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CHAPTER TWO

CLIMATE JUSTICE IN NIGERIA

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1.0 Introduction

Climate change has emerged as one of the most pressing global challenges of the 21st century, and its impacts are particularly severe in developing countries such as Nigeria. The concept of climate justice goes beyond environmental protection—it emphasizes fairness, equity, and the protection of vulnerable populations disproportionately affected by climate-related hazards. In Nigeria, issues such as desertification in the north, flooding in the south, deforestation, and pollution in the Niger Delta highlight the urgent need for inclusive and equitable climate action. Within this context, civil society organizations (CSOs) play a crucial role in advocating for climate justice. These organizations serve as the bridge between government institutions, international agencies, and local communities, ensuring that climate policies are not only environmentally sound but also socially equitable. They engage in policy advocacy, public education, environmental monitoring, and community mobilization, empowering citizens to demand accountability and participate in decision-making processes related to climate governance.

Furthermore, Nigerian civil societies such as the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria (ERA/FoEN), the Nigerian Conservation Foundation (NCF), and Climate and Sustainable Development Network (CSDevNet) have been at the forefront of campaigns against environmental degradation, oil pollution, and deforestation. Through awareness creation, legal advocacy, and grassroots mobilization, these organizations are instrumental in shaping national discourse and promoting sustainable environmental practices.

This chapter therefore examines the roles of civil societies and organizations in promoting climate justice in Nigeria, exploring their strategies, challenges, and contributions to sustainable environmental governance. It underscores the importance of strengthening civil society engagement to achieve a just and inclusive transition toward environmental sustainability and social equity. Thus, this chapter is discussed under the following subheadings.

- a) Concept of civil society organizations (CSOs)
- b) Concept of Climate Justice
- c) Strategies to promote Climate Justice in Nigeria

2.0 Conceptual Terms

2.1 Concept of civil society organizations (CSOs)

According to the World Bank, (2013) civil society organizations refer to the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the

interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious, or philanthropic considerations. This definition underscores the diversity of CSOs, encompassing community-based organizations, environmental groups, professional associations, and advocacy networks. The World Bank's perspective highlights the participatory and advocacy roles of CSOs in governance and development processes, emphasizing their contribution to democratic accountability and policy dialogue. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015) defines civil society organizations as voluntary associations of citizens that are formed to advance shared interests, influence policy, and contribute to the well-being of communities and societies. This definition stresses the voluntarism and citizen-driven nature of CSOs, situating them as critical actors in promoting human development, social justice, and sustainability. The UNDP view also aligns with the participatory development paradigm, which recognizes the importance of citizen engagement in shaping decisions that affect their lives.

Edwards (2009) defines civil society as the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes, and values. Within this arena, civil society organizations function as institutional vehicles through which people organize themselves to influence policies, challenge injustice, and promote democratic ideals. Edwards' conceptualization emphasizes the pluralistic and transformative role of CSOs in strengthening democracy, holding governments accountable, and ensuring that marginalized groups have a voice in governance. His definition situates CSOs as both agents of social change and intermediaries between the state and the citizenry. Salamon and Anheier (1997) define civil society organizations as formal and informal entities that are independent of government and primarily serve public purposes rather than profit motives. Their definition is grounded in the structural–operational approach, which identifies CSOs based on five criteria: organization, privateness, non-profit distribution, self-governance, and voluntarism. This approach provides a more systematic framework for understanding CSOs, differentiating them from both state institutions and private businesses. It highlights their institutional independence and their fundamental commitment to the public good.

Anheier (2014) further elaborates on CSOs as networks and institutions that occupy the space between the state, the market, and the family, enabling citizens to pursue common goals, promote values, and influence governance processes. This definition broadens the understanding of CSOs beyond traditional NGOs to include social movements, advocacy groups, faith-based organizations, and community initiatives. Anheier's conceptualization underscores the intermediary role of CSOs in linking citizens with formal institutions and fostering social cohesion, innovation, and accountability.

From these definitions, it is evident that CSOs represent a vital component of democratic governance and sustainable development. Common elements among the definitions include their

voluntary nature, non-profit orientation, public-interest focus, and advocacy function. They act as channels through which citizens engage the state, influence policy, and promote social justice. In the context of Nigeria, CSOs have become indispensable actors in driving development, promoting human rights, and addressing pressing issues such as climate change, corruption, and inequality.

2.2 Concept of Climate Justice

Mary Robinson Foundation for Climate Justice (2011) defines climate justice as “linking human rights and development to achieve a human-centered approach, safeguarding the rights of the most vulnerable and sharing the burdens and benefits of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly.” This definition underscores the intersection of human rights and environmental policy, emphasizing that responses to climate change must respect the dignity and rights of affected populations. It also stresses equity—both between nations (global North and South) and within societies—recognizing that those who contribute least to climate change often suffer its worst effects. United Nations (UN, 2019) conceptualizes climate justice as “a concept that frames global warming as an ethical and political issue rather than a purely environmental one, recognizing that the impacts of climate change are not borne equally or fairly among all people. This definition highlights the ethical and distributive dimensions of climate change, focusing on fairness in policy-making, accountability of polluters, and the responsibility of industrialized nations to assist developing countries. It positions climate justice as a principle guiding equitable global cooperation and sustainable development.

Schlosberg and Collins (2014) define climate justice as “the fair treatment of all people and the recognition of diverse values and capabilities in the processes and outcomes of climate policy.” Their approach incorporates three pillars of justice—distributional justice (fair allocation of burdens and benefits), recognitional justice (acknowledging cultural and social differences), and procedural justice (inclusive participation in decision-making). This definition provides a multidimensional framework that links social equity, participatory governance, and environmental ethics in addressing climate change. Friends of the Earth International (2012), climate justice means “ensuring that the communities and countries most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions take responsibility for the damage they have caused, and that affected communities have the right to sustainable livelihoods and a healthy environment.” This definition takes a rights-based and accountability-oriented stance, calling for reparative and preventive measures. It reflects the activist perspective that global climate policy should not only reduce emissions but also correct historical injustices created by colonialism, industrialization, and environmental exploitation.

Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2022) defines climate justice as “a framework that links development, equity, and ethics in the context of climate change, ensuring fair sharing

of the benefits and burdens arising from mitigation and adaptation efforts.” This definition connects justice with sustainable development and emphasizes equitable adaptation and mitigation strategies, particularly for developing countries. It recognizes that climate responses must align with global equity principles and the right to development, reflecting the moral responsibility of wealthier nations to support vulnerable regions through finance, technology, and capacity-building.

From these definitions, climate justice emerges as a multifaceted and equity-driven concept that integrates human rights, environmental sustainability, and social fairness. It insists that climate change is not only an environmental crisis but also a moral and political one. The common threads include fairness in burden-sharing, inclusivity in decision-making, and recognition of the disproportionate impacts on marginalized groups. In Nigeria, where communities in the Niger Delta, northern drylands, and coastal regions face acute climate challenges, applying the principles of climate justice is essential to achieving equitable and sustainable development.

3.0 Strategies to promote Climate Justice in Nigeria

Achieving climate justice in Nigeria requires a combination of policy reforms, institutional strengthening, community empowerment, and global cooperation. As a country highly vulnerable to climate-related impacts such as desertification, flooding, coastal erosion, and oil pollution, Nigeria must adopt strategic, inclusive, and equitable approaches that address both the environmental and socio-economic dimensions of climate change. The following six strategies are essential for promoting climate justice in Nigeria.

3.0.1. Strengthening Climate Governance and Policy Frameworks

A strong legal and institutional framework is the foundation for achieving climate justice. Nigeria has developed several policies such as the National Climate Change Policy (2021–2030) and the Climate Change Act (2021), which establish a legal basis for climate governance. However, effective implementation remains weak. Strengthening climate governance involves:

- A. Mainstreaming equity and justice principles into all environmental and development policies.
- B. Establishing transparent institutions such as the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC) to coordinate climate actions across all sectors.
- C. Ensuring that climate policies prioritize vulnerable populations, including rural farmers, women, and coastal communities.
- D. Integrating traditional and indigenous knowledge systems into national adaptation and mitigation strategies.

When governance is inclusive, transparent, and accountable, it ensures that all groups—especially marginalized ones—participate in decision-making and benefit from climate initiatives.

3.0.2. Empowering Local Communities and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)

Grassroots empowerment is central to promoting climate justice. Local communities in Nigeria often bear the brunt of environmental degradation yet have limited influence over decisions affecting them. Strengthening community resilience involves:

- A) - Supporting community-based adaptation projects such as sustainable farming, mangrove restoration, and afforestation.
- B) - Funding CSOs and youth-led climate movements that advocate for environmental accountability and justice.
- C) - Enhancing public access to climate information and building awareness through education and outreach programs.
- D) - Encouraging partnerships between local NGOs, traditional leaders, and government agencies for effective environmental monitoring.

Empowered communities can hold polluters accountable, participate in local governance, and contribute indigenous knowledge toward sustainable environmental practices.

3.0.3. Promoting Environmental Accountability and Corporate Responsibility

One of the most critical aspects of climate justice in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta, is addressing corporate environmental irresponsibility. Decades of oil exploration have caused pollution, loss of livelihoods, and social conflict. Promoting environmental accountability involves:

- A) - Enforcing strict environmental regulations and ensuring companies comply with emission standards.
- B) - Mandating Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs) and continuous monitoring of industrial activities.
- C) - Implementing the polluter-pays principle to ensure that companies responsible for environmental degradation finance remediation and compensation efforts.
- D) - Supporting litigation and advocacy efforts that empower communities to seek redress for environmental injustices.

This strategy ensures that corporations contribute to environmental restoration and that affected communities are compensated fairly.

3.0.4. Enhancing Climate Finance and Green Investments

Climate justice cannot be achieved without adequate financial support for adaptation and mitigation, particularly for vulnerable communities. Nigeria requires increased access to climate finance through international and domestic funding mechanisms. Key approaches include:

- A) - Mobilizing international climate funds such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF) for community-based adaptation.
- B) - Establishing a National Climate Justice Fund dedicated to supporting marginalized communities and promoting sustainable livelihoods.
- C) - Encouraging public-private partnerships that promote renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, and green technologies.
- D) - Providing financial incentives for companies that adopt low-carbon and environmentally responsible practices.

Equitable distribution of climate finance ensures that those most affected by climate change are supported in building resilience and adaptive capacity.

3.0.5. Integrating Climate Education and Public Awareness

Public understanding of climate justice remains limited in Nigeria. Strengthening climate literacy can transform attitudes and behaviors toward sustainability. Climate education should be incorporated at all levels of learning and public engagement through:

- A) - Integrating climate change and environmental justice education into school curricula.
- B) - Organizing national awareness campaigns using traditional and digital media to promote sustainable practices.
- C) - Training policymakers, journalists, and educators on climate justice principles.
- D) - Promoting citizen science initiatives where local people gather data on weather patterns, deforestation, and pollution.

Education builds informed citizens capable of holding leaders accountable and participating in decision-making processes that influence climate outcomes.

3.0.6. Promoting International Cooperation and Global Solidarity

Climate justice has a strong global dimension. Nigeria, as part of the developing world, faces climate impacts caused largely by industrialized nations. Therefore, promoting international cooperation is essential to ensure fair access to technology, finance, and knowledge. This includes:

- A) - Strengthening Nigeria's participation in international climate negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).
- B) - Advocating for loss and damage compensation from developed nations responsible for high emissions.
- C) - Promoting regional cooperation within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) to develop cross-border adaptation strategies.
- D) - Collaborating with international NGOs, research institutions, and donor agencies to support climate-resilient development. Through global solidarity, Nigeria can secure the resources, technologies, and policy frameworks needed to achieve equitable and sustainable climate outcomes.

4.0 Conclusion

Realizing climate justice in Nigeria requires coordinated efforts among government institutions, civil society, private sector actors, and international partners. These five recommendations—strengthening governance, empowering communities, enforcing accountability, expanding finance, and advancing education—represent a holistic pathway to ensure that climate action is fair, inclusive, and sustainable. Implementing them will not only reduce environmental vulnerability but also promote social equity, economic resilience, and intergenerational justice in Nigeria.

Promoting climate justice in Nigeria demands a multilevel and inclusive approach that integrates governance reforms, environmental accountability, community empowerment, education, and global cooperation. Implementing these six strategies will not only mitigate the effects of climate change but also ensure fairness, participation, and equity in the nation's sustainable development agenda.

To achieve climate justice in Nigeria, it is essential to adopt comprehensive strategies that combine policy reform, institutional capacity building, community participation, and equitable resource distribution. The following recommendations provide practical steps that can guide government institutions, civil society organizations, and international partners toward promoting fairness, inclusivity, and sustainability in Nigeria's response to climate change.

4.0.1. Strengthen Climate Governance and Legal Frameworks

The first step toward realizing climate justice in Nigeria is to reinforce the country's climate governance architecture through robust legal and institutional mechanisms. The Climate Change Act (2021) provides a foundation for coordinated action, but stronger enforcement and accountability mechanisms are required. The government should:

- a) Establish clear mandates for federal, state, and local agencies to implement equitable climate policies.
- B) Incorporate human rights and environmental justice principles into national and subnational climate legislation.
- c) Ensure transparent monitoring and evaluation systems to track progress on adaptation, mitigation, and equity goals.
- d) Promote policy coherence by aligning climate policies with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), gender equity frameworks, and environmental protection laws. A transparent and inclusive governance structure will ensure that the benefits and burdens of climate change policies are distributed fairly across all social groups.

4.0.2. Empower Local Communities and Marginalized Groups

Climate justice requires that communities most affected by climate change—such as smallholder farmers, women, youth, and indigenous groups—have a voice in decision-making. These groups should not only be beneficiaries of climate programs but also active participants in shaping them. To achieve this:

- a) Support community-based adaptation and mitigation initiatives through financial and technical assistance.
- b) Build local capacity through education, training, and awareness campaigns that promote environmental stewardship.
- c) Incorporate traditional knowledge and indigenous practices into climate action plans, especially in regions affected by desertification and deforestation.
- d) Establish community climate councils that can engage with policymakers and monitor the implementation of local climate projects. Empowered communities can effectively advocate for their rights, ensure fair distribution of resources, and hold polluters accountable for environmental harm.

4.0.3. Promote Environmental Accountability and Corporate Responsibility

Nigeria's path to climate justice must include holding corporations accountable for environmental degradation, particularly in the oil-producing Niger Delta region. The government, civil society, and the judiciary should collaborate to enforce environmental laws and the polluter-pays principle. Key steps include:

- a) Conducting regular environmental audits and publicizing reports on industrial pollution.
- b) Enforcing sanctions on companies that fail to comply with environmental regulations.
- c) Encouraging corporate environmental responsibility through green certifications, incentives, and recognition programs.
- d) Providing legal support for affected communities to seek redress and compensation for environmental damage. This approach ensures justice for communities affected by resource extraction and pollution while promoting responsible corporate behavior aligned with global sustainability standards.

4.0.4. Expand Climate Finance and Support for Vulnerable Populations

To ensure that climate action is just and inclusive, Nigeria must strengthen access to climate finance at both the national and local levels. This can be achieved through:

- a) Creating a National Climate Justice Fund to support adaptation projects in rural and marginalized communities.
- b) Enhancing partnerships with international financial institutions, including the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Global Environment Facility (GEF).
- c) Providing micro-financing schemes for women, farmers, and youth-led enterprises engaged in sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and environmental restoration.
- d) Ensuring equitable allocation of resources, so that regions most affected by climate change—such as the northern drylands and coastal areas—receive adequate support.

Equitable financing ensures that climate solutions address social inequalities and promote sustainable livelihoods.

4.0.5. Strengthen Climate Education, Research, and Public Awareness

Public understanding of climate justice is still limited in Nigeria. Enhancing education and research on climate change can drive behavioral change and foster citizen participation. Key measures include:

- a) Integrating climate change and environmental justice education into school and university curricula.
- b) Supporting research institutions and think tanks to study the socio-economic impacts of climate change and recommend policy solutions.
- c) Promoting media engagement and public campaigns to inform citizens about their environmental rights and responsibilities.
- d) Encouraging youth innovation and advocacy in climate technology, green entrepreneurship, and sustainability initiatives. A well-informed population is essential for building a culture of environmental responsibility, civic engagement, and sustainable development.

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