



**TECHNIUM**  
**SOCIAL SCIENCES JOURNAL**

**Vol. 24, 2021**

**A new decade  
for social changes**

[www.techniumscience.com](http://www.techniumscience.com)

ISSN 2668-7798



9 772668 779000

## **An Invitation to Sociology of Climate Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa: Concealing the Intersections of Environmental Justice, Inequality, and the Nation State**

**Shingirai S Mugambiwa**

University of Limpopo Department of Social Work, South Africa

[shingirai.mugambiwa@ul.ac.za](mailto:shingirai.mugambiwa@ul.ac.za); [mugambiwashingirai@gmail.com](mailto:mugambiwashingirai@gmail.com)

**Abstract.** This paper provides a synopsis of the critical debates in environmental sociology vis-à-vis climate governance and evokes the intersections of environmental justice, equality and the nation state. The nation state, which in this study refers to the government of the day is regarded as an important factor in determining the state of environmental justice and equality. This is because the government has the mandate to formulate and implement policies such as environmental policy. Issues of injustice and inequality are clearly spelt out in the discipline of sociology which provide insights on ways through which humans in societies respond to environmental crises. The paper places considerable emphasis on the political economy of environmental sociology which lies on the effects of modernity and capitalism in relation to socio-ecological well-being of communities. This is significantly linked to Karl Marx's contribution on class struggles over the means of production which favours the bourgeoisie who are responsible for the greater ecological damage.

**Keywords.** Climate governance, Class, Environmental justice, Inequality, Sociology

### **Introduction**

Embracing climate governance from a sociological standpoint was born out of the field's recognition of the fact that physical environments significantly influence human societies and behavior (Dunlap, 1979). Environmental sociologists are at loggerheads with traditional sociologists on critical issues such as the role of social facts wherein they argue that social facts can only be explained by other social facts. For example, the responses and perceptions of communities on climate change require one to understand the underlying cultures and belief systems of communities. The generic understanding of governance refers to the management of resources and policy-making by means of exercising authority (Prete, 2004). The term governance, as a result, is often employed to signify a complex set of structures at both public and private levels commonly associated with national administration. Rao (2008) defined governance as the process of exercising of political and administrative authority in the process of managing the affairs of a country. The process of governance takes cognisance of all mechanisms, processes and institutions where citizens articulate their interests and mediate their differences.

Khawaja (2011) provides the components of equity, participation, transparency, responsiveness and accountability as linked with the governance. To put this into perspective,

the concept of governance refers to all processes of governing by either a government or any other social system (Rao, 2008). Governance is related to the processes of interaction and decision-making among the actors involved in a collective problem leading to the creation and reproduction of social norms and institutions (Mugambiwa et al., 2015). As a result, the problem is not limited to one aspect of the community since it relates to various aspects translating to either social, political, economic and environmental problems. Further, Jagers & Stripple (2003) provide a comprehensive definition of climate governance which they referred to as the mechanisms and measures that are developed and used in steering social systems in an effort to prevent, mitigate and/or adapt to climate change risks (Jagers & Stripple, 2003).

### **Merging environmental sociology with climate governance**

Environmental sociology significantly informs the intrinsic understanding of climate governance from a social science perspective. Environmental sociology is a product of earlier research that aimed at challenging erected boundaries within human society, nonhuman natures, and the built environment (Pellow and Brehm, 2013). In essence, environmental sociology creates a platform for a well-orchestrated and well informed approach to the interaction of humans and the natural environment. The field also includes management of natural resources with focus on aspects such as climate change adaptation and mitigation which significantly informs climate governance.

The field of environmental sociology emerged from classical sociological theory with the quest to demonstrate its relevance on analysing environmental crises (Dunlap and Michelson, 2002). As such, environmental sociology provides insights on ways in which humans in societies respond to environmental crises. Climate change risks constitute some of the immensely notable environmental crises. Climate governance, therefore, becomes significant in environmental sociology debacle. Climate governance significantly informs the state of preparedness among communities and their capacity to cope to the effects of climate change (Simonet, 2010). Contemporary studies in environmental sociology are focusing largely on the capacity of communities in responding to climate change taking into consideration the notions of climate change vulnerability, risk, resilience and adaptation (Adger et. al, 2006; Pelling and High, 2005). This is essential in perceiving the extent of the actual and potential damage and responses. One, therefore, needs to take into consideration the fact that the impacts-based perspective informs the form of response required in addressing the impacts of climate change to pave way for policy articulation and formulation.

### ***Inequality***

Inequality is precisely tackled within the confines of environmental sociology since issues pertaining to equality are crucial in climate governance. Inequality is a fundamental concept of the sociological enterprise and the field of environmental sociology provides a unique way of theorizing the concept (Boyce, 2008). Interestingly, the main focus of a plethora of sociological contributions from classical to contemporary theorists are based on the challenges of inequality in communities. Focusing on inequality in communities has grave shortcomings since scholars are bound to largely dwell on the depths of inequalities instead of its possible and actual impacts (Foster & Holleman (2012). Environmental sociology, therefore, provides insights into actual and anticipated impacts of environmental hazards such as climate change since its approach to inequality is built on the relationships among humans, animals and ecosystems. This provides a well informed approach to inequality since the focus is not only on inequality among humans but also among animal species and the ecosystem.

Drawing from the works of Karl Marx and Max Weber, inequality is at the heart of all sociological work. The ecological foundations of the works of Marx and Weber demonstrate an endorsement of the focus of environmental sociology on the challenges of inequality and power that is primarily rooted in capitalist economies and statecraft (Gibson, 2009; Foster & Holleman, 2012). The major focus of the works of Marx and Weber was predominantly on modernity's detrimental effects as well as its capitalist cultures on marginalised populations and ecosystems (Foster & Holleman, 2012). As such, the efforts of governments in policy articulation on climate change is deeply rooted in some form of inequality since not all concerned parties are not equally informed in the process. For instance, rural communities are usually left out despite the fact that they constitute the largely affected populations insofar as climate change risk is concerned.

### ***The political economy of environmental sociology***

The political economy perspectives of environmental sociology are crucial in climate governance. The focus of political economy of environmental sociology lies on the effects of modernity and capitalism vis-à-vis socio-ecological well-being of communities (Gould et al., 2008). The concept can be traced to the Marxist scholarship on struggles over the means of production favouring the bourgeoisie class that are responsible for the greater ecological damage and horrendous social suffering. Insights on inequality in environmental sociology and the political economy of environmental sociology links inequality to ecological harm (Foster & Holleman, 2012). Mol (2003) coined the term Ecological modernization which suggests that regardless of the fact that globalization contributes to environmental degradation, it also informs policy articulation and implementation and programs designed to improve the environmental.

### **National governments initiatives on climate governance**

Boström & Uggla (2016) highlight the significance of environment and society relations and the importance of representation which informs climate governance. Representation is of paramount importance in climate governance because in the event of environmental injustice, the environment cannot plead its own case, as such, it needs humans to represent it. Moreover, in instances where humans strain the environment, representation is required to determine better ways to utilise the environment and adapt to environmental hazards. The major form of representation in climate governance is the government.

National governments play an important role in climate governance. Their role is largely focused on the implementation and adoption of adaptation policy and institutional frameworks (Bhatasara, 2016). The development of public policies aimed at adapting to climate change by national governments is informed by numerous factors such as the risk of climate hazards and the countries' commitment to the UNFCCC (Chagutah, 2010). This is because climate change adaptation requires strong legislative, institutional and policy frameworks in place (Chagutah, 2010). The adoption of strong policy frameworks is fundamental since it is anticipated to shape and inform the national adaptive capacity. Policy frameworks are also vital in the process of coordinating individual and collective approaches to climate change. Such approaches significantly inform and determine the outcome of adaptation. As such, the government will be able to utilise available resources accordingly vis-à-vis adaptation to the impacts of climate change.

Despite having numerous positive impacts of legislation in climate change, it is also important to focus on the limitations of the legislations and governmental policies in place (Agrawal, 2010). Legislation in adaptation policies is considered restricting in the same manner

inflexible institutions contribute to the failure of policy. It is therefore recommended that governments should employ flexibility in their efforts in dealing with the uncertainties of climate change effects. Baird et al. (2014) assert that both public and private actors play a pivotal role in contributing to the effects of climate change. As such, there is need for governments to establish appropriate response systems aimed at addressing the effects of climate change especially in the developing world.

### **Climate governance initiatives by selected African governments**

#### **▪ Zimbabwe**

In Zimbabwe, the government has made a positive contribution towards addressing the impacts of climate change. The process began by admitting that climate change is a critical issue as such, the government needs to play a leading role in dealing with the challenges associated with it. The commitment of the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) to the impacts of climate change was first established when the government signed the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in June 1992 as well as consented to the Kyoto Protocol on Climate Change in June 2009 (Bhatasara, 2016). Nonetheless, the ratification of international instruments failed to transform into substantial climate change policies in Zimbabwe. As such, Zimbabwe has no specified policy response to climate change though there are numerous disconnected responses and policy documents such as the ones presented by Dodman & Mitlin (2016) and Mugambiwa & Rukema (2019) which inform the government's position on climate change not necessarily the policy framework on the response strategy. Moreover, it is also of great concern that Zimbabwe does not have a national climate change adaptation policy or programme of action. Bhatasara (2016) purports that regardless of the absence of a comprehensive policy document for climate change adaptation, in May 2013, Zimbabwe has however employed a draft National Climate Change Response Strategy. Nevertheless, the progress of the policy document has become increasingly slow. Brown et al. (2012) are of the view that the draft response strategy is slow because climate change is handled as a petty issue in the policy domain. This implies that it is not given a wider coverage and by policy makers and the national government.

The lack of a substantive climate change policy in Zimbabwe is attributed to the numerous policy frameworks aimed at the environment and climate (Bhatasara, 2016; Mugambiwa & Rukema, 2019). The frameworks are namely; the National Environmental Policy, Agriculture Policy framework, Drought Mitigation Policy and Disaster Management Policy. The aforementioned policies have one thing in common that is they address issues pertaining to climate change at a national level and they indirectly address the impacts and challenges posed by climate change. For instance, Zimbabwe's Agriculture Policy acknowledges that the country is vulnerable to drought, a trend that is widely believed to be accentuated by climate change. Moreover, many other policies have demonstrated a similar trend such that even though they do not directly address climate change, their focus is on the effects of climate. As such, in the end it translates to the fact that they are aimed at addressing the impacts of climate change.

#### **▪ Ethiopia**

The government of Ethiopia has demonstrated commitment in combating climate change based on the manner in which the country has suitably reacted to the impacts of climate change by ratifying pertinent international conventions and other necessary steps taken to implement the two categories of climate change responses namely; mitigation and adaptation (Lemma, 2016). Ethiopia has ratified the UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol. Ethiopia had its

first Climate Change National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2007 (MoFE, 2015). Moreover, the government of Ethiopia has other climate change related programs namely; the target to build carbon neutral economy by 2025, the Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions of 2010 and the sectoral adaptation plan of action a (lemma, 2016).

#### ▪ *South Africa*

South Africa has made positive strides in its response to the effects of climate change and formulation of response strategies. South Africa has made commitments aimed at reducing poverty and ensure enhanced development in various sectors through policy initiatives such as the Reconstruction and Development Program (RDP); Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) and Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative of South Africa (ASGISA) (DEA, 2010). The country boasts one of the world's most effective disaster management policies that is said to put considerable efforts into developing a National Climate Change Response policy. All the aforementioned efforts are aimed at addressing the impacts of climate change and ensure that the country is on the right platform in addressing the impacts of climate change. Policy frameworks are therefore critical as part of the measures and response strategies because they enable the use of national resources in addressing the impacts of climate change and any other environmental hazard.

#### **African Regional Blocks**

Inasmuch as individual countries are making positive efforts to address the impacts of climate change, it is important to pay attention on the combined efforts of governments in the region to deliberate on the consequence of climate change as well as their policy positions accordingly. In this paper I focused on three regions in the Sub-Saharan Africa namely the Southern African Development Community, East African Community and Economic Community of West African States. The aforementioned bodies constitute member states that actively contribute to their existence and the member states take part in the formulation of the organisations' various policy positions.

#### ***Southern Africa Development Community***

Regional bodies such as the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) play an important role in making policies that are aimed at addressing disasters such as climate change. The member countries of SADC are; Angola, Botswana, DR Congo, Lesotho, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, Eswatini, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe. SADC has adopted the protocol on Forestry to ensure effective environmental protection in safeguarding the interests of present and future generations. This is despite the fact that the region lacks a comprehensive policy document that addresses climate change. The region, therefore, boasts a protocol on Forestry which urges member states to use similar criteria and indicators aimed at sustainable forest management so as to evaluate biodiversity in forests. The SADC Forestry Protocol was established to achieve sustainable utilisation of natural resources and effective protection of the environment which is one of the key objectives of the SADC (Miller et al., 2007).

The treaty considers forests as key natural resources as well as a major component of the environment that should be managed for the benefit of the SADC communities. The Protocol recognises climate change as an issues of common concern among member states of the regional body (Miller et al., 2007). In May of 2009 the SADC member states developed a regional programme of Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) (Ruppel, 2012). The focus of the programme was to improve the capacity of SADC

member states in the management of their national programmes through regional cooperation on the international processes on REDD and Climate Change. It has therefore been ascertained that SADC does not have a specific climate change policy, the member countries have developed policies that address the causes and effects of climate change.

### ***East African Community***

This section combines the approaches initiated by countries in the East Africa Community (EAC) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). The EAC comprise Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda and Burundi and the countries are projected to suffer some of the worst impacts of climate change. The countries, therefore, came up with a collective approach to address the impacts of climate change through the East African Community Climate Change Policy which was designed by governments of the concerned countries (Kasaija, 2004). The policy was designed to address the impacts of climate change. The policy addresses issues pertaining to planning adaptation and mitigation actions designed to address climate change (Katembo, 2008). The high vulnerability of the region to climate change exposes the region to the increased consequence of food security to the extent that the policy makes adaptation to climate change a priority for the EAC region. The policy is also said to be aiming to strengthen meteorological services and improve early warning systems (Kasaija, 2004). The major focus therefore is to increase preparedness for disaster risk management, scaling up of the efficient use of energy resources, irrigation, crop and livestock production. Further, the policy also has some mitigation measures which include reforestation, forest conservation and access to efficient and sustainable crop and livestock production systems (Kasaija, 2004). This shows that climate governance is not limited to individuals but rather the state and national institutions are also involved in ensuring that there is a comprehensive approach to the phenomenon of climate change which is aimed at adaptation, resilience and mitigation vis-à-vis climate governance.

### ***Economic Community of West African States***

The ECOWAS comprise countries in the West African region namely; Benin, cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Togo, Mali, and Burkina Faso. ECOWAS does not have a climate change protocol though the Heads of State adopted of member countries adopted an environmental policy in 2008 to address environmental issues in the sub-region (Cowell, 2011). The policy was in line with the ECOWAS treaty on 'the harmonisation and coordination of national policies and the promotion of programmes, projects and activities' (EAC climate change policy, 2010). The major objective of the environmental policy was to curb the depletion of natural resources, improve the environment, and preserve biological diversity. The role of the nation state in climate governance in the ECOWAS region is limited due to the lack of a tangible climate change policy trajectory. The argument in that regard is that the nation state forms the apex of equality and justice through its mandate to formulate necessary policy positions aimed at protecting the environment.

### **Conclusion**

This invitation to sociology of climate governance provided a synopsis of the critical debates in contemporary environmental sociology. The paper evoked the intersections of environmental justice, equality and the nation state. It has emerged that the nation state is an important factor in determining the state of justice and equality. This is because the nation state

possess power to formulate and implement environmental policy. This was therefore interpreted within the confines of environmental sociology which emerged from classical sociological theory in pursuit of demonstrating its relevance on analysing environmental crises. Issues of injustice and inequality are clearly spelt out in the discipline of sociology which provides insights on ways through which humans in societies respond to environmental crises. A consideration of climate change risks resonates the significance of climate governance in environmental sociology narrative. This is because climate governance significantly informs the state of preparedness and capacity to cope to the effects of climate change among communities.

Moreover, the political economy of environmental sociology which lies on the effects of modernity and capitalism in relation to socio-ecological well-being of communities was found essential in the invitation to sociology of climate governance. The concept echoes the Marxist scholarship on struggles over the means of production which favours the bourgeoisie classes who are responsible for the greater ecological damage and horrendous social suffering of certain elements of communities. This provides evidence of the inequality that is created by the phenomenon of climate change wherein those responsible for greenhouse gas emissions are less affected by the impacts of climate change whereas third world countries that contribute less to the phenomenon suffer the most from the impacts of the phenomenon. In that regard, inequality in environmental sociology and the political economy of environmental sociology links inequality to ecological harm and the need for climate governance to address the harm through channels such as the nation state and other influential institutions.

## References

- [1] Adger, W. N., Paavola, Y., Huq, S & Mace, M. J. 2006. *Fairness in Adaptation to Climate Change*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [2] Bhatasara, S. 2016. Understanding Climate Variability and Livelihoods Adaptation in Rural Zimbabwe: A case of Charewa, Mutoko. PhD Thesis. Rhodes University.
- [3] Boström, M & Uggla, Y. 2016. *A sociology of environmental representation, Environmental Sociology*. Informa UK Limited, UK.
- [4] Boyce, J. K. 2008. Is inequality bad for the environment? *Res. Soc. Probl. Public Policy*, 15 (1), 267–88.
- [5] Brown, D., Chanakira, R., Chatiza, K., Dhliwayo, M., Dodman, D., Masiiwa, M., Muchadenyika, D., Mugabe, P. & Zvigadza, S. 2012. Climate change impacts, vulnerability and adaptation in Zimbabwe. IIED Climate Change Working Paper 3. International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED), London.
- [6] Chagutah, T. 2010. Climate Change Vulnerability and Adaptation Preparedness in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe Country Report. Cape Town: Heinrich Böll Stiftung Southern Africa.
- [7] Cowell, F. 2011. The impact of ECOW AS protocol on good governance and democracy. *African Journal of International and comparative Law*, 19 (2), 331-342.
- [8] Dodman, D. & Mitlin, D. (2015), “The national and local politics of climate change adaptation in Zimbabwe”, *Climate and Development*, 7 (3), 223-234.
- [9] Dunlap, R. E & Michelson, W. 2002. *Handbook of Environmental Sociology*. Westport, CT: Greenwood.
- [10] Dunlap, R. E. 1979. Environmental Sociology. *Ann. Rev. Sociol.* 5 (1), 243-273.
- [11] EAC climate change policy 2010. Available at: <http://www.eac.int/environment/index.php>. [Accessed on 25 June 2019]

- [12] Foster, J. B & Holleman, H. 2012. Weber and the environment: classical foundations for a post exemptionalist sociology. *Am. J. Sociol*, 117 (6),16-25.
- [13] Gandure, S. Walker, S. & Botha, J.J. 2011. Farmers' perceptions of adaptation to climate change and water stress in a South African rural community. *Environ. Dev.* 5 (1), 39–53.
- [14] Gibson, J. W. 2009. *A Reenchanted World: The Quest for a New Kinship with Nature*. New York: Henry Holt.
- [15] Giddens, A. 2009. *The Politics of Climate Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- [16] Gould, K. A, Pellow, D. N & Schnaiberg A. 2008. *The Treadmill of Production: Injustice and Unsustainability in the Global Economy*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm.
- [17] Jagers, S & Stripple, J. 2003. Climate Governance beyond the State. *Global Governance*, 9 (3), 385–399.
- [18] Kasaija, P. A. 2004. Regional integration: A political federation of the East African countries? *African Journal of International Affairs*, 7 (1), 21-34.
- [19] Kasaija, P. A. 2004. Regional integration: A political federation of the East African countries? *African Journal of International Affairs*, 7 (1), 21-34.
- [20] Katembo, B. 2008. Pan Africanism and development: The East African community model. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 2 (2), 99-111.
- [21] Miller, C. I., Stephenson, N. L & Stephens, S. L. 2007. Climate change and forests of the future: Managing in the face of uncertainty. *Journal of Ecological Applications*, 21 (4), 52-65.
- [22] Mol A. 2003. *Globalization and Environmental Reform: The Ecological Modernization of the Global Economy*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- [23] Mugambiwa, S. S. & Rukema, J. R. 2019. Rethinking indigenous climate governance through climate change and variability discourse by a Zimbabwean rural community. *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management*. DOI: 10.1108/IJCCSM-11-2018-0074.
- [24] Mugambiwa, S.S., Tirivangasi, H.M. & Yingi, L. 2015. Emergence of the wave of democratisation in Africa and its aftermath: A focus on governance in South Africa. South African Association of Public Administration and Management (SAAPAM) Limpopo Chapter 4th Edition.
- [25] Pelling, M & High, C. 2005. Understanding Adaptation: What can Social Capital Offer Assessments of Adaptive Capacity? *Global Environmental Change*, 15 (4), 308-319.
- [26] Simonet, G. 2010. The Concept of Adaptation: Interdisciplinary Scope and Involvement in Climate Change. *Sapiens* 3(1), 1-10.