined deductive categories derived from the framework with inductive themes emerging from the data.

4. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

This section presents the empirical findings of the study, drawing explicitly on respondents' institutional roles and governance positions within Nigeria's NAP process. Rather than treating knowledge as abstract or neutral, the analysis foregrounds how institutional location, policy-level authority, technical expertise, advisory mandates, and state or national positioning shapes whose knowledge is generated, validated, prioritised, and ultimately acted upon.

The findings are organised according to the stages of the knowledge management cycle: knowledge generation, validation, storage and access, sharing, application, and learning and feedback. Across these stages, attention is paid to how institutional mandates and roles condition the visibility and influence of gendered and experiential knowledge.

Respondents included federal officials, technical experts, gender advisors, and civil society actors, with most operating at the national level. Across these roles, differences in institutional authority shaped the extent to which actors could influence how knowledge was generated, validated, and applied within the NAP process. Senior officials located within federal institutions described their roles as primarily technical and coordinative, with responsibility for ensuring that the NAP aligns with national policy frameworks and international reporting obligations.

4.1 Knowledge Validation

Knowledge validation within the NAP process was consistently described as a technocratic and procedurally driven exercise. Validation occurs through inter-ministerial technical reviews, senior management clearance, and stakeholder validation workshops.

A senior policy actor explained: *“Before anything is accepted, it must meet technical standards and align with national planning frameworks and donor expectations.”* (INT-01)

Gender desk officers reported being included in validation processes, but primarily to review gender components rather than shape validation criteria: *“We are invited to validate the gender sections, but the main focus is still on the technical and economic analysis.”* (INT-03)

Civil society respondents highlighted the limited influence of women’s inputs at this stage: *“At validation workshops, women raise issues, but once the technical team finalises the document, many of those inputs are not reflected.”* (INT-06)

A Civil Society /Private Sector Representative noted that validation privileges quantifiable knowledge: *“If knowledge cannot be measured or quantified, it becomes difficult for it to be taken seriously during validation”* (INT-10). This reflects a broader institutional preference for quantifiable evidence, which systematically disadvantages experiential forms of knowledge that are less easily standardised.

Notably, perceptions of validation differed across institutional positions. Senior policy actors framed validation as a necessary quality-control mechanism aligned with donor expectations, whereas civil society respondents experienced it as a filtering stage where women’s contributions lost visibility. Gender desk officers occupied an intermediate position, formally included but lacking authority to influence validation criteria.

One civil society respondent recounted a validation workshop in which women’s representatives raised concerns about limited access to climate finance for smallholder female farmers. Although the issue was acknowledged during discussion, it was ultimately reframed within broader economic feasibility criteria and did not appear as a distinct priority in the final document (INT-06). This example demonstrates how validation processes function as filtering mechanisms rather than neutral review stages.

Importantly, perspectives on validation varied across institutional positions. While senior policy actors framed validation as a necessary quality-control mechanism aligned with donor and national planning requirements, civil society respondents experienced it as a filtering stage where women’s contributions lost visibility. Gender desk officers occupied an intermediate position, formally included in validation processes but lacking authority to influence validation criteria. This divergence highlights how institutional position shapes both the perception and impact of knowledge validation.

4.2 Knowledge Storage and Access

Respondents described climate- and gender-related data as being stored across multiple, fragmented institutional systems, including ministerial databases, national climate information platforms, statistical repositories, and donor-managed project systems. Senior institutional actors acknowledged the absence of an integrated system linking climate and gender data across sectors.

Gender desk officers highlighted that gender-disaggregated data are unevenly available, with stronger coverage in social sectors such as health and education, and weaker representation in adaptation-relevant sectors like agriculture, water, and livelihoods. Qualitative data generated through consultations with women were reported to be particularly vulnerable to loss, as they are rarely digitised or systematically archived.

State-level respondents noted additional access barriers, including limited digital infrastructure and weak data-sharing mechanisms between national and subnational institutions. These challenges further marginalise locally grounded women's knowledge, restricting its reuse in national planning processes.

4.3 Knowledge Sharing: Institutional Silos and Limited Feedback Loops

Knowledge sharing within the NAP process occurs primarily through formal institutional platforms such as technical working groups, stakeholder workshops, and policy dialogues. Federal-level respondents viewed these platforms as effective coordination mechanisms, while gender advisors and civil society actors described them as largely one-directional, focused on information dissemination rather than mutual learning. Women's organisations are included intermittently, particularly during consultations and validation stages, but respondents noted that their engagement is often ad hoc and project-specific. Institutional silos, weak inter-agency communication, and concerns over data ownership were identified as key bottlenecks limiting effective knowledge exchange.

Importantly, respondents across roles emphasised that knowledge generated at community and state levels where women's experiential knowledge is most visible—rarely circulates beyond initial consultations. This limits institutional learning and reinforces a top-down flow of information.

4.4 Knowledge Application: Decision-Making Power and Resource Allocation

The application of knowledge is the stage at which women's contributions are most constrained. Decision-making is driven by technical feasibility, budgetary considerations, and alignment with national priorities, limiting the influence of experiential knowledge on final outcomes. Although monitoring and evaluation systems exist, they prioritise technical outputs and financial accountability over gendered and social outcomes. As a result, lessons related to women's experiences are inconsistently documented and rarely reintegrated into subsequent planning cycles.

4.5 Learning and Feedback: Weak Institutional Learning on Gender

Mechanisms for learning and feedback were reported to exist mainly through monitoring, evaluation, and reporting systems. However, respondents across institutional roles noted that these mechanisms prioritise technical outputs and financial accountability over social and gendered outcomes.

Gender advisors and academic respondents observed that lessons related to women's experiences during implementation are inconsistently documented and rarely reintegrated into subsequent planning cycles. Women's participation in learning processes was described as limited and often mediated through NGOs rather than embedded within institutional review systems.

Across all stages, the evidence shows that marginalisation is not the result of a single decision point but emerges cumulatively as knowledge moves through institutional processes. Each stage—validation, storage, and application—introduces specific constraints that progressively reshape women’s knowledge, reducing its influence on final policy outcomes.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that gender inequality in adaptation planning is reproduced through institutional knowledge governance rather than through exclusion alone. From a feminist perspective, women’s knowledge is incorporated but transformed in ways that reduce its epistemic authority, reflecting broader hierarchies privileging technocratic expertise.

Institutional theory explains how these patterns are stabilised through bureaucratic procedures, validation criteria, and donor accountability systems that favour standardised and quantifiable evidence. These mechanisms function as filters that shape what counts as legitimate knowledge.

Stakeholder theory further clarifies the distinction between participation and influence. Although women are included in consultative processes, decision-making power remains concentrated among actors controlling institutional resources and procedures.

Consistent with existing literature, the findings confirm that participation in climate governance does not necessarily translate into influence over decision-making (Eriksen et al., 2015; Rao et al., 2019). They also support studies demonstrating that climate institutions tend to privilege scientific and technocratic expertise over socially embedded and experiential forms of knowledge (Djoudi et al., 2016; Nightingale, 2017).

However, this study extends prior research by providing a process-oriented explanation of how such marginalisation occurs. While earlier studies primarily emphasise representation and participation gaps, the findings here show that epistemic inequality is reproduced through sequential institutional processes, particularly during validation, storage, and resource allocation. In this sense, marginalisation is not only a matter of exclusion, but of how knowledge is transformed, filtered, and prioritised within institutional systems. By locating these dynamics within the knowledge management cycle, the study provides a systematic account of how epistemic hierarchies are operationalised within policy processes, offering a bridge between feminist critiques of knowledge and institutional analyses of governance.

This shifts the analytical focus from who participates in adaptation planning to how institutional knowledge practices structure epistemic authority, thereby contributing a more fine-grained understanding of gendered power dynamics in climate governance. A knowledge management perspective reveals that these dynamics are embedded within institutional systems. The knowledge management cycle operates as a series of filtering mechanisms through which certain forms of knowledge are legitimised while others are marginalised. Gender inequality therefore emerges from how knowledge is governed within adaptation systems.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how women’s knowledge is governed within Nigeria’s National Adaptation Plan (NAP) process. The findings show that gender integration is shaped less by participation and more by how knowledge is validated, prioritised, and authorised within institutional systems. Three core conclusions emerge from the interviews: First, women’s knowledge is incorporated primarily at the stage of knowledge generation, particularly through consultations and gender-focused assessments. However, this inclusion is largely

procedural and advisory. Second, institutional validation and prioritisation mechanisms operate as structured filtering processes. Technocratic standards, donor accountability requirements, and budgetary logics privilege quantifiable and standardised forms of evidence. As adaptation planning progresses from consultation to resource allocation, women's experiential knowledge is reframed, diluted, or deprioritised. Third, epistemic authority remains concentrated among actors occupying formal technical and decision-making roles at the federal level. While gender advisors and civil society representatives participate in consultative processes, they possess limited influence over validation criteria and funding decisions. This reinforces the structural distinction between participation and power identified in literature.

By tracing women's knowledge across the knowledge management cycle, this study advances scholarship on gender and climate governance in three ways. First, it reconceptualises gender responsiveness as a problem of institutional knowledge governance rather than participation alone. Second, it demonstrates how feminist, institutional, stakeholder, and knowledge management perspectives can be integrated to analyse epistemic authority within adaptation systems. Third, through an exploratory case study of Nigeria's NAP process, it provides analytically relevant insights that may inform research on other climate-vulnerable countries operating within similar bureaucratic and donor-driven constraints.

Practical Implications

Strengthening gender responsiveness requires reforms to institutional knowledge systems. This includes embedding gender-sensitive criteria within validation processes, integrating qualitative and gender-disaggregated data into institutional databases, and establishing feedback mechanisms that ensure locally generated knowledge informs national decision-making. Monitoring systems should also incorporate indicators capturing gendered outcomes.

Empirically, this study contributes by providing a process-level account of how women's knowledge is transformed as it moves through institutional adaptation systems. While existing studies have primarily documented gaps between participation and influence, the findings here identify specific stages—particularly validation, storage, and resource allocation—at which women's experiential knowledge is reconfigured, filtered, or deprioritised. By tracing these dynamics across the knowledge management cycle, the study moves beyond static analyses of inclusion to reveal how epistemic authority is actively produced through routine institutional practices. This provides concrete empirical evidence of the mechanisms through which gendered knowledge hierarchies are reproduced within climate governance.

Limitations

This study is based on ten interviews and is weighted toward actors operating at the national level. As such, it does not capture the full diversity of perspectives involved in Nigeria's adaptation governance system, particularly from subnational institutions and community-level women whose knowledge is central to the issues examined here. The findings should therefore be read as exploratory and analytically suggestive rather than broadly generalisable. Their value lies in identifying institutional patterns and proposing a framework for further investigation, rather than in claiming comprehensive empirical coverage of the NAP process.

Future Research Agenda

Future research should extend this analysis across countries and governance levels to further examine how women's knowledge is transformed within adaptation systems.

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