

OPTIMISING INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION FOR CLIMATE ACTION AND SUSTAINABILITY IN THE NIGER DELTA: LESSONS FROM NORWAY AND NEW ZEALAND

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Abstract

This article established the need for enhanced inclusive participation in climate action and sustainability in the Niger Delta, drawing on lessons from Norway and New Zealand. The Niger Delta holds enormous oil and gas resources and natural resources, including diverse forest and ecosystem species. Unfortunately, petroleum operations in the region have led to devastating environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, which has undermined climate efforts and severely limited progress towards sustainable development. While legal and institutional frameworks exist to provide for indigenous participation in environmental governance, it was revealed that the Niger Delta still lacks extensive indigenous participation in climate action and sustainable development. The current poverty, lack of awareness, rentier mentality, and gaps in legal and policy implementation, among other factors, have limited the inclusive participation desired in the region. Thus, the practices of jurisdictions such as Norway and New Zealand in guaranteeing indigenous and inclusive participation in climate action and sustainability provided recommendations to optimise inclusive participation across the region. These included legal and regulatory reforms to mandate indigenous participation and co-governance; extensive environmental/climate education; local capacity building and poverty reduction; the integration of indigenous knowledge into environmental/climate policies, strategies, and practices; and enhanced transparency in governance.

Keywords: Inclusive Participation, Climate Governance, Environmental Sustainability, Niger Delta

1. Introduction

As anthropogenic activities on the Earth increased over the past decades, so did the effects on the Earth's natural environment and climate system. The consequences, being accelerated climate change, leading to harmful weather disruptions, drought, desertification, biodiversity loss, ocean acidification, floods, among others,¹ have led the international community, under the auspices of the United Nations and its treaty system, to take action to mitigate these effects through various efforts, such as renewable energy, emissions trading and carbon sequestration.² The fight against

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¹ N. Prodanova, M. Naslednikova and O. Tarasova, 'Study of the Impact of Anthropogenic Activities on the Environment: Problems and Prospects of Sustainable Nature Management' [2023] *E3S Web of Conferences* 420, 04001 1-10.

² E E. Woha & B Oyaleke, 'International Environmental Law in Nigeria: The Precautionary, Preventive and Polluter Pays Principles, Emerging Trends, Challenges and Prospects [2026] 9(1) *African Journal of Law, Ethics and Education* <https://ajileejournal.com/index.php/ajlee/article/view/321> accessed 15th November 2025
S. Fawzy and Others, 'Strategies for mitigation of climate change: a review' [2020] *Environmental Chemistry Letters*, 1-26; A Review of Renewable Energy Sources, Sustainability Issues and Climate Change Mitigation'

climate change is one of the most pressing issues of our contemporary world, and the pursuit of sustainability is one of the most important causes today.³ Both cannot be achieved without the collective participation of everyone, and this is one of the cornerstones of environmental protection, climate action and sustainable development. The principle of common concern for mankind in international environmental law finds root in the understanding that the fight to protect the Earth is not the job of any single nation, but a collective responsibility of all,⁴ even though it is understood that the level of responsibility differs according to the level of contribution to climate causation or the level of development. Indeed, through inclusive participation, grassroots communities or persons most affected by environmental decisions, anthropogenic activities or climate effects, can provide indigenous solutions to climate and sustainability challenges within their very regions and globally.⁵

The Niger Delta is one of these vulnerable regions. It is home to the third-largest mangrove forests in Africa and is one of the world's most ecologically sensitive regions.⁶ It is also a notable carbon sink.⁷ Located in Nigeria's southern region, the Niger Delta also maintains Nigeria's largest crude oil and natural gas reserves.⁸ Since the discovery of crude oil and natural gas, the Niger Delta region has faced severe environmental damage, ecological destruction and livelihood elimination, stemming from incessant oil pollution perpetrated by oil companies.⁹ This paper attempts to Optimise inclusive participation for climate action and sustainability in the Niger-delta taking lessons from Norway and New Zealand.

2. Conceptual Clarifications

a. Inclusive Participation

In environmental matters, inclusive participation refers to the meaningful involvement of all relevant stakeholders, especially marginalised, local or affected communities, in decision-making processes that shape environmental and developmental outcomes.¹⁰ It goes beyond just consultation to ensuring that relevant voices influence policy formulation, implementation, monitoring and benefit-sharing transparently and equitably.

b. Climate Action

Climate action encompasses policies, strategies, interventions, and efforts aimed at addressing the causes and consequences of climate change.¹¹ It includes both climate change mitigation and adaptation measures to strengthen resilience to climate impacts, protecting livelihoods, and safeguarding ecosystems.¹²

Cogent Engineering [2016] 3 1167990 1-14; United Nations, 'Climate Action.' <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/climate-action-coalitions> accessed 15th November 2025.

³ K. Abbass and Others, 'A Review of the Global Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation and Sustainable Mitigation Measures' *Environmental Science and Pollution Research* [2022] 29 (28) 42539–42559.

⁴ Dinah Shelton, 'Common Concern of Humanity' *Environmental Law and Policy* [2009] 39 (2) 83.

⁵ Meg Parsons and Others, 'Participatory Approaches to Climate Adaptation, Resilience and Mitigation: A Systematic Review' [2025] *Ambio: A Journal of Environment and Society*, 54 2005–2020.

⁶ A. E. Ogbeibu and B. J. Oribhabor, 'The Niger Delta Mangrove System and its Conservation Challenges.' in O. B. Yllano (ed) *Mangrove Biology, Ecosystem and Conservation* (IntechOpen, 2023).

⁷ S. A. Aransiola and Others, 'Niger Delta Mangrove Ecosystem: Biodiversity, Past and Present Pollution, Threat and Mitigation' [2024] 75 *Regional Studies in Marine Science*, 103568.

⁸ D. Thomas, 'Niger Delta Oil Production, Reserves, Field Sizes Assessed' *Industry Briefs* (Oil and Gas Journal: 13th November 1995).

⁹ I. V. Ejiba, S. C. Onya and O. K. Adams, 'Impact of Oil Pollution on Livelihood: Evidence from the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria' [2016] 12 (5) *Journal of Scientific Research & Reports*, 1-12.

¹⁰ J. Newig and Others, 'Does Stakeholder Participation Improve Environmental Governance? Evidence from a Meta-analysis of 305 Case Studies' [2023] 82 *Global Environmental Change*, 102705 1-11.

¹¹ Close to the Gap Foundation, 'What is Climate Action.'

<https://www.closesthegapfoundation.org/glossary/climate-action> accessed 16th November 2025.

¹² Ibid.

The effect of climate change is evident in Nigeria, particularly in the Niger Delta region of the country which requires climate action. The Niger Delta is one of the world's largest wetlands, and Africa's largest delta, covering some 70 000 km.¹³ The Niger Delta is evidently blessed with numerous resources, including crude oil that accounts for about 80 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings. Despite its immense oil wealth, the region presents an example of extreme poverty, environmental pollution, climate change and eventual degradation, as vast oil revenues have barely touched pervasive local poverty¹⁴.

The Niger Delta is one of the five most polluted spots in the world.¹⁵ This is caused by the activities of the multi-national oil companies operating in the region, resulting from pollution and climate change. The major negative effect of climate change is environmental degradation/pollution. Pollution refers to the presence of matter or energy whose nature, location, or quantity has undesired effects on the environment, which may arise from nature (natural pollutants) or as a result of human activities (anthropogenic pollutants), through the environmental media of air, land, or water.¹⁶ It is on record that in the Niger Delta, the major causes of pollution are oil spillage and gas flaring by the oil companies, leading to soil fertility loss, delta forest loss, biodiversity depletion, and fisheries decline, among many others.¹⁷

Over the years, there has been a tug of war between the multinational companies, local communities, and the government on who, in fact cause the degradation flowing from climate change. It has always been the argument of the state entity that, even though the state has the duty to protect under the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, the companies are the ones carrying out the businesses in the local communities and therefore should be held responsible for the degradation and be liable in law and fact for the damage therefrom. The narrative by the companies has also been that the state should be responsible for the degradation as stated clearly under the United Nation Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights on the one hand and the local communities, which in most cases, bear the brunt argue helplessly that both the state and the companies cause the degradation and should be liable in law and fact to clean up the environmental mess in their communities. This, therefore, according to the author, creates a blame game syndrome. The Federal High Court sitting in Abuja ordered Shell to pay the sum of N45.5 billion, equivalent of \$111.6 million, as damages for decades of environmental degradation through oil spills that occurred during the Biafran-Nigerian civil war.¹⁸ This is a judgment of the court in the right direction that, if complied with, would go a long way in ensuring the multinational corporations are responsible and responsive in the ways and manners they carry out their explorative activities in the local communities of their operations which causes climate change in the region.

c. Sustainability

¹³B Oyaleke, 'From Botswana to Nigeria: A comparative analysis of the legal status of non-tribesmen and non-natives under Customary Arbitration in Botswana and Nigeria' [2021] 1(1), *Africa Journal of Law, Ethics and Education*, Available online at <https://ajleejournal.com/index.php/ajlee/article/view/124> accessed 5 January, 2026 [ISSN 2756-6870]

¹⁴United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) *Niger Delta Human Development Report*. (Lagos, UNDP, 2006) 9

¹⁵Azaiki S, *Inequities in Nigerian Politics* (Yenegoa, Treasure Communications Resources Limited Nigeria, 2003)

¹⁶Callan, S J and Thomas J.M 'Environment Economics and Management: Theory policy and application' (Chicago: Invin series in Economics, 1996)

¹⁷Amugo F.O 'Environmental Degradation and the Niger Delta Crises' [2018] 1(6) *International Journal of Education and Social Science Research*, 208

¹⁸See <https://www.jurist.org/news/2021/08/shell-to-pay-111m-in-damages-for-1970s-oil-spill-in-nigeria/> accessed 14 June, 2025

Sustainability is a developmental approach that meets the needs of the present generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.¹⁹ It integrates environmental protection, social well-being, and economic viability, ensuring that natural resources, ecological systems, and human communities can thrive in the long term.²⁰

3. The Niger-Delta Context

The Niger Delta is a delta of the River Niger that lies in Nigeria's southernmost region and drains into the Gulf of Guinea, which opens into the South Atlantic Ocean. The Niger Delta separates the Bight of Bonny from the Bight of Benin within the larger Gulf of Guinea. As part of Nigeria, the Niger Delta is made up of nine (9) states; consisting of all the six (6) States of the South South geopolitical zone which include; Rivers, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, Cross River, Delta and Edo State, plus one (1) state (Ondo) from the South Western geopolitical zone and two states (Abia and Imo) from the South Eastern geopolitical zone.²¹ With a population of more than 30 million, the Niger Delta is home to various ethnic groups, including Ijaw, Ibibio, Edo, Annang, Urhobo, Oron, Efik, Ogoni, Ibani, Ikwerre, Igbo, and Yoruba, among others.²² The common languages spoken, in addition to indigenous languages, are English and Nigerian Pidgin English. Indigenous people practice mostly Christianity and traditional religions. Dense urban areas and cities in the region include: Port Harcourt, Calabar, Uyo, Benin, Asaba, Owerri, Aba, Warri, Yenagoa and others, with Port Harcourt being the headquarters of the related federal government agency; the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC).

The region holds one of Africa's largest mangrove forests and is home to diverse flora and fauna, including elephants, monkeys, crocodilians, birds, fish, and marine mammals.²³ The geomorphological units of the region are diverse and include the outer barrier island complexes adjoining the Atlantic Ocean, including Bonny Island, the lower tidal floodplain, which consists of creeks, mangroves, estuaries, swamps and the upper freshwater riverine floodplain.²⁴ The region is also home to dense swamp forests and rainforests in the uplands. Apart from the living resources embedded in the Niger Delta, the Niger Delta is also popularly known for its vast hydrocarbon deposits. Nigeria's crude oil and natural gas resources, discovered in 1958 and currently making the nation one of the world's largest crude oil and natural gas producers, are sourced from the Niger Delta.²⁵ The region hosts multinational oil companies, including Shell, Agip, TotalEnergies, Mobil, Chevron, Nigeria Liquefied Natural Gas Company, Eni, Oando and many more.²⁶

3.1 Socio-economic, Environmental and Climate Change Issues and Impacts in the Niger-Delta

¹⁹ P. K. Ozili, 'Sustainability and Sustainable Development Research around the World' [2000] 20(3) *Managing Global Transitions*, 59–293

²⁰ Justice Mensah, 'Sustainable Development: Meaning, History, Principles, Pillars and Implications for Human Action: A Literature Review' [2019] 5 *Cogent Social Sciences*, 1653531 5.

²¹ The Niger Delta Monitoring Group, 'The Niger Delta.' <https://www.nigerdeltabudget.org/the-niger-delta/> accessed 17th November 2025.

²² T. Bodo and B. G. Gimah, 'The Pollution and Destruction of the Niger Delta Ecosystem in Nigeria: Who is to be blamed?' *European Scientific Journal* (2020) 16 (5) 161-182.

²³ S. C. Izah, 'Ecosystem of the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: Potentials and Threats' *Biodiversity International Journal* (2018) 2 (4) 338-345.

²⁴ Ibid. S. A. Aransiola, 'Niger Delta Mangrove Ecosystem: Biodiversity, Past and Present Pollution, Threat and Mitigation' *Regional Studies in Marine Science* (2024) 75 103568.

²⁵ A. E. Ite and Others, 'Petroleum Exploration and Production: Past and Present Environmental Issues in the Nigeria's Niger Delta' *American Journal of Environmental Protection* (2013) 1 (4) 78-90.

²⁶ T. Ewauma, 'Impact of Oil & Gas Production on the Niger Delta' (Climate Justice Central: 14th August 2024). <https://www.climatejusticecentral.org/posts/impact-of-oil-gas-production-on-the-niger-delta> accessed 16th November 2025.

a. Environmental Pollution

The Niger Delta region is one of the most polluted regions in Nigeria and West Africa. The ongoing crude oil and gas exploration since their discovery in the region has resulted in several spills and emissions of toxic waste in the forests and mangroves within the region, which have poisoned the environment and eliminated species of plants and animals.²⁷ The damage has left part of the waters unsafe for drinking and usage, and parts of the soil are no longer rich enough to support plant or marine life. While oil spills and bunkering activities have led to land and marine pollution, the heat from emitted gases has also poisoned the atmosphere, leading to air pollution.²⁸ The indigenous people depend on the natural environment to thrive,²⁹ but this has been at risk since the environmental devastation the region faces began. Clean-ups, mandated by the government and enshrined within oil pollution laws, have been embarked upon, but are not enough to remediate the environment or restore it to its original state. The pollution has also led to and is linked to other challenges the Niger Delta faces.

b. Mangrove Deforestation

Another environmental challenge the Niger Delta faces is the prevalence of mangrove deforestation to make way for urban development, land degradation, logging and pollution. In addition to oil pollution, it has been reported that the Niger Delta has lost up-to 40 per cent of its mangrove cover in the last 50 years due to urbanisation and logging.³⁰ This has also led to the loss of animal life in the region, with some being critically endangered. The lack of widespread enforcement of regulations to protect the biodiversity of the region has led to these circumstances, which further deplete the region's biodiversity.

The environmental challenges prevalent in the Niger Delta contribute to Nigeria's share in carbon emissions, which increases the impact of climate change in the region.³¹ Without intentional commitment to protecting the region from deforestation and pollution, the region stands to experience more negative impacts of climate change.

c. Poverty

A socio-economic challenge the Niger Delta faces is looming poverty. While several efforts are underway by the government and other local and international partners to improve the level of development of the region, access to adequate healthcare, jobs, satisfactory living, education, food, and infrastructure, among others are still limited.³² A region that is rich in crude oil and natural gas, supporting up-to 90 per cent of the nation's foreign exchange earnings, still faces hunger, healthcare crisis and a low standard of living, giving credence to the resource curse theory.³³ It is quite ironic indeed because the region is a recipient of constitutionally backed federal monetary allocation and oil derivatives, which run into billions of naira.³⁴ The existence of NDDC and

²⁷ N. M. Chijioke and Others, 'Causes and Effects of Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta and the Mitigation Measures that can be Implemented' *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* (2025) 10 (2) 45-55.

²⁸ N. Takon, 'Environmental Damage Arising from Oil Operations in Niger Delta of Nigeria: How not to continually live with their specific Impact on Population and Ecology' *International Journal of Development and Sustainability* (2014) 3 (9) 1878-1893.

²⁹ United Nations Development Programme, Niger Delta Human Development Report, 2006, http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/nigeria_hdr_report.pdf accessed 17th November 2025.

³⁰ O. O. Agumagu, R. Marchant and L. C. Stringer, 'Land Use and Land Cover Change Dynamics in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria from 1986 to 2024' *Land* (2025) 14 765 1-22.

³¹ B. Authority, 'Social and Environmental Drivers of Climate Change Vulnerability in the Niger Delta region, Nigeria' *European Journal of Environment and Earth Sciences* (2020) 1 (5) 1-10.

³² A. O. Emmanuel and J. J. Olayiwola and A. W. Babatunde, 'Poverty, Oil Exploration and Niger Delta crisis: The Response of the Youth' *African Journal of Political Science* (2011) 5 (8) 1-9.

³³ K. R. Mbelegberi and A. O. Hart, 'Natural Resource Governance and Conflict in the Niger Delta Region, Nigeria' *Journal of Public Administration and Social Welfare Research* (2025) 10 (5) 115-132.

³⁴ Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 (as amended), s. 162 (2).

various efforts should indeed create a pathway for the region to experience true growth and development. But, quite sadly, this is not the case due to some factors. The complicity of the federal government, multinational corporations, state governors and community leaders and the very ignorance of the indigenous people, despite efforts made, fuels the state of poverty the region remains in.³⁵ These hinder the region from achieving the sustainable development it very much needs.

Consequently, climate action and sustainable development cannot occur if these challenges are not addressed squarely.

3.2 Legal and Institutional Framework for Climate Action, Sustainability and Inclusive Participation in the Niger-Delta

Nigeria has a national legal and institutional framework for environmental protection and conservation, which also affects the Niger Delta. But the particular interest in this paper is climate action, sustainability, and inclusive participation in the Niger Delta, which some of these environmental laws and institutions are dedicated to. From the most recent Climate Change Act 2021 to the Petroleum Industry Act 2021, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act 2008 to the Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1992.

a. Climate Change Act 2021

The Climate Change Act 2021 was signed into law by President Muhammadu Buhari on November 18, 2021, and was the result of Nigeria's climate commitments at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland.³⁶ The Act was enacted to create a pathway for Nigeria to achieve its climate objective, address climate change impacts and promote long-term socioeconomic sustainability.³⁷ The legislation was indeed a milestone in the furtherance of Nigeria's resolve to tackle climate change. It creates the National Council on Climate Change,³⁸ embodies the nation's Carbon Budget and National Climate Change Action Plan to tackle climate change and limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels³⁹ and in addition, places climate change obligations on MDA's, public entities and private entities.⁴⁰ Important provisions under the law that promote inclusive participation in climate action include integrating climate change into various educational levels and ensuring public engagement in order to keep the public informed about the Action Plan and enable them to contribute to tackling climate change.⁴¹

b. Petroleum Industry Act 2021

The Petroleum Industry Act 2021 was enacted to provide for the renewed regulation of Nigeria's oil and gas industry to enhance profitability and efficiency. The Petroleum Act and its Regulations remain the primary legislation on oil and gas activities in Nigeria. It promotes public safety and environmental protection. Section 9 (1) (b) of the Act allows the authority created by the Act to make regulations on operations for the prevention of air and water pollution which may cause climate change in the country; hence necessitating climate action which encompasses policies, strategies, interventions, and efforts aimed at addressing the causes and consequences of climate change.

The Act establishes the Upstream Commission and the Mid-Downstream Authority. The Act also creates a new licensing system for oil and gas operations and provides for a new fiscal system that

³⁵ K. O. Alakwe, 'The Paradox of the Niger Delta: Examining the Principal Determinants of Poverty and Underdevelopment' *Journal of Developing Societies*, (2024) 40 (1) 94-115.

³⁶ Climate Change Laws of the World, Nigeria Climate Change Act, 2021. https://climate-laws.org/document/nigeria-s-climate-change-act_5ef7 accessed 17th November 2025.

³⁷ Climate Change Act 2021, s. 1.

³⁸ Ibid, s. 3.

³⁹ Ibid, Part V, s. 19-20.

⁴⁰ Ibid, Part VI, s. 22-24.

⁴¹ Ibid, s. 26.

incorporates a hydrocarbon tax, corporate income tax, and royalties. But what is important to this study and essential to the Act itself is the establishment of the Host Communities Development Trust. Under the Act, a Trust is created for the development of the communities that host upstream and midstream petroleum operations, with 3% of the Settlor's operating expenditure and other funds as stated therein.⁴² The Trust is set up by the operator and registered, and is managed by a Board of Trustees, a Management Committee, and an Advisory Committee, members of which are representatives of the community and are under a duty to manage the affairs of the Trust with the Settlor for the development of the Host Community.⁴³ Under the Act, indigenous communities now have certain participatory rights. But this has also come with its challenges. Some have argued that the percentage is insufficient and seek an increase of 3%, while the appointment of the aforementioned Board and Committee members has been criticised for allegations of personal gain and interests that could affect the transparency and operation of the Fund for the benefit of the community.⁴⁴

c. National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act 2008
NESREA was established to replace the Federal Environmental Protection Agency. The Act makes provision for the establishment of Nigeria's environmental protection agency, NESREA.⁴⁵ and saddles it with the responsibility of formulating and enforcing environmental standards, policies and regulations, in collaboration with the government, national and international partners, in order to foster sound environmental protection, conservation and management.⁴⁶ Additionally, the Agency has a duty to raise public awareness and provide environmental education on matters concerning sustainable environmental management, which is essential for public participation, access to justice, and information.⁴⁷ NESREA plays a fundamental role in guaranteeing these rights, particularly in compliance monitoring and enforcement, through meetings, public forums, citizen monitoring or awareness campaigns.⁴⁸

d. Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1992
The Environmental Impact Assessment Act 1992 is another crucial legislation that embodies the three access rights. The Act was enacted, requiring impact assessments for projects stipulated therein that may significantly impact the environment in a harmful manner.⁴⁹ This assessment process provides for public participation through public hearings, access to information through making the project information and its environmental impacts available to the public and access to justice through providing avenues for the masses to challenge, in the courts, any decision that is not in the interest of the community or the environment they reside in.⁵⁰ The Act thus embodies the basic need for inclusive participation that is essential for environmental action and sustainable development.

4. Optimising Inclusive Participation in Climate Action and Sustainability: What it takes

⁴² Petroleum Industry Act, 2021, s. 234-239.

⁴³ Ibid, s. 242-252.

⁴⁴ I. Ekponta, 'PIA: CSO Demands Transparency in Fund Management' (Leadership Newspapers: 1st August 2025). <<https://leadership.ng/pia-cso-demands-transparency-in-fund-management/>> Accessed 16th November 2025. E. Yafuborghi, C. Onuegbu, 'PIA: Host communities decry delayed funding for development projects in Akwa Ibom' (Vanguard Newspapers: 10th October 2024). <https://www.vanguardngr.com/2024/10/pia-host-communities-decry-delayed-funding-for-development-projects-in-akwa-ibom/> accessed 16th November 2025.

⁴⁵ National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act, 2008, s. 1.

⁴⁶ Ibid, s. 2, 7 and 8.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ EIA Act 1992, s. 1.

⁵⁰ Ibid, s. 24, 36, 38, 40, 55.

Climate action and sustainability require inclusive participation at all levels to bring about better outcomes.⁵¹ The UN has also recognised inclusive participation as one of the Sustainable Development Goals.⁵² Truly, the decentralisation of environmental and climate governance cannot be achieved without inclusive participation, especially for communities most affected by environmental decisions.⁵³ of which the Niger Delta region is one. Ergo, to ensure that inclusive participation is optimally recognised and adhered to, it is important to involve particular groups, including indigenous communities and civil society, gender and youth, and traditional and indigenous knowledge systems, pioneered by those most affected by climate issues and who will benefit most from sustainability.⁵⁴ These groups champion climate causes and are crucial to implementing sustainability efforts. The Brazilian Amazon indigenous community at COP 30 is a powerful example of the essential role of indigenous participation in climate action and sustainability. These groups are discussed hereunder.

a. Communities

It has been reported that indigenous and vulnerable communities are at risk of suffering more from the impacts of climate change.⁵⁵ But as noted earlier, indigenous communities play a fundamental role in climate action and sustainability. International environmental law has recognised that these communities have a right to access environmental information, justice and participate in activities that will affect them.⁵⁶ For the Niger Delta, indigenous communities are most affected by oil spills, gas flaring and the resulting environmental pollution that has damaged parts of the environment.⁵⁷ These communities ought to be directly involved in impact assessment programmes, access to accurate environmental information, justice, and efforts to conserve biodiversity and promote sustainability.⁵⁸ To do this, a robust public participation framework must be in place to ensure inclusive participation. Additionally, communities should be empowered with the knowledge, skill and capacity to provide meaningful contributions to climate action and sustainability.⁵⁹

b. Gender and Youth

Gender and youth are a primary part of climate action and efforts towards sustainable living, according to the UN.⁶⁰ It has also been reported that women and young people face greater climate risks, which is why attention is given to gender inclusivity and youth in climate action.⁶¹ Accordingly, it is important to end gender abuse and discrimination to ensure that both men and women participate jointly in tackling climate issues. Their inclusiveness is necessary to ensure

⁵¹ E. A. Moallemi, 'Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals Requires Transdisciplinary Innovation at the Local Scale' *One Earth* (2020) 3 300-313.

⁵² UNDP, 'The SDGs in Action.' <https://www.undp.org/sustainable-development-goals> accessed 18th November 2025.

⁵³ H. W. Fischer, 'Decentralization and the Governance of Climate Adaptation: Situating Community-based planning within broader trajectories of Political Transformation' *World Development* (2021) 140 105335.

⁵⁴ Nicole Redvers and Others, 'Indigenous Peoples: Traditional Knowledges, Climate Change and Health' *PLOS Global Public Health* (2023) 3 (10) 1-20.

⁵⁵ Walter Leal Filho and Others, 'Impacts of Climate Change to African Indigenous Communities and Examples of Adaptation Responses' *Nature Communications* (2021) 12 6224 1-4.

⁵⁶ Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, signed in 1998.

⁵⁷ Chijioke and Others (n. 48), Takon (n. 49).

⁵⁸ S. K. Gautam, 'The Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Biodiversity Conservation: Integrating Traditional Practices with Modern Environmental Approaches' *Environmental Reports Review Article* (2019) 1-3 1-3.

⁵⁹ D. Dushkova and O. Ivlieva, 'Empowering Communities to Act for a Change: A Review of the Community Empowerment Programs towards Sustainability and Resilience' *Sustainability* (2024) 16 8700 1-25.

⁶⁰ United Nations, Youth. <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/youth#> accessed 18th November 2025. UN, 'Why Women are Key to Climate Action.' <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/women> accessed 18th November 2025.

⁶¹ Ibid.

balanced participation among men and women, and among older and younger people, in promoting climate goals and sustainable living.⁶²

c. Civil Society

Civil society groups and NGOs have a crucial role in promoting inclusivity in environmental protection and sustainable development. These groups are crucial in advancing fundamental human rights against perpetrators of environmental degradation and biodiversity loss, and in advising policymakers on strategies and mechanisms to promote sustainability, the energy transition, and climate justice.⁶³ Additionally, they are instrumental in promoting and improving climate education through awareness campaigns, programmes, and conferences, among other initiatives.⁶⁴ Their contributions to climate action, especially in education and awareness, have placed them at important levels in climate negotiations.⁶⁵

5. Challenges to Inclusive Participation for Climate Action and Sustainability in the Niger-Delta

Certain challenges hinder inclusive participation for climate action and sustainability in the Niger Delta. From limited awareness to limited regulatory implementation, a lack of capacity, and rent-seeking behaviours, it is apparent that the Niger Delta is a region of primary concern when it comes to inclusive participation in climate action and sustainability. These challenges are accordingly considered hereunder:

a. Limited Implementation of Legal, Institutional and Policy Framework for Climate Action and Sustainability

This study has previously outlined the existing legal, policy, and institutional framework that promotes climate action and sustainability in Nigeria. However, current realities in the Niger Delta indicate that these frameworks are not being implemented or enforced optimally.⁶⁶ Participation, though mandated, lacks depth beyond initial consultations.⁶⁷ Lack of institutional and technical capacity required to enforce environmental laws has led to fragmented and weak enforcement.⁶⁸ Without proper and comprehensive legal enforcement, inclusive participation remains limited. The constant pollution and environmental degradation in the region and the side-lining of indigenous people from crucial matters affecting the environment show that there is a dearth in enforcement, which is negatively affecting the region as climate issues continue to rise and as the region further plunges into unsustainability.

b. Limited Awareness

Awareness is central to inclusive participation. This is because participation requires being fully aware of the matter at hand and the contributions needed to achieve the desired climate and sustainability goals. However, in the Niger Delta region, awareness of climate and sustainability is limited. Many indigenous communities lack access to climate information, environmental literacy, technical knowledge and organisational structures needed to engage meaningfully in

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ R. Sharma, 'Civil Society Organizations' Institutional Climate Capacity for Community-based Conservation Projects: Characteristics, Factors and Issues' *Current Research in Environmental Sustainability* (2023) 5 100218 1-12.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Z. O. Edo, 'The Challenges of Effective Environmental Enforcement and Compliance in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria' *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* (2012) 14 (6) 1-16.

⁶⁷ H. P. Omodu, 'Sustainable Development in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: An Evaluation of the Petroleum Industry Act's 3% Host Community Development Fund' *Journal of Law and Global Policy* (2025) 10 (3) 20-39.

⁶⁸ Z. O. Edo, L. Etemike and V. E. Clark, 'Exploring Barriers to Environmental Law Enforcement and Compliance in Nigeria Niger Delta Region' *Journal of Danubian Studies and Research* (2022) 12 (1) 235-257.

planning, monitoring or policy processes.⁶⁹ Awareness is still low.⁷⁰ Limited awareness drives ignorance, which can be exploited to misinform people, leading to negative outcomes for the environment and sustainability. It also weakens the quality of participation and reinforces dependence on external actors, constraining the communities' ability to act as equal partners in climate governance, reducing effectiveness, legitimacy and sustainability of participatory processes in the Niger Delta.⁷¹

c. Poverty and Lack of Capacity

One of the socio-economic issues highlighted earlier that the Niger Delta faces is poverty. The irony that a resource-rich region is poor because of the government's ineffectiveness is striking. Poverty and lack of capacity are the realities of the majority of indigenous persons and communities in the Niger Delta, as noted earlier.⁷² The region's chronic underdevelopment, weak public services and high unemployment levels⁷³ affect the level of participation in environmental causes. The loss of livelihood exacerbated by environmental degradation and the limited efforts by the federal and state governments to create employment have led to the poverty currently experienced among indigenous communities in the Niger Delta.⁷⁴ As a result, indigenous participation in climate action and sustainability is limited because they lack the resources to sustain such demanding efforts.

6. International Lessons and Comparative Insights from Norway and New Zealand

Norway and New Zealand are considered in this study because of their strong performance in meeting the needs of indigenous communities regarding environmental protection and sustainability. There are lessons to be learned, as considered below:

a. Norway

Norway is a country located in northern Europe and is one of the world's largest producers of oil and gas.⁷⁵ It is one of the world's richest countries, measured by GDP per capita, and has a high standard of living and a high human development index (HDI).⁷⁶ It is a welfare state and has one of the world's largest sovereign funds.⁷⁷ Norway is also blessed with rich biodiversity.⁷⁸ When it comes to environmental protection, climate action, and sustainability, Norway is among the

⁶⁹ J. T. Jack, 'Indigenous Knowledge and Climate Change Adaptation in Niger Delta Coastal Communities' *African Social Research* (2023) 3 46-52.

⁷⁰ I. S. Aliyu and S. U. Abubakar, 'Legal Frameworks and Challenges for Environmental Protection in Nigeria: An Appraisal of Enforcement Mechanisms' *International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research in Academic Studies and Field Practices* (2025) 4 (3) 8.

⁷¹ R. S. Bellgam, 'Impact of Community Participation on Environmental Management in Opobo/Nkoro Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria' *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science* (2024) 8 (1) 142.

⁷² Alakwe (n. 56).

⁷³ J. C. Egbebulam, D. Ekpe and T. O. Adejumo, 'Oil Exploration and Poverty in the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria: A Critical Analysis' *International Journal of Business and Social Science* (2013) 4 (3) 279-287.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ US Energy Information Administration, 'Country Brief Analysis: Norway' (21st August 2024). https://www.eia.gov/international/content/analysis/countries_long/Norway/pdf/Norway%20CAB%202024.pdf accessed 19th November 2025.

⁷⁶ European Health Information Gateway, UNDP Human Development Index (HDI) (Norway). <https://gateway.euro.who.int/en/hfa-explorer/hdi/norway/#GxzOCAZifE> accessed 20th November 2025. L. Ventura, Richest Countries in the World (Global Finance: 3rd September 2025). <https://gfmag.com/data/richest-countries-in-the-world/#> accessed 20th November 2025.

⁷⁷ T. Ekeli and A. N. R. Sy, 'The Economics of Sovereign Wealth Funds: Lessons from Norway.' In A. N. Sy, R. Arezki and T. Gylfason (eds) *Beyond the Curse: Policies to Harness the Power of Natural Resources* (International Monetary Fund, 2012).

⁷⁸ Convention on Biological Diversity, Norway – Country Profile.

<<https://www.cbd.int/countries/profile?country=no>> Accessed 20th November 2025.

countries committed to sustainable living, emissions reduction, and the fight against climate change.⁷⁹ This is possible through the relevant and existing legal frameworks that allow for inclusive participation for climate change. These include, Climate Change Act, enacted in 2018 and later updated which establishes a legally binding target to become a low-emission society by reducing greenhouse gas emission by 90% by 2050; Article 112 of the Norway Constitution which guarantees every person the right to a healthy environment and requires the state to protect this right for present and future generations, while Ministry of Climate and Environment, Klimautvalget 2050 (Climate Commission and Municipal authorities are to see to the enforcement of the aforementioned laws. Consideration is given to Norway in this study because inclusive participation in climate matters, resource control, biodiversity protection, and sustainable development are well practised there. Public consultation, municipal hearings and citizen input are institutionalised and required practically before any environmental/climate-related decision is made.⁸⁰

Local governments also make real input in biodiversity protection, climate planning and environmental standards, and there is a basic level of synergy of governance between local governments, state governments and national governments.⁸¹ Access to environmental or climate information and transparency in governance are also guaranteed at all levels,⁸² and the Norwegian government and people prioritise long-term continuity and sustainability over short-term monetary pay-outs.⁸³ Finally, Norway's climate actions are inclusive, involving collaborations between the government, communities, NGOs, businesses and educational institutions.⁸⁴ This inclusion of every stakeholder promotes positive outcomes, helping Norway meet its climate objectives and goals for sustainable development.

b. New Zealand

New Zealand is a developed island country located in Oceania. It has a high HDI and GDP per capita.⁸⁵ It is worthy of consideration in this study because it has one of the world's best examples of inclusive participation in management of natural resources, especially between the Maori community and the State.⁸⁶ For example, New Zealand's government protected Māori fishing rights, while Māori perspectives on fisheries management helped advocate for a balanced and

⁷⁹OECD 'Environment at a Glance: Norway' (OECD Publications: 30th June 2025). <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/environment-at-a-glance-country-notes_59ce6fe6-en/norway_b359cf21-en.html#> accessed 20th November 2025.

⁸⁰ C. Aall, 'Municipal Environmental Policy in Norway: From 'Mainstream' Policy to 'Real' Agenda 21?' *Local Environment* (2000) 5(4) 451-465. Norway Planning and Building Act 2008.

⁸¹ H. Westskog and Others, 'The Transformative Potential of Local-level Planning and Climate Policies: Case Studies from Norwegian Municipalities' *Cogent Social Sciences* (2022) 8 (1) 1-17. E. I. Falleth and S. Hovik, 'Local Government and Nature Conservation in Norway: Decentralisation as a Strategy in Environmental Policy' *Local Environment: The International Journal of Justice and Sustainability*, (2009) 14 (3) 221-231.

⁸² EITI International Secretariat, 'Validation of Norway: Assessment of the Progress in implementing the EITI Standard' (10th February 2023). A. Thurston, 'Openness and Information Integrity in Norway' (Open Government Partnership: 15th October 2013). <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/stories/openness-and-information-integrity-in-norway/#> accessed 20th November 2025.

⁸³ Diplomat International Canada Magazine, 'Norway invests in its own future', October 2016. <<https://diplomatonline.com/2016/10/norway-invests-in-its-own-future/#>> Accessed 20th November 2025. K. K. Aase, 'Optimal Spending Strategies for Sovereign Wealth Funds Using a Discrete-Time Life Cycle Model' *Journal of Risk and Financial Management* (2024) 17 327 4.

⁸⁴ EITI International Secretariat (n. 114).

⁸⁵World Population Review, Human Development Index by Country. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/hdi-by-country> accessed 20th November 2025. IMF, IMF Data Mapper: New Zealand, 2025. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/NZL> accessed 20th November 2025.

⁸⁶Ministry of Environment 'Matauranga Maori and the Ministry' (27th September 2023). <https://environment.govt.nz/te-ao-maori/matauranga-maori-and-the-ministry/#> accessed 20th November 2025.

interconnected approach, prioritising long-term fisheries sustainability in New Zealand.⁸⁷ This is possible due to the enforcement of the relevant existing legal and institutional frameworks which include Climate Change Response (Zero Carbon) Amendment Act, 2019 which puts the 1.5 Centigrade goal of the Paris Agreement into domestic law and the Resource Management System Reform which integrates spatial planning with climate adaptation, prioritising community consultation and recognising the cultural interests of indigenous. The Ministry for the Environment, Climate Change Commission, the Treaty of Waitangi and the National Adaptation Framework serve as the institutions responsible for carrying the dictates of the provisions of the law. As climate education and environmental literacy is existent and improve, community knowledge and cultural values also influence environmental policies and shape national climate strategies in New Zealand.⁸⁸ Additionally, community-led processes are incorporated in New Zealand's climate action and environmental activities, and the nation's law obligates the government to consult with indigenous communities in making major environmental decisions.⁸⁹

c. Comparative Analysis: Lessons for the Niger Delta

From both nations discussed above, differences can be seen in inclusive participation therein, and the lack thereof in the Niger Delta. Important lessons can therefore be learned as follows:

- i. Legalisation and institutionalisation of inclusive participation
- ii. Enhancement of environmental transparency and access to environmental information
- iii. Decentralisation of climate/environmental governance
- iv. Embedded cultural and traditional ecological knowledge into climate strategies and environmental protection
- v. Incentivization of long-term sustainability over short-term benefits

7. Conclusion

Optimising inclusive participation for climate action and sustainability in the Niger Delta ultimately requires addressing the deeper structural barriers that have long shaped the region's environmental governance. Challenges such as rent-seeking behaviour, entrenched poverty, limited education and community capacity and a centralised decision-making framework continue to narrow the space for meaningful engagement and undermine the legitimacy of climate initiatives. These constraints reveal that participation in the region has often been procedural rather than substantive and reactive rather than forward-looking.

The experiences of Norway and New Zealand show that more effective models are possible when communities are treated as partners in environmental governance. Their approaches, characterised by transparency, decentralised authority, co-governance mechanisms and strong environmental literacy, offer useful principles that can be applied to not just the Niger Delta but Nigeria as a whole. For the Niger Delta, the path forward lies in institutionalising participation, strengthening local capacity, education, improving access to information and realigning incentives to long-term

⁸⁷ C. Houkamau and P. Pouwhara, 'Integrating Māori Perspectives in Environmental Management and Fisheries' *Link Praxis Journal of Practice-led Research and Global South* (2024) 2 (1) 1-35.

⁸⁸ C. Eames, 'Climate Change Education in New Zealand' *Curriculum Perspectives* (2017) 37 99–102. H. Moshou and H. Drini, 'Strategic Insights for Environmental Education in Greece: SWOT and PEST Analyses in the Context of the Climate Change Crisis' *Sustainability* (2025) 17, 2633 3.

O. Campbell, 'Exploring NZ's Environmental Policies for a Sustainable Future.' <https://sustainableliving.org.nz/exploring-nzs-environmental-policies-for-a-sustainable-future/> accessed 20th November 2025.

⁸⁹ Resource Management Act 1991, s. 8. M. Dickie and Others, 'Why New Zealand's Consultation Process is important for REDD+ countries' (Environmental Defense Fund: April 2012). <https://www.edf.org/sites/default/files/New_Zealand_consultation_process_important_REDD_countries_EDF.pdf> accessed 20th November 2025.

sustainability over short-term cash payments. Doing so can move the region from compensation-driven engagement to shared environmental stewardship. This will enhance inclusive participation for climate action and sustainable development in the Niger Delta, ending decades-long environmental pollution, mangrove depletion and poverty.

8. Recommendations

To transform the Niger Delta into a region where inclusive participation in climate governance, biodiversity conservation and sustainable development becomes a reality, the following recommendations outlined should be implemented.

- a. The relevant existing legal frameworks for the protection of the environment from climate change should be religiously enforced. It is not enough to have laws without the necessary political will to ensure its enforcement.
- b. All the government agencies and institutions established for the protection of the environment from climate change should work together in harmony and unity in ensuring that effectiveness and efficiency is achieved by removing the necessary bottlenecks and bureaucracies.
- c. Environmental education and climate awareness should be incorporated into the learning curriculum in educational institutions and carried out frequently by governmental institutions at all levels. This can shift Niger Delta participation from rent-seeking behaviour to developmental, future-oriented engagement through education.
- d. Local capacity building and integration of data systems and technology to enhance local knowledge, awareness and skill for participatory climate action, improvement of livelihoods and the promotion of sustainable practices that would benefit the region.
- e. Increase integration of traditional knowledge to enhance ecosystem protection and forest management, which will promote biodiversity conservation in the Niger Delta region.
- f. Strengthen governance and transparency of existing benefit structures such as the Host Community Development Trust Fund under the PIA 2021 through independent, community, and government-led oversight and clear public auditing. This shifts incentives away from short-term pay-outs and ensures community engagement centres on long-term community development and sustainability.