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ADVANCING CLIMATE POLICY IN AFRICA: NIGERIA'S LEADERSHIP IN SOUTH-SOUTH COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria has emerged as a central figure in Africa's climate diplomacy, leveraging its strategic influence within regional institutions such as ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) to advance climate resilience and South-South cooperation. This study explores Nigeria's evolving role in shaping regional climate governance by analyzing its contributions to the development and implementation of key frameworks, including the ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy and the AU Climate Resilience Plan (2022–2032). Through a qualitative case study and thematic analysis, the research highlights Nigeria's legal reforms, institutional leadership, and policy advocacy aimed at harmonizing climate action across the continent. Despite these efforts, challenges such as limited climate finance, weak intergovernmental coordination, and inadequate monitoring systems persist. The study concludes with recommendations to strengthen Nigeria's leadership and promote integrated, accountable, and inclusive climate governance in Africa. These findings are vital for policymakers, regional organizations, and development partners working toward a sustainable and climate-resilient future for the continent.

KEYWORDS: Nigeria, South-South cooperation, climate diplomacy, ECOWAS, AU, AfCFTA, regional climate governance.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Africa remains disproportionately vulnerable to climate change because of its economic dependence on natural resources, high poverty levels, and limited adaptive capacity. In response to the growing impacts of global warming, countries in the Global South are pursuing collective strategies through South-South cooperation (SSC). This is particularly critical as the African continent aims to implement the African Union's Agenda 2063, the Paris Agreement, and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNECA, 2023; UNFCCC, 2022).

Climate change presents significant challenges for Africa, requiring collaborative efforts among nations to develop resilient and adaptive strategies. Nigeria, as Africa's most populous country and largest economy, plays a crucial role in shaping the continent's climate policy landscape. By actively participating in regional organizations like ECOWAS, the AU, and AfCFTA, Nigeria has established itself as a leader in promoting South-South cooperation on climate issues. This paper examines Nigeria's contributions to regional climate governance, focusing on its involvement in key initiatives and the implications for sustainable development across Africa.

In recent years, South-South cooperation has become increasingly important as a framework for enabling peer-to-peer support among developing countries in building climate resilience. Nigeria, as a significant geopolitical and economic power in West Africa, has taken on the responsibility of driving continental cooperation in climate policy, environmental governance, and sustainable development (UNDP, 2022; African Union, 2022). Through regional leadership and diplomacy, Nigeria has spearheaded several initiatives that support joint action, policy harmonization, and capacity building for climate adaptation and mitigation across African states.

Nigeria's efforts are reflected in its implementation of the Climate Change Act (2021), which legally mandates the integration of climate objectives into national planning and introduces a Climate Change Council and a dedicated fund. At the regional level, Nigeria has played a central role in shaping the ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy (2022) and in aligning national development strategies with the AU's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032). Furthermore, Nigeria has actively promoted the integration of environmental and sustainability standards into AfCFTA policies, advocating

for climate-smart trade practices that contribute to long-term emission reductions (CEPII, 2024; AfDB, 2023).

This study contributes to the literature by critically analyzing Nigeria's role in South-South climate cooperation and regional governance, with the goal of providing actionable policy recommendations. By focusing on Nigeria's engagement within ECOWAS, AU, and AfCFTA, the study identifies both structural and operational factors that influence regional climate policy outcomes. This work is particularly relevant for African policymakers, regional institutions, and development partners seeking to scale up climate action through coherent multilateral frameworks.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Although Nigeria plays a leading role in regional climate governance through ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and AfCFTA, the effective implementation of regional climate strategies remains a challenge. Weak institutional capacity, poor inter-agency coordination, and limited access to climate finance have hindered Nigeria's ability to translate continental frameworks into concrete national and subnational actions (UNEP, 2024; AfDB, 2023). Despite national efforts, including the Climate Change Act (2021) and the Great Green Wall Project, alignment with regional climate objectives is not always systematic or measurable.

There is also a lack of harmonized monitoring and reporting mechanisms across African countries, which reduces transparency and accountability in regional climate cooperation. These gaps undermine the potential of South-South climate diplomacy to foster transformative change. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate how Nigeria can better align its national actions with regional strategies to strengthen African climate governance and inform more coordinated policy decisions.

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To examine Nigeria's role in ECOWAS, AU, and AfCFTA in advancing regional climate policy.
2. To evaluate the alignment of Nigeria's national climate initiatives with regional strategies.
3. To provide actionable insights for African policymakers on strengthening South-South climate cooperation.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What frameworks support Nigeria's regional climate diplomacy?
2. How has Nigeria contributed to climate governance under ECOWAS, AU, and AfCFTA?
3. What are the policy gaps and opportunities for enhancing regional climate cooperation?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study holds critical significance for advancing climate policy coherence and sustainable development across Africa. By focusing on Nigeria's strategic role within ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and AfCFTA, it offers a timely analysis of how South-South cooperation can be a catalyst for regional climate resilience. Nigeria's leadership in crafting legal instruments, championing environmental integration in trade, and supporting multilateral climate strategies demonstrates a replicable model for other African states. The research provides evidence-based insights for policymakers, development partners, and climate institutions to improve policy alignment, mobilize climate finance, and enhance institutional capacities. Additionally, the study addresses pressing implementation gaps in monitoring, coordination, and reporting mechanisms, offering actionable recommendations to close these divides. As Africa grapples with the dual challenges of climate vulnerability and economic development, this research contributes to shaping a more integrated, collaborative, and forward-looking climate governance architecture. It ultimately supports the realization of Agenda 2063 and the Paris Agreement goals.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptualizing South-South Climate Policy Cooperation

South-South Climate Policy Cooperation (SSCPC) refers to collaborative efforts among developing countries to address shared environmental and climate challenges through mutual support, solidarity, and collective action. Rooted in the broader framework of South-South Cooperation, SSCPC emphasizes the exchange of knowledge, technology, expertise, and policy innovations to build adaptive capacity and resilience in the Global South. In the climate context, this cooperation is particularly vital as developing countries often face similar vulnerabilities, such as food insecurity, water scarcity, and extreme weather events, exacerbated by limited financial and technical resources.

SSCPC serves as a platform for peer learning, where countries can align national strategies with regional and global climate goals through harmonized policies and joint initiatives. It promotes equity by empowering Southern nations to define and drive their climate agendas

without over-reliance on North-South aid dynamics. By fostering regional ownership and inclusive governance, SSCPC strengthens multilateralism and enhances the legitimacy and effectiveness of climate action across Africa and other developing regions.

2.2 Climate Diplomacy and Regional Climate Governance

Climate diplomacy refers to the strategic engagement of states in international and regional processes to shape climate-related decisions, forge alliances, and influence global and regional climate outcomes. For African nations, climate diplomacy has become a vital tool for asserting their interests in global negotiations, accessing climate finance, and shaping cooperative frameworks that reflect their developmental needs and ecological vulnerabilities.

Regional climate governance complements these efforts by creating platforms for collective action within continental bodies such as the African Union (AU), ECOWAS, and AfCFTA. These institutions are central in coordinating climate strategies, harmonizing national policies, and fostering cross-border resilience projects. The African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) and Agenda 2063's Climate Pillar exemplify the continent's commitment to long-term, integrated climate governance.

Nigeria's active participation in regional climate diplomacy has positioned it as a key player in shaping Africa's climate agenda. Its leadership within ECOWAS, the AU, and continental trade platforms reflects a growing recognition of the importance of coordinated, African-led climate action.

2.3 Nigeria's National Climate Strategy

Nigeria's national climate strategy reflects an evolving, multidimensional framework designed to tackle the escalating challenges of climate change while aligning with global commitments under the Paris Agreement. At the heart of this strategy is the Climate Change Act of 2021, which establishes a legal and institutional basis for mainstreaming climate objectives into Nigeria's economic planning. The Act mandates the creation of the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC), a high-level inter-ministerial body chaired by the President, to oversee the implementation of climate policies across federal and subnational levels. It also introduces a Climate Change Fund to support mitigation and adaptation interventions.

The country's revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), submitted in 2021, commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% unconditionally and 47% with international support by 2030, compared to business-as-usual levels. These targets focus on priority sectors including energy, agriculture, waste management, transport, and oil and gas. Notably, the updated NDCs include gender-responsive and nature-based solutions, such as sustainable forest management and climate-smart agriculture, with co-benefits for biodiversity and livelihoods.

As of 2024, Nigeria's emissions are estimated at approximately 387 million metric tons of CO₂-equivalent annually, representing the highest in West Africa (UNEP, 2024). To address this, the government has launched initiatives such as the Energy Transition Plan (ETP), which aims to achieve net-zero emissions by 2060 while expanding energy access to over 90 million underserved Nigerians. The ETP targets an increase in renewable energy penetration from under 20% to over 60% of electricity generation by 2050, supported by investments in solar, hydro, and green hydrogen.

In terms of adaptation, Nigeria's National Adaptation Plan (NAP), developed with support from the UNDP and finalized in 2023, provides a roadmap for strengthening resilience in critical sectors such as agriculture, health, and water resources. The plan emphasizes decentralization, encouraging state governments to develop localized adaptation strategies aligned with national objectives.

Nigeria participates actively in regional initiatives such as the Great Green Wall (GGW), aimed at restoring 4 million hectares of degraded land and creating 10 million green jobs by 2030 across the Sahel. Domestically, this is implemented through the National Agency for the Great Green Wall (NAGGW), which also contributes to Nigeria's regional environmental leadership.

Institutional reforms have also been advanced through the establishment of the Department of Climate Change (DCC) under the Federal Ministry of Environment, responsible for monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) of climate data, facilitating transparency and accountability under international frameworks.

In sum, Nigeria's national climate strategy is characterized by legal robustness, ambitious targets, and increasing institutional maturity. It represents a critical foundation for Nigeria's

leadership in South-South climate cooperation, offering a model for integrating domestic action with regional and international climate governance.

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study research design situated within a policy analysis framework to examine Nigeria's leadership in advancing climate policy through South-South cooperation in Africa. The case study approach enables a detailed and contextualized investigation of Nigeria's engagement with regional institutions such as ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). By focusing on Nigeria as a single, instrumental case, the research aims to understand how one nation's policy strategies influence broader regional climate governance mechanisms.

The study relies on documentary and content analysis of policy documents, legal frameworks, institutional reports, and multilateral agreements to capture the complexity of Nigeria's climate diplomacy. This design allows for an in-depth evaluation of policy alignment, institutional leadership, and implementation dynamics across multiple governance levels. The case study approach is particularly effective in unpacking the practical and political dimensions of South-South cooperation, offering insights transferable to similar regional contexts in Africa and beyond.

3.2 Data Collection

The study relies on secondary data collection, drawing from a wide range of authoritative and policy-relevant sources to ensure credibility and depth of analysis. Key data were obtained through desk review of official documents, multilateral frameworks, legal instruments, and institutional reports spanning the period from 2020 to 2025. These sources include Nigeria's Climate Change Act (2021), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and National Adaptation Plan, as well as regional documents such as the ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy (2022), the African Union Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032), and policy briefs from the AfCFTA Secretariat.

Data were gathered from reports published by global and regional organizations, including the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA), the African Development Bank (AfDB), and the United Nations Development

Programme (UNDP). Scholarly articles, think tank publications, and peer-reviewed journals were also reviewed to supplement institutional data and provide academic grounding.

This multi-source approach ensures a comprehensive understanding of Nigeria's policy actions, institutional engagements, and leadership within South-South climate cooperation frameworks. The diversity of sources enhances triangulation and supports a robust thematic analysis of regional climate governance.

3.3 Data Analysis

This study employed thematic analysis to interpret and synthesize qualitative data drawn from policy documents, institutional reports, and regional frameworks. The aim was to critically assess Nigeria's engagement in regional climate governance and identify cross-cutting issues related to policy coherence, implementation capacity, and climate finance mobilization.

Thematic analysis was conducted in four stages. First, the data corpus, including Nigeria's Climate Change Act (2021), ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy (2022), AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy (2022–2032), and relevant AfCFTA protocols, was systematically reviewed to ensure familiarity with the content. Second, initial codes were generated by identifying recurring concepts and language that reflected Nigeria's strategic actions, institutional roles, and policy commitments. Third, related codes were grouped into broader analytical themes, guided by the study's research objectives. Finally, these themes were refined, interpreted, and contextualized using insights from regional and global climate policy literature.

The three core themes that emerged, policy alignment, institutional effectiveness, and climate finance access, formed the analytical foundation for understanding Nigeria's leadership in South-South climate cooperation. This approach enabled a nuanced evaluation of Nigeria's climate diplomacy and regional integration efforts, offering evidence-based insights for advancing continental climate governance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Nigeria's Role in ECOWAS Climate Governance

Nigeria has played a pivotal role in shaping and operationalizing the climate governance agenda within the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As the region's

largest economy and most populous country, Nigeria has utilized its political influence and technical capacity to spearhead the formulation and adoption of the ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy (2022). This strategy aims to provide a harmonized framework for member states to integrate climate adaptation and mitigation into their national development plans.

One of Nigeria's most significant contributions has been its active participation in the design and institutionalization of ECOWAS climate governance mechanisms. It has championed initiatives that link climate action to broader regional priorities, including food security, energy access, and conflict prevention. For instance, Nigeria has consistently promoted the integration of climate considerations into the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture, recognizing the growing role of climate-induced displacement and resource conflicts in regional instability.

Moreover, Nigeria's support for regional climate summits, such as the Africa Interregional Climate and Innovation Summit (AICIS 2025), underscores its commitment to elevating climate change as a regional priority. These platforms serve as critical spaces for agenda-setting, stakeholder coordination, and the dissemination of best practices in climate resilience.

Institutionally, Nigeria has also worked to strengthen ECOWAS capacities through technical assistance, policy alignment, and knowledge exchange. It has pushed for the establishment of regional climate observatories, the enhancement of data-sharing protocols, and the promotion of joint climate finance mobilization strategies. Nigeria's own experience with domestic frameworks, such as the Climate Change Act (2021) and National Adaptation Plan, has served as a reference point for peer countries in West Africa.

4.2 Nigeria and the AU Climate Agenda

Nigeria's leadership extends significantly into the African Union (AU), where it plays a central role in shaping and implementing the AU Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022–2032). This continental strategy seeks to align national and regional actions with the goals of the Paris Agreement and Africa's Agenda 2063, focusing on climate resilience, low-carbon development, and ecosystem protection.

One of Nigeria's most prominent contributions to the AU climate agenda is through its chairmanship of the Committee of African Heads of State on Climate Change (CAHOSCC). In this capacity, Nigeria has been instrumental in convening high-level dialogues,

coordinating African positions at global climate negotiations (e.g., COP27 and COP28), and advancing policy coherence across AU member states. Nigeria has particularly advocated for the operationalization of loss and damage mechanisms and increased African access to global climate finance instruments, such as the Green Climate Fund and Adaptation Fund.

On the implementation front, Nigeria has aligned its national strategies with AU climate priorities by reinforcing domestic institutions and regulatory frameworks. The Climate Change Act (2021) serves as a cornerstone in this alignment, mandating climate mainstreaming across ministries and establishing legal pathways for adaptation and mitigation planning. The Act also created the National Council on Climate Change (NCCC), a coordination body that mirrors continental governance structures and facilitates synergy between national and AU frameworks.

Nigeria's contributions also include ecological restoration through transboundary projects like the Great Green Wall (GGW), a flagship AU initiative aimed at combating desertification and promoting sustainable livelihoods in the Sahel. Nigeria, through the National Agency for the Great Green Wall (NAGGW), has made significant progress in land restoration, job creation, and the development of climate-resilient rural economies, offering a scalable model for other AU member states.

However, Nigeria's role is not without constraints. Persistent challenges such as funding shortfalls, technical capacity gaps, and institutional fragmentation hinder the full realization of AU climate objectives. Despite these obstacles, Nigeria remains a key driver of Africa's climate policy agenda, bridging the gap between global commitments and regional implementation.

4.3 Integration of Climate Policy into AfCFTA

Nigeria has emerged as a strong advocate for embedding environmental sustainability within the operational frameworks of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), recognizing the intersection between trade liberalization and climate action. As Africa's largest economy and a key player in AfCFTA negotiations, Nigeria has pushed for the inclusion of climate-smart provisions in trade protocols, aiming to align economic integration with environmental resilience.

Central to Nigeria's position is the belief that green trade policies can serve dual objectives: accelerating intra-African commerce while mitigating environmental degradation. Nigeria has actively lobbied for the incorporation of environmental safeguards, sustainable production standards, and emission-reduction measures into AfCFTA's legal texts and implementation protocols. This is evident in its support for proposals on environmental impact assessments for cross-border infrastructure projects and green value chain development, particularly in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing, and energy.

Studies have highlighted the potential of an environmentally conscious AfCFTA to reduce carbon emissions across the continent by up to 25% by 2045 (CEPII, 2024). Nigeria's internal policy reforms—such as its Business Environment Regulatory Reforms and strengthened Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) regulations—reflect a deliberate effort to ensure national readiness for green trade integration. These reforms not only demonstrate policy coherence with AfCFTA goals but also serve as a template for other African countries seeking to balance trade growth with sustainability.

Additionally, Nigeria has supported the creation of green innovation hubs and climate-smart industrial zones under the AfCFTA framework, particularly in partnership with regional development banks and private sector actors. Such initiatives are designed to attract climate-aligned foreign direct investment (FDI), encourage clean technology adoption, and foster knowledge transfer across borders.

Nevertheless, implementation challenges persist. These include limited technical capacity to enforce environmental standards, uneven regulatory harmonization among member states, and the absence of a dedicated environmental chapter in the current AfCFTA agreement. Despite these gaps, Nigeria's proactive engagement underscores its commitment to making AfCFTA a catalyst for low-carbon development, thereby enhancing the synergy between economic integration and climate resilience.

4.4 Challenges in Nigeria's Regional Climate Diplomacy

Despite Nigeria's active leadership in regional climate governance, several structural and operational challenges continue to undermine the effectiveness of its diplomacy within ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and AfCFTA frameworks. These constraints affect Nigeria's ability to translate its climate commitments into measurable regional impact and limit its influence in driving collective climate action across the continent.

One of the most pressing challenges is limited climate finance mobilization. Although Nigeria has articulated ambitious goals in its revised Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the Climate Change Act (2021), it continues to face substantial financing gaps. Access to international climate finance mechanisms, such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF), Global Environment Facility (GEF), and the Adaptation Fund, remains sporadic and inadequate relative to the scale of required investments. The lack of bankable projects, weak institutional capacity for fund application, and cumbersome donor procedures have further constrained resource mobilization efforts (UNEP, 2024).

Policy coordination challenges also impede Nigeria's regional climate diplomacy. There is often fragmentation between federal ministries, state governments, and regional bodies, resulting in disjointed implementation of climate strategies. Overlapping mandates, bureaucratic inertia, and political turnover contribute to inconsistent policy execution and hinder Nigeria's ability to lead by example. This coordination gap is particularly evident in areas such as climate-smart agriculture, renewable energy deployment, and regional infrastructure planning, where multi-level governance is essential.

Another major challenge is the absence of robust data systems for climate monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV). Reliable climate data is critical for tracking progress, ensuring transparency, and informing evidence-based policymaking. However, Nigeria's MRV infrastructure remains underdeveloped, limiting its ability to fulfill regional reporting obligations and reducing its credibility in multilateral forums. Inadequate investment in meteorological services, data-sharing platforms, and technical expertise exacerbates this shortfall.

Additionally, geopolitical and institutional tensions within regional organizations sometimes dilute Nigeria's leadership. As other countries also seek to assert influence, the regional climate governance landscape can become competitive rather than cooperative. Diverging national interests, capacity asymmetries, and uneven political will across member states often make consensus-building difficult, thereby slowing regional progress.

In summary, while Nigeria's intentions and strategies are aligned with continental climate goals, systemic barriers, particularly in finance, coordination, data systems, and regional diplomacy, continue to limit the transformative potential of its leadership. Addressing these

challenges will be essential for Nigeria to maintain its role as a credible and effective climate actor within South-South cooperation frameworks.

4.5 Policy Opportunities

Despite the challenges identified, Nigeria is well-positioned to capitalize on a range of strategic opportunities to strengthen its leadership in regional climate governance and enhance the effectiveness of South-South cooperation frameworks across Africa.

One key opportunity lies in leveraging its geopolitical weight to champion the development of African carbon markets. As a regional economic powerhouse and a major emitter in West Africa, Nigeria can play a catalytic role in shaping continental carbon pricing mechanisms, emissions trading schemes, and climate finance platforms tailored to African realities. Such leadership could help monetize mitigation efforts, attract green investment, and incentivize private sector participation in low-carbon development.

Additionally, Nigeria can advance its climate diplomacy by promoting climate-smart regional infrastructure. Projects in sustainable transport, renewable energy, and resilient agriculture—implemented in collaboration with ECOWAS and the African Union—can serve as regional public goods that foster cross-border integration while building climate resilience. Nigeria's Energy Transition Plan and its experience with solar and mini-grid deployment provide viable blueprints for regional replication.

Expanding South-South cooperation through technical exchanges and innovation hubs is another high-impact avenue. Nigeria can spearhead regional centers of excellence focused on climate innovation, capacity building, and policy harmonization. By facilitating peer learning and institutional twinning with countries facing similar environmental challenges, Nigeria can help build a critical mass of regional expertise.

Moreover, Nigeria has the opportunity to mainstream climate objectives into broader economic integration efforts under AfCFTA. This includes advocating for a dedicated environmental protocol within AfCFTA agreements, establishing green trade corridors, and aligning product standards with sustainability benchmarks. Such measures would enhance policy coherence and ensure that economic growth is decoupled from ecological degradation.

Finally, enhancing national monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems offers a strategic lever for boosting Nigeria's regional credibility. Investments in data infrastructure,

digital tools, and institutional training would not only improve transparency and performance tracking but also strengthen Nigeria's ability to support and guide continental climate reporting standards.

In sum, Nigeria has a unique window to consolidate its role as a regional climate leader by strategically investing in carbon market development, infrastructure diplomacy, knowledge exchange, green trade, and MRV systems. Realizing these opportunities requires political will, institutional alignment, and sustained multilateral engagement.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study examined Nigeria's role in advancing climate policy cooperation within regional frameworks, focusing on its engagement with ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). Using a qualitative case study approach and thematic analysis, the research identified Nigeria as a leading actor in shaping regional climate governance through institutional leadership, legal reforms, and multilateral diplomacy.

Nigeria has significantly contributed to the development and implementation of the ECOWAS Regional Climate Strategy (2022), promoted continental resilience under the AU Climate Strategy (2022–2032), and actively advocated for the integration of environmental standards within AfCFTA. These efforts demonstrate Nigeria's commitment to aligning national policies with regional climate objectives. However, persistent challenges, such as limited climate finance access, weak intergovernmental coordination, and underdeveloped data systems, continue to constrain Nigeria's capacity to deliver transformative regional outcomes.

Despite these limitations, the study identified multiple opportunities for Nigeria to enhance its regional leadership. These include leveraging carbon markets, promoting climate-smart infrastructure, deepening South-South cooperation through technical exchange, and advancing green trade integration within AfCFTA.

5.2 CONCLUSION

Nigeria's dynamic engagement in African climate diplomacy underscores the increasing relevance of regional collaboration in addressing the continent's shared environmental and

developmental challenges. Through its active participation in key frameworks under ECOWAS, the African Union (AU), and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), Nigeria has emerged as a central actor in shaping a more unified and responsive South-South climate governance model. Its leadership, demonstrated through pioneering legislation such as the Climate Change Act, institutional strengthening, and policy advocacy, reflects a growing national commitment to harmonizing domestic priorities with regional and global climate goals.

Nonetheless, Nigeria's influence can only achieve its full potential if structural barriers are effectively addressed. Persistent issues such as weak intergovernmental coordination, limited access to climate finance, and gaps in monitoring and accountability mechanisms continue to undermine progress. Moving forward, Nigeria must deepen policy integration, champion climate finance mobilization, and invest in robust implementation systems. By doing so, it can not only reinforce its leadership but also anchor a resilient, inclusive, and forward-looking climate governance framework for Africa as a whole.

5.3 Recommendations

Drawing from the study's findings, four strategic recommendations are proposed to enhance Nigeria's leadership in South-South climate cooperation and ensure effective regional climate governance:

1. Integrated Policy Alignment and Harmonization

Nigeria should prioritize the full integration of its national climate commitments, particularly those outlined in its Climate Change Act and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), into broader regional frameworks such as the ECOWAS Climate Strategy and the AU's Climate Resilience Plan. This vertical alignment will strengthen policy coherence, reduce duplication, and promote unified action across governance levels. Clear institutional mechanisms for coordination between federal, state, and regional actors are essential for synchronizing climate goals and ensuring consistent implementation across the continent.

2. Sustainable Climate Finance Mobilization

To overcome persistent financing gaps, Nigeria must adopt diversified and innovative approaches to climate finance. These include issuing sovereign green bonds, developing climate-aligned public-private partnerships, and leveraging multilateral funding sources such as the Green Climate Fund and the Adaptation Fund. Strengthening the enabling environment

for climate investment will also attract private sector participation and ensure long-term financial sustainability for both national and regional climate programs.

3. Institutional and Technical Capacity Strengthening

The effectiveness of Nigeria's regional climate leadership depends on the capacity of its institutions to deliver on their commitments. Targeted investments in technical training, human resources, and institutional tools are necessary for both federal and subnational agencies. In addition, Nigeria should play a leading role in supporting institutional capacity development within ECOWAS, AU, and AfCFTA structures, contributing to shared regional capacity for climate governance, implementation, and monitoring.

4. Monitoring, Knowledge Exchange, and Data Systems

Robust Monitoring, Reporting, and Verification (MRV) systems are essential to track progress, ensure accountability, and inform evidence-based decision-making. Nigeria should invest in national MRV infrastructure while actively participating in regional data harmonization initiatives. Furthermore, it should institutionalize South-South knowledge exchange mechanisms such as climate innovation hubs, peer-learning platforms, and regional technical forums to facilitate the sharing of best practices, technologies, and policy innovations across African nations.

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