

**Towards Environmental Justice and Equity in Africa: Achieving
Sustainability through Transformational Land Use Governance**

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Abstract

This paper critically examines the grave ecological issues that Africa is facing. These problems include deforestation, land degradation, and the effects of climate change, which are made worse by poor governance and the overuse of natural resources. The paper makes the case for including environmental justice and equity in land use governance by pointing out how litigation is becoming more important for protecting the environment. It stresses that recognizing collective and customary land rights, especially for marginalized groups like women and Indigenous Peoples, is key to sustainable development in Africa. The paper also calls for transformational governance frameworks that include participatory approaches and recognize ecosystem rights. This would make communities stronger and more empowered. The paper concludes that to deal with environmental injustices in a better way, African governments need to move to grassroots leadership and collaborative governance models.

1. Introduction

Africa, which constitutes approximately 15% of the global population, is confronted with significant environmental issues such as deforestation, land degradation, loss of biodiversity, and heightened susceptibility to climate change.¹ The UN Environment Programme reports that Africa loses approximately \$195 billion in natural capital each year due to illegal mining, logging, and fishing, leading to community displacement and livelihood loss.² Recently, litigation has become a vital tool for environmental defenders aiming to protect the environment and seek justice for affected communities. Although this legal approach is still in its early stages and faces several challenges, there is growing optimism surrounding environmental justice on the continent, as evidenced by an increasing number of legal cases.³

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¹ Huang L, 'Hope for Environmental Justice in Africa' (*Dialogue Earth*, 19 December 2022) <<https://dialogue.earth/en/justice/hope-for-environmental-justice-in-africa/>> accessed 2 December 2025.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.; see also *Save Lamu & 5 others v National Environmental Management Authority (Nema) & another* [2019] KEELC 4739 (KLR); *Export Processing Zone Authority & 10 others (Suing on their own behalf and on behalf of all residents of Onino-Uburu Village in Mikindani, Changamwe Area, Mombasa) v National Environment Management Authority & 3 others* [2024] KESC 75 (KLR); <https://www.unep.org/news-and-stories/press-release/climate-litigation-more-doubles-five-years-now-key-tool-delivering> accessed 10 December 2025; Okedele PO and others, 'Climate Change

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In recent years, sub-Saharan Africa has emerged as a major focus for substantial land acquisitions aimed at plantation agriculture and forestry. While these investments can inject essential capital into Africa's struggling land-based economies, they also pose numerous socioeconomic and environmental risks, particularly given the weak domestic governance concerning investments and land management.⁴ One major factor driving farmland acquisitions in sub-Saharan Africa is the perception among 'northern' investors, especially from Europe, of a long-term demand for biofuels in industrial nations.⁵ Additionally, 'southern' countries, particularly in South Asia and the Middle East, are facing food insecurity due to land resource constraints, increasing their demand for food products.⁶ The core issues prompting investments are growing resource scarcity amid rising consumption and declining agricultural self-sufficiency. Consequently, sub-Saharan Africa bears the costs of global resource scarcity while exporting its benefits, raising concerns about the distributional impacts of globalization and the effectiveness of global market governance.⁷

Inequalities in the impact of environmental policies, unequal access to environmental amenities, and disproportionate exposure to environmental hazards are just a few of the ongoing issues that environmental justice addresses for different communities.⁸ The lack of public involvement and the scarcity of legal options make these issues even more pressing. Environmental justice is becoming increasingly important as countries step up their efforts to address pollution, climate change, and

Litigation as a Tool for Global Environmental Policy Reform: A Comparative Study of International Case Law' [2024] Global Environmental Policy Review <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Akinwale-Ishola/publication/387130595_Climate_change_litigation_as_a_tool_for_global_environmental_policy_reform_A_comparative_study_of_international_case_law/links/67619121e9b25e24af5c99de/Climate-change-litigation-as-a-tool-for-global-environmental-policy-reform-A-comparative-study-of-international-case-law.pdf> accessed 10 December 2025; Ochieng G, 'Climate Litigation in Africa: Rising Tides, Rising Claims' <https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=5402199> accessed 10 December 2025; 'Governance Challenges in Promoting Environmental Justice | Beyond Intractability' <<https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/environmental-justice-challenges>> accessed 2 December 2025; Mokgonyana K, 'The Last Bastion: How Courts Can Be Catalysts for Climate Action in Africa' (*African Arguments*, 12 December 2024) <<https://africanarguments.org/2024/12/last-bastion-how-courts-can-be-catalysts-for-climate-action-in-africa-environmental-litigation/>> accessed 10 December 2025.

⁴ Schoneveld, G.C., "The anatomy of large-scale farmland acquisitions in sub-Saharan Africa." (2011): v+ -21.

⁵ Ibid.; see also Krukowska M, 'European Investors and Land Acquisitions in Sub-Saharan Africa' <https://www.academia.edu/37233151/European_Investors_and_Land_Acquisitions_in_Sub_Saharan_Africa> accessed 10 December 2025; 'The Geographic and Sectoral Patterns of Large-Scale Farmland Investments in Sub-Saharan Africa - ScienceDirect' <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0306919214000475>> accessed 10 December 2025.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ OECD, *Environmental Justice: Context, Challenges and National Approaches*, OECD Publishing, Paris, 2024 <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381310684_Environmental_Justice_Context_Challenges_and_National_Approaches> accessed 17 November 2025.

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environmental degradation.⁹ This emphasizes the need for equity in the procedures and results of environmental policymaking.¹⁰

It is concerning that a large number of these investments in land-based carbon sequestration are being made in areas with insufficient land tenure security and where the collective rights of people who manage forests and ecosystems are neither recognized nor safeguarded.¹¹ People may lose their land and means of subsistence as a result of careless carbon credit investments in these situations.¹²

Legal, socioeconomic, and political obstacles frequently prevent marginalized communities from seeking redress for environmental harms, making access to environmental justice a crucial issue in developing nations.¹³

In rural Africa, land is primarily managed under systems of collective ownership governed by customary law, which is distinct from statutory law. This distinction raises significant concerns regarding the legal status of customary rights.¹⁴ Despite attempts to enhance legal recognition for these rights, they often do not receive the same protection as formal property rights, making them vulnerable to expropriation.¹⁵

This paper advocates for the entrenchment of Environmental Justice and Equity in Africa as a practical way of achieving Sustainability through transformational land use and governance that takes into account the central role that communities play in land ownership and management.

2. Environmental Justice and Equity for Sustainability in Africa

Globally, environmental justice is becoming a more common term in academic research, political discourse, environmental activism, and policymaking. It calls into question how various people's lives are impacted by their environment.¹⁶ Is there a correlation between pollution and poverty? Are certain communities much more susceptible than others to the effects of climate change or flooding? Does everyone benefit from having access to green space, or just some do? Do influential people control

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ 'Without Land Justice and Social Equity, Carbon Markets Will Fail | International Institute for Sustainable Development' <<https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/land-justice-social-equity-carbon-markets>> accessed 2 December 2025.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Anyachebelu, N.C., "Access to Environmental Justice: Challenges and Solutions in Developing Countries," *International Journal of Research and Publication*, Issue 5, Vol. 3, May 2024.

¹⁴ Schoneveld, G.C., "The anatomy of large-scale farmland acquisitions in sub-Saharan Africa." (2011): v+-21.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Walker G, *Environmental Justice: Concepts, Evidence and Politics* (Routledge 2012); see also Figueroa RM, 'Environmental Justice', *The Routledge Companion to Environmental Ethics* (Routledge 2022).

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environmental decisions at the expense of others?¹⁷ It is important that any preferred approach answers these questions conclusively if the issues affecting access to environmental justice and equity in Africa are to be addressed.

When environmental justice was first discussed academically, it brought to light the unequal distribution of environmental harms, showing that some communities—especially racialized and impoverished groups—were more vulnerable to environmental hazards than others.¹⁸ Early research highlighted the connections between socioeconomic factors and exposure to these risks. With time, the concept of environmental justice expanded to include unequal access to environmental goods like fresh food and green spaces, as well as the unequal distribution of environmental harms.¹⁹ The development of the idea required more thorough investigations into what constitutes the "environment," the reasons behind environmental injustice, and a more comprehensive definition of "justice" in relation to environmental contexts.²⁰

Advancing environmental justice requires acknowledging that the environment is socially differentiated and unevenly accessible. This plural concept lacks a universal definition and includes diverse ideas surrounding distribution, processes, and recognition.²¹ As nations enhance efforts to address environmental degradation, pollution, and climate change, environmental justice can provide insights into ensuring fairness in both the processes and outcomes of policymaking in this sphere.²² Environmental justice ensures equal environmental protections and benefits for all individuals, irrespective of race, color, national origin, or income, and promotes meaningful participation in policymaking that impacts their communities.²³ Environmental justice encompasses two main aspects: firstly, it is defined as the right to a safe, healthy, and sustainable environment for all, considering various dimensions such as ecological, physical, social, political, aesthetic, and economic

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Schlosberg D, 'Theorising Environmental Justice: The Expanding Sphere of a Discourse' (2013) 22 *Environmental Politics* 37 <<http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09644016.2013.755387>> accessed 17 November 2025.

¹⁹ Ibid; see also Sze J and London JK, 'Environmental Justice at the Crossroads' (2008) 2 *Sociology Compass* 1331 <<https://compass.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2008.00131.x>> accessed 17 November 2025.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ OECD, 'Environmental Justice: Context, Challenges and National Approaches' <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381310684_Environmental_Justice_Context_Challenges_and_National_Approaches> accessed 2 December 2025.

²² Ibid.

²³ 'The Environmental Justice Movement' (14 August 2025) <<https://www.nrdc.org/stories/environmental-justice-movement>> accessed 2 December 2025.

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environments.²⁴ Secondly, it represents conditions that uphold this right, ensuring that individual and group identities and needs are respected, thus promoting self-actualization and community empowerment.²⁵

Environmental justice is recognized as a fundamental right and encompasses social conditions necessary to uphold this right. Achieving environmental justice involves analyzing environmental inequalities, their origins, and the systems that maintain them.²⁶ Effective governance for environmental justice necessitates confronting vested interests and institutional racism, while adopting a comprehensive understanding of justice that incorporates distribution, recognition, and participation.²⁷

3. Transformational Land Use Governance: Challenges and Prospects

Numerous Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) indicators are connected to tenure rights and food security. These include goal 1.4.2, which measures perceptions of land tenure security, goal 2.4.1, focusing on the agricultural area's productivity and sustainability, and goal 5.a.1, which addresses women's ownership of agricultural land.²⁸

Land serves as the spatial foundation for anthropogenic activities and is essential for socio-economic development and survival. Since the late 20th century, intensified land use has significantly impacted global sustainable growth.²⁹ Unsustainable exploitation of high-suitability land poses major regional sustainability challenges, while abandonment of marginal farmland threatens food security. Issues arise from high-intensity land use, including pressure on agricultural land, soil pollution, and reduced biodiversity, complicating the sustainable management of land resources.³⁰ The challenge lies in

²⁴ 'Governance Challenges in Promoting Environmental Justice | Beyond Intractability' <<https://www.beyondintractability.org/essay/environmental-justice-challenges>> accessed 2 December 2025.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.; see also Dodge J, 'Environmental Justice and Deliberative Democracy: How Social Change Organizations Respond to Power in the Deliberative System.' (2009) 28 Policy & Society <<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&profile=ehost&scope=site&authtype=crawler&jrnl=14494035&AN=59835347&h=ErtIpZnjKcL1zimvqRQWgvjB%2B1FIzksze0zWP2bZ090Ut2vguV9ZPSoSAsjpQx1t549joeEuMRDVoVYwEWkIPfg%3D%3D&cr=c>> accessed 11 December 2025; Chowkwanyun M, 'Environmental Justice: Where It Has Been, and Where It Might Be Going' (2023) 44 Annual review of public health 93 <<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36623927/>> accessed 11 December 2025.

²⁸ UN General Assembly, Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, A/RES/70/1, 21 October 2015.

²⁹ Long H and others, 'Land Use Transitions: Progress, Challenges and Prospects' (2021) 10 Land 903 <<https://www.mdpi.com/2073-445X/10/9/903>> accessed 2 December 2025; see also Han B and others, 'Understanding Land-Use Sustainability with a Systematical Framework: An Evaluation Case of China' (2023) 132 Land Use Policy 106767 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264837723002338>> accessed 2 December 2025.

³⁰ Ibid.

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balancing human needs with the long-term capacity of the biosphere to provide essential goods and services.³¹

With rapid urbanization and economic growth, land utilization and protection have emerged as critical global issues. Excessive urbanization challenges sustainable urban land use and negatively impacts farmland and ecological environments, leading to overexploitation and discord within the human-land system.³² Poor land-use planning is diminishing the efficiency and sustainability of urban land, increasing the conversion of farmland to construction land. This trend results in ecological problems like land degradation, pollution, and increased carbon emissions, along with social issues regarding land interests.³³ Implementing protection policies for cultivated land is vital for sustainable management and is crucial for ensuring food security and social stability.³⁴

Water and land governance are essential for transforming food systems by enhancing agricultural production and protecting ecosystems.³⁵ Effective management mitigates risks like land degradation, water scarcity, and climate change, while ensuring equitable access to resources and promoting sustainability. Due to the complexity of challenges within food systems, inclusive governance frameworks are vital for fostering behavior change and achieving sustainability in the sector.³⁶ Governance involves decision-making structures and processes, with justice being a vital element for effective governance in integrated landscape approaches (ILAs).³⁷ Justice is crucial for understanding and implementing ILAs, which include negotiating management objectives, engaging stakeholders, promoting equitable public policies, and addressing inequalities in global mineral markets.³⁸ The pursuit of justice aims to balance multiple objectives and enhance synergies while minimizing trade-offs.³⁹

³¹ Ibid.

³² Zhang L, Kuang B and Yang B, 'Sustainable Land Use and Management' (2023) 15 Sustainability 16259 <<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/23/16259>> accessed 2 December 2025.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ NDCs FF, 'Strengthening Land-Use and Freshwater Governance' (*Food Forward NDCs*, 20 February 2024) <<https://foodforwardndcs.panda.org/food-governance/strengthening-land-use-and-freshwater-governance/>> accessed 2 December 2025.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Zafra-Calvo N and others, 'Engaging with Justice in Integrated Landscape Approaches' (2025) 30 Ecology and Society <<https://ecologyandsociety.org/vol30/iss3/art6/>> accessed 2 December 2025.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

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Sustainable land use involves the fair distribution of land, water, and resources to meet present and future human needs.⁴⁰ Effective planning, development, and conservation by both government and individuals are key to this approach. Land evaluation plays a vital role in sustainable land use, forming the foundation of sustainability science in this area.⁴¹

Land degradation is a significant threat to food production in smallholder farming systems in sub-Saharan Africa. Effective monitoring of agricultural land use is essential for guiding sustainable intensification (SI).⁴² Traditional metrics for sustainable land use (SLU) indicators are complex and challenging for rapid assessment. A proposed framework for SLU assessment focuses on indirect quantification of key indicators such as crop productivity, soil organic carbon (SOC), acidification, erosion, and nutrient balance through easily identifiable agricultural practices. This framework aims to enable the identification of necessary practices to combat land degradation and can be used as a decision-support tool to optimize SI investments, enhancing food production while preserving land.

4. Environmental Justice and Equity in Africa: Linkages with Transformational Land Use Governance

Sustainable development is a significant global concern, with land use and management playing a crucial role in achieving its goals.⁴³ At the international level, indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources are outlined in various frameworks, such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and ILO Convention, along with other human rights instruments like the ICCPR, ICESCR, ICERD, and CBD.⁴⁴ Regional systems, including the African and Inter-American Human Rights Systems, also support these rights. Indigenous peoples have rights to own, use, develop, and control their traditional lands and resources, which encompass both individual and collective rights.⁴⁵ States are obliged to recognize and protect these rights, ensuring that indigenous peoples are not displaced without their free, prior, informed consent and adequate

⁴⁰ Han B and others, 'Understanding Land-Use Sustainability with a Systematical Framework: An Evaluation Case of China' (2023) 132 *Land Use Policy* 106767 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0264837723002338>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Nziguheba G and others, 'Assessment of Sustainable Land Use: Linking Land Management Practices to Sustainable Land Use Indicators' [2022] *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability* <<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14735903.2021.1926150>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁴³ Zhang L, Kuang B and Yang B, 'Sustainable Land Use and Management' (2023) 15 *Sustainability* 16259 <<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/15/23/16259>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁴⁴ Gilbert, J., "Land grabbing, investments & indigenous peoples' rights to land and natural resources: case studies and legal analysis." *Copenhagen: International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGLA)* (2017).

⁴⁵ Ibid.

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compensation. However, violations of these rights remain prevalent, often due to state actions or private sector activities, leading to increased forced displacements referred to as 'land grabbing.'⁴⁶ This phenomenon, driven by foreign investors seeking arable land and natural resources, is exacerbated by development projects, designated conservation areas, and climate change initiatives, significantly threatening indigenous land rights globally.⁴⁷

Carbon markets are growing quickly, but they run the risk of harming local communities and falling short of climate targets if they lack robust property rights and social justice.⁴⁸ If we are to accomplish equitable and effective climate action, carbon market policies must incorporate strong land laws, human rights protections, and community involvement.⁴⁹ Social justice refers to the fair and equitable distribution of resources among individuals and communities, regardless of social class, age, gender, or race. It promotes equal rights and access to resources for all.⁵⁰ However, studies indicate that rural and marginalized populations often lack access to essential services and face challenges in socio-economic resilience due to their limited participation in decision-making processes.⁵¹

Current global landscape challenges include climate and biodiversity crises, conflicts over resources, and diverse land management practices. Addressing these requires integrated solutions at a landscape scale through Integrated Landscape Approaches (ILAs), which serve as governance strategies for complex social and ecological issues.⁵² However, many ILAs overlook the injustices inherent in landscape governance, use, and management, which can shape the effectiveness of these strategies.⁵³

Increasing policy engagement aimed at sustainable landscapes is crucial to addressing global biodiversity and environmental crises while meeting targets set by the Sustainable Development Goals,

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid; see also Krukowska M, 'European Investors and Land Acquisitions in Sub-Saharan Africa' <https://www.academia.edu/37233151/European_Investors_and_Land_Acquisitions_in_Sub_Saharan_Africa> accessed 10 December 2025.

⁴⁸ 'Without Land Justice and Social Equity, Carbon Markets Will Fail | International Institute for Sustainable Development' <<https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/land-justice-social-equity-carbon-markets>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Apraku A and others, 'Managing Climate Change through Social Justice in Africa: Key Lessons from the Libode Area of Eastern Cape, South Africa' (2025) 27 *Scientific African* e02534 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2468227625000055>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Zafra-Calvo N and others, 'Engaging with Justice in Integrated Landscape Approaches' (2025) 30 *Ecology and Society* <<https://ecologyandsociety.org/vol30/iss3/art6/>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁵³ Ibid.

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the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Paris Climate Agreement.⁵⁴ Landscapes are seen as interconnected human and natural systems that fulfill diverse needs and enhance quality of life, characterized by ecological complexity and varied human perspectives. Integrated landscape approaches (ILAs) serve as governance strategies to balance conflicting land-use claims, emphasizing the importance of public engagement, institutional support, and governance.⁵⁵ They also highlight the political dimensions of landscapes, revealing potential conflicts and injustices tied to land-use. Successful implementation of ILAs requires recognizing and addressing diverse values and interests, fostering public participation, and managing power dynamics among stakeholders.⁵⁶

Justice involves eliminating systemic barriers that create disparities. Landscape justice specifically pertains to people's ability to make decisions about, access, utilize, and manage landscapes, including aspects like land tenure, livelihoods, and cultural identity, which are vital for their quality of life.⁵⁷ Quality of life is defined as the diverse opportunities for individuals to thrive in their chosen lives, while being limited by the landscape's ecological capacity.⁵⁸ This understanding also acknowledges the role of more-than-human beings, highlighting the intricate interactions between nature and humans that shape landscapes.⁵⁹

5. Towards Environmental Justice and Equity in Africa: Achieving Sustainability through Transformational Land Use Governance

The degree to which climate investments aim to guarantee inclusivity, deal with unemployment and poverty, and address inequality in all of its manifestations must be used to gauge their impact.⁶⁰ Land exhibits significant diversity in physical and biological characteristics, which are crucial for ecosystem functions, biodiversity, food and water security, and human well-being.⁶¹ However, land degradation, particularly in drylands, leads to food insecurity, migration, and conflict. This degradation arises from complex social, economic, and environmental interactions. Effective measures require understanding land as a social-ecological system with policies developed at a landscape level.⁶² A systems approach

⁵⁴ Zafra-Calvo N and others, 'Engaging with Justice in Integrated Landscape Approaches' (2025) 30 Ecology and Society <<https://ecologyandsociety.org/vol30/iss3/art6/>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Zafra-Calvo N and others, 'Engaging with Justice in Integrated Landscape Approaches' (2025) 30 Ecology and Society <<https://ecologyandsociety.org/vol30/iss3/art6/>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ 'Climate Justice and Equity in Africa' (17 August 2022) <<https://africanclimatefoundation.org/programmes/climate-justice-and-equity/>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁶¹ Cowie A and others, *Sustainable Land Use Systems: The Path to Collectively Achieving Land Degradation Neutrality* (2025).

⁶² Ibid.

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to land management enhances the understanding and management of land resources, facilitating environmental, social, and economic benefits, and can serve as a pathway to sustainable solutions that reverse degradation, mitigate climate change, improve food security, and foster peace through sustainable land-use systems.⁶³

The ongoing struggle to secure land rights for women, local communities, and Indigenous Peoples is highlighted by the recent agreement on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement. This struggle has its roots in decades of international initiatives, national policies, and established frameworks.⁶⁴ Evidence indicates that when given supportive environments, these communities effectively manage land and natural resources.⁶⁵ Securing land rights is not merely a human rights issue but also essential for sustainable land management practices. The objectives of net-zero policies could be compromised in the absence of secure land rights.⁶⁶

In order to acknowledge and defend collective and customary land rights, as well as to advance the legal recognition of women's land rights, progressive land laws have been enacted by several governments throughout Africa.⁶⁷ There are currently frameworks in place in many countries that encourage the development of a responsible carbon market, with a focus on the significance of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent for local communities and Indigenous Peoples.⁶⁸ There is a pressing need to link these laws systematically with national carbon market policies. Robust, well-enforced legal systems are essential to ensure that carbon market investments respect the rights of legitimate tenure holders, involve local communities in decision-making, enhance food security, and build climate resilience. Effective enforcement mechanisms are crucial for the adherence to these laws.⁶⁹

Sustainable land management (SLM) integrates agriculture, environment, and socioeconomic well-being, aiming to maintain ecosystem productivity while increasing goods and services, particularly safe

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ 'Without Land Justice and Social Equity, Carbon Markets Will Fail | International Institute for Sustainable Development' <<https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/land-justice-social-equity-carbon-markets>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ 'Without Land Justice and Social Equity, Carbon Markets Will Fail | International Institute for Sustainable Development' <<https://www.iisd.org/articles/deep-dive/land-justice-social-equity-carbon-markets>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

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food.⁷⁰ Well-designed SLM programs can yield global environmental benefits by combating land degradation and reversing biodiversity decline.⁷¹ Their effective implementation can also provide social and economic advantages through productivity improvements and resilience in agroecosystems, crucial for tackling current challenges like food security and climate change.⁷²

A shift towards rights-based and transformative governance is essential for addressing environmental injustice and ecological decline.⁷³ This would include revising legal frameworks to recognize ecosystem rights, promoting participatory governance, and incorporating Indigenous and local knowledge into environmental policy.⁷⁴ These reforms aim to enhance ecological integrity, empower local communities, and support a country's commitments to the Sustainable Development Goals.⁷⁵

Strengthening community-based education and advocacy initiatives reflects Ubuntu's philosophy of collective knowledge-sharing. It promotes local ownership of climate-health initiatives to avoid dependency.⁷⁶ Advocacy should focus on policies addressing environmental injustices affecting low-income and rural communities, including pollution and access to clean resources. Support for grassroots organizations is vital in advancing environmental justice.⁷⁷ Protecting the right to a healthy environment is a moral obligation, and policies must ensure marginalized communities are not disproportionately burdened by environmental harms.⁷⁸

⁷⁰ GEF, *Sustainable Land Management and its Relationship to Global Environmental Benefits and Food Security - A Synthesis Report for the GEF*, 50th GEF Council Meeting, June 07 – 09, 2016, Washington, D.C, GEF/STAP/C.50/Inf.03, May 10, 2016 <https://www.thegef.org/sites/default/files/council-meeting-documents/EN_GEF.STAP_C.50.Inf_03_SLM_GEBs_and_Food_Security_0.pdf> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Gwambene B and Miigo H, 'Unpacking the Transformative Power of the Rights of Nature: Rethinking Self, Society, and Nature in Environmental Governance in Tanzania' (2025) 3 *Ecological Civilization* 10018 <<https://www.sciepublish.com/article/pii/724>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ 'Navigating the Storm: Ethical Consideration to Climate Justice and Sustainable Health Equity in Africa' (2025) 25 *The Journal of Climate Change and Health* 100465 <<https://www.sciencedirect.com:5037/science/article/pii/S2667278225000483>> accessed 2 December 2025.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

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6. Conclusion

Effective interventions should foster grassroots leadership, guided by among others, Ubuntu ethics, to promote solidarity, equity, and shared responsibility.⁷⁹ A shift in global climate governance is necessary, moving from top-down approaches to frameworks emphasizing mutual accountability and local empowerment.⁸⁰

It is a good idea to support the notion of making Environmental Justice and Equity a permanent part of Africa as a way to achieve Sustainability through changes in land use and governance that recognize the important role that communities play in land ownership and management.

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