

**Environmental Governance in Africa:
Utilising Integrated and Collaborative
Approaches for Green Growth**

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Environmental Governance in Africa: Utilising Integrated and Collaborative Approaches for Green Growth

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the status of environmental governance in Africa. The paper argues that implementing sound environmental governance frameworks in Africa is a key priority that can accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development and green growth in the continent. However, the paper notes that the ideal of sound environmental governance is yet to be actualised in Africa. It discusses some of the challenges hindering the quest towards robust environmental governance systems in Africa. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that strengthening environmental governance in Africa is an urgent priority if the Sustainable Development and green growth agendas are to be achieved in the continent. The paper discusses how integrated and collaborative approaches can be harnessed and utilised in order to strengthen environmental governance in Africa for green growth and Sustainable Development.

1.0 Introduction

Pursuing sound environmental governance is vital in the quest towards Sustainable Development. Environmental governance refers to the rules, policies and institutions that shape how humans interact with the environment¹. Further, it has been argued that environmental governance covers a broad range of legal and other tools employed in both the private and public sectors to foster environmental protection². The United

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¹ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Environmental Law and Governance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/topics/environmental-law-and-governance> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

² Environmental Law Institute., 'Environmental Governance' Available at <https://www.eli.org/environmental-governance> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

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Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) notes that environmental governance is a broad concept that encompasses laws, policy, rules and norms that govern human behavior in respect of the environment, while also addressing who makes environmental decisions, how such decisions are made and carried out, the scientific information needed for environmental decision-making and how the public and major stakeholders can participate in environmental decision-making processes³. It has been argued that environmental governance extends beyond government regulations and interventions to involve other stakeholders including the private sector, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and the public in environmental decision-making processes⁴.

Environmental governance is a key pillar in the pursuit of Sustainable Development. It has been argued that through robust environmental governance systems, we can safeguard people and planet and accelerate progress towards the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)⁵. By building effective, responsive and inclusive environmental governance frameworks, it is possible to achieve environmental goals including sound biodiversity conservation, pollution control, effective management of natural resources and strong climate action both globally and at regional, national and local levels therefore strengthening Sustainable Development efforts⁶. Environmental governance is therefore a key determinant of Sustainable Development since robust governance systems are paramount in protecting and restoring the planet and forging a sustainable tomorrow for both humanity and nature⁷.

³ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Environmental Governance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/west-asia/regional-initiatives/environmental-governance> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

⁴ Environmental Governance., Available at <https://www.manglai.io/en/glossary/environmental-governance> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

⁵ United Nations Environment Programme., 'About environmental rights and governance' Available at <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-governance/about-environmental-rights-and-governance> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

⁶ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Environmental Law and Governance' Op Cit

⁷ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Environmental Law and Governance' Op Cit

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In addition, sound environmental governance can accelerate progress towards green growth. Green growth is a development paradigm that aims to harmonise economic growth with environmental sustainability⁸. This approach emphasizes environmentally sustainable economic progress to foster low-carbon and socially inclusive development⁹. It has been argued that green growth fosters economic growth and development while at the same time ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our health and well-being relies¹⁰. Further, it has been argued that green growth provides a pathway that seeks to achieve growth targets and development objectives in a more efficient, sustainable and resilient manner¹¹. Sound environmental governance is a prerequisite towards achieving green growth. For example, measures such as reducing carbon emissions, tackling pollution, enhancing energy and resource efficiency, and preventing the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services which are vital in ensuring robust environmental governance frameworks are also necessary in attaining green growth by decoupling economic growth from environmental impacts¹². Sound environmental governance can therefore foster green growth by protecting the environment while also accelerating the pace of economic growth and social progress¹³.

⁸ Green Growth., Available at <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/index.php?menu=1447> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

⁹ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific., 'Green Growth Uptake in Asia-Pacific Region.' Available at https://unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/cep/CEP-20/ppp/Item10_b_ESCAP_GreenGrowthUptake_e_sm.pdf (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

¹⁰ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development., 'What is Green Growth and How can it Help Deliver Sustainable Development?' Available at <https://www.oecd.org/greengrowth/whatisgreengrowthandhowcanithelpdeliversustainabledevelopment.htm> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

¹¹ African Development Bank Group., 'Green Growth' Available at <https://www.afdb.org/en/topics-and-sectors/initiatives-partnerships/green-growth-initiative/background> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

¹² United Nations Environment Programme., 'Green Economy' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/supporting-resource-efficiency/green-economy> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

¹³ Chuku, C., Ajayi. V., 'Growing Green: Enablers and Barriers for Africa' Working Paper Series No. 363, (2022), African Development Bank, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

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Environmental governance therefore plays a key role towards realising Sustainable Development and green growth. However, it has been noted that environmental governance systems in most countries are strained, with marginalized groups including indigenous peoples, local communities, women and the youth being excluded from environmental decision-making processes¹⁴. Further, the Global South including African countries are facing numerous legal, political, financial, capacity and technical challenges which undermine their ability to build robust environmental governance frameworks¹⁵. Failure to put in place sound environmental governance systems undermines Sustainable Development and green growth by fuelling challenges such as climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss and environmental degradation¹⁶. In light of these challenges, strengthening environmental governance is necessary if the Sustainable Development and green growth agendas are to be realised.

This paper critically examines the status of environmental governance in Africa. The paper argues that implementing sound environmental governance frameworks in Africa is a key priority that can accelerate progress towards Sustainable Development and green growth in the continent. However, the paper notes that the ideal of sound environmental governance is yet to be actualised in Africa. It discusses some of the challenges hindering the quest towards robust environmental governance systems in Africa. In light of these concerns, the paper argues that strengthening environmental governance in Africa is an urgent priority if the Sustainable Development and green growth agendas are to be achieved in the continent. The paper discusses how integrated and collaborative

¹⁴ United Nations Development Programme., 'Environmental Governance: Bolstering Inclusive and Effective Governance Systems that Champion Environmental Justice and Sustainability' Available at <https://www.undp.org/nature/our-work-areas/environmental-governance> (Accessed on 15/11/2025)

¹⁵ Tsihohery. M., & Zafimahova. C., 'Environmental Governance in The Division of Roles International Institutions and Government Institutions in African Countries' *Journal of Management and Administration Provision*, Volume 2, No. 2 , (2022), pp 58-64

¹⁶ United Nations Development Programme., 'Environmental Governance: Bolstering inclusive and effective governance systems that champion environmental justice and sustainability' Op Cit

approaches can be harnessed and utilised in order to strengthen environmental governance in Africa for green growth and Sustainable Development.

2.0 Environmental Governance and Green Growth in Africa: Prospects and Challenges

Fostering sound environmental governance in Africa is a prerequisite for green growth and sustainability. The environment is at the heart of the green growth agenda in Africa. It has been correctly noted that green growth is one that is environmentally sustainable¹⁷. Therefore, strengthening environmental governance is vital towards achieving green growth both globally and in Africa. The goal of inclusive green growth is to foster economic growth, reduce poverty, promote equity, and create opportunities for all without harming the environment¹⁸. According to UNEP, green growth embraces strategies that protect the environment including reducing carbon emissions, tackling pollution, enhancing energy and resource efficiency, combating climate change and halting and reversing biodiversity loss¹⁹.

From the foregoing it is evident that sound environmental governance is key in promoting green growth by advocating for complementarity between environmental protection and economic growth²⁰. It has been argued that the recognition of interdependence between environmental conservation and economic growth rather than the trade-offs between economic growth and environmental protection has made the concept of green growth increasingly attractive to policymakers over the traditional environmental protectionist approaches that conservatively seek to protect the environment at the expense of the much-desired economic growth especially in developing countries²¹. Therefore pursuing sound environmental governance in Africa

¹⁷ World Bank Group., 'Inclusive Green Growth - FAQ' Available at <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/129971468157532224/pdf/793260BRI0v20R00Box037737400Public0.pdf> (Accessed on 17/11/2025)

¹⁸ Ibid

¹⁹ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Green Economy' Op Cit

²⁰ Chuku. C., & Ajayi. V., 'Growing Green: Enablers and Barriers for Africa' Op Cit

²¹ Ibid

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can lead to the attainment of green growth by advocating for environmentally sustainable economic growth.

Africa has immense opportunities to pursue green growth through sound environmental governance. For example, it has been argued that by harnessing its vast natural resources, Africa can accelerate progress towards green growth including through the blue economy (sustainable use of marine resources), climate-smart agriculture, sustainable forestry, sustainable water management, and ecotourism among others²². Further, it has been argued that utilising the significant low-carbon and mitigation opportunities provided by renewable energy generation in Africa can bolster efforts towards achieving green growth²³. Africa has the potential to become a trailblazer in renewable energy solutions due to its abundance in solar, wind, hydro, biomass, and geothermal resources among other renewables²⁴. It has been argued that renewable energy is a climate-smart opportunity for Africa to achieve net-zero transition and reduce its carbon footprint for green growth and Sustainable Development²⁵. In light of the foregoing, it has been noted that promoting green growth in Africa involves tackling existing and emerging development challenges without locking into pathways that deplete the continent's natural capital²⁶.

Strengthening environmental governance in Africa is therefore an important ideal towards green growth. However, achieving this objective remains an elusive reality for Africa. For instance, it has been noted that Africa faces mounting environmental threats

²² African Development Bank Group., 'Climate and Green Growth Strategic Framework: Projecting Africa's Voice' Available at https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/african_development_bank_-_climate_change_and_green_growth_policy.pdf (Accessed on 17/11/2025)

²³ Ibid

²⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Africa's green business opportunities are abundant, UNEP study shows' Available at <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/africas-green-business-opportunities-are-abundant-unep-study-shows> (Accessed on 17/11/2025)

²⁵ Ibid

²⁶ African Development Bank Group., 'Green Growth' Op Cit

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including water scarcity, pollution, climate change, deforestation and soil degradation²⁷. Unsustainable extraction of Africa's vast natural resources contributes to and worsens the triple planetary crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution and waste²⁸. Challenges such as limited financial resources, weak institutions, inadequate technical capacity and the lack of political will to prioritize environmental conservation undermine the quest towards robust environmental governance in Africa and worsens environmental threats in the continent²⁹. Environmental protection in Africa is also constrained by weak governance systems which fail to integrate governance principles of inclusion, accountability and responsiveness in environmental policies, programs and decision-making processes³⁰. As a result, marginalized and vulnerable groups including indigenous peoples, local communities, the youth and women suffer persistently low levels of representation and participation in public institutions and environmental decision-making processes thus hindering the achievement of robust environmental governance in Africa and all over the world³¹.

Failure to prioritise environmental governance in Africa undermines the quest towards green growth and Sustainable Development by fuelling and worsening challenges such as poverty, climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution, water scarcity, environmental degradation, inequitable distribution of natural resources, loss of arable land and food

²⁷ Dawo. K.A., & Khalifa. W.M., 'Do Green Innovation, Environmental Governance, and Renewable Energy Transition Drive Trade-Adjusted Resource Footprints in Top Sub-Saharan African Countries?' Available at <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/17/11/4907> (Accessed on 17/11/2025)

²⁸ Ibid

²⁹ Tsiotery. M., & Zafimahova. C., 'Environmental Governance in The Division of Roles International Institutions and Government Institutions in African Countries' Op Cit

³⁰ United Nations Development Programme., 'Environmental Governance' Available at <https://www.undp.org/governance/environmental-governance> (Accessed on 17/11/2025)

³¹ United Nations Development Programme., 'Strengthening Environmental Governance' Available at <https://www.undp.org/nature/our-work-areas/environmental-governance> (Accessed on 17/11/2025)

insecurity³². It is therefore necessary to strengthen environmental governance for green growth and sustainability in Africa.

3.0 Strengthening Environmental Governance in Africa for Green Growth

Bolstering environmental governance in Africa is vital in the pursuit of green growth and sustainability. Through robust environmental governance systems, Africa can be able to harness its vast opportunities for green growth by utilising key sectors such as renewable energy, critical minerals, sustainable agriculture, blue economy, sustainable forestry and sustainable water management³³. Sound environmental governance is therefore at the heart of green growth in Africa.

In order to achieve sound environmental governance for green growth, it is necessary to utilise integrated and collaborative approaches. Integrated approaches on environmental governance involve promoting a sectoral and cross-sectoral balance between social development, sustained economic growth and the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems³⁴. It entails the use of environmental sustainability as an entry point to support the balanced integration of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of Sustainable Development³⁵. It has been argued that through integrated approaches, it is possible to foster coordinated decision-making processes involving multiple environmental sectors and stakeholders thus improving environmental governance and accelerating progress towards Sustainable Development and green

³² Tsitohery. M., & Zafimahova. C., 'Environmental Governance in The Division of Roles International Institutions and Government Institutions in African Countries' Op Cit

³³ African Development Bank Group., 'Climate and Green Growth Strategic Framework: Projecting Africa's Voice' Op Cit

³⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Integrated Approach to Environmental Sustainability in Development Planning' Available at <https://www.unep.org/regions/latin-america-and-caribbean/regional-initiatives/strengthening-environmental-governance-1> (Accessed on 18/11/2025)

³⁵ Ibid

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growth³⁶. Utilising integrated approaches in environmental governance can therefore foster green growth by achieving balance between sustained economic growth and the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems³⁷.

Further, collaborative approaches are also vital in strengthening environmental governance in Africa for green growth and sustainability. Collaborative approaches involve the engagement of all stakeholders including the private sector, NGOs and the public including women, the youth and indigenous peoples and local communities in environmental governance³⁸. Collaborative approaches especially those that involve the public in environmental governance are associated with several benefits which include: information and ideas on public issues; public support for planning decisions; avoidance of protracted conflicts and costly delays; reservoir of good will which can carry over to future decisions; and spirit of cooperation and trust between decision makers and the public³⁹. Collaborative approaches are therefore crucial in strengthening environmental governance for green growth and sustainability since they take into account the unique roles, skills and capacities of various stakeholders. For example, involving the private sector can strengthen environmental governance including through unlocking environmental and climate finance and investments in green products and services⁴⁰. In addition, due to their close proximity to nature, and ecologically-sound traditional knowledge and practices, harnessing the contribution of indigenous peoples and local

³⁶ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Integrate Environmental Sustainability into the Sustainable Development Goals' Available at <https://www.unep.org/explore-topics/environmental-rights-and-governance/what-we-do/supporting-2030-agenda/integrate> (Accessed on 18/11/2025)

³⁷ Ibid

³⁸ Environmental Governance., Op Cit

³⁹ Muigua. K., 'Towards Meaningful Public Participation in Natural Resource Management in Kenya.' Available at <http://kmco.co.ke/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/TOWARDSMEANINGFULPUBLICPARTICIPATION-IN-NATURAL-RESOURCEMANAGEMENT-IN-KENYA.pdf> (Accessed on 18/11/2025)

⁴⁰ World Bank Group., 'Creating an Enabling Environment for Private Sector Climate Action' Available at <https://ieg.worldbankgroup.org/evaluations/creating-enabling-environment-private-sector-climate-action> (Accessed on 18/11/2025)

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communities can improve environmental governance for green growth and sustainability⁴¹. Further, due to gender roles, women especially those in rural areas are key agents towards strengthening environmental governance for sustainability⁴². Embracing collaborative approaches is therefore key towards improving environmental governance for green growth and sustainability.

4.0 Conclusion

Achieving sound environmental governance in Africa is a pertinent ideal in the quest towards green growth and sustainability. Through robust environmental governance systems, Africa can be able to harness its vast opportunities for green growth by balancing the need for sustained economic growth and environmental protection⁴³. By embracing integrated approaches that promote a sectoral and cross-sectoral balance between social development, sustained economic growth and the sustainable management of natural resources and ecosystems, and collaborative approaches that involve all stakeholders including the private sector, indigenous peoples, local communities, women and the youth, Africa can be able to improve its environmental governance framework in the pursuit of green growth and sustainability⁴⁴. Utilising integrated and collaborative approaches in environmental governance is therefore a practical and effective approach in the quest towards green growth and sustainability.

⁴¹ United Nations., 'Climate Change' Available at <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/climate-change.html> (Accessed on 18/11/2025)

⁴² Geneva Environment Network., 'Gender and the Environment' Available at <https://www.genevaenvironmentnetwork.org/resources/updates/gender-and-the-environment/> (Accessed on 18/11/2025)

⁴³ African Development Bank Group., 'Climate and Green Growth Strategic Framework: Projecting Africa's Voice' Op Cit

⁴⁴ United Nations Environment Programme., 'Integrated Approach to Environmental Sustainability in Development Planning' Op Cit

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