

# Transparency and Operational Clarity of Provisions in Climate Change Policies towards the Protection of Gendered Vulnerability in the Decentralised Government of Busia, Kenya

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## Abstract

Across Sub-Saharan Africa, progressive climate governance frameworks coexist with persistent gender-equity deficits at implementation. In Kenya's devolved system, county governments are responsible for translating gender-responsive climate commitments into local planning, budgeting, and accountability, yet whether implementation produces equitable outcomes for populations most affected by climate change remains under-examined. This article investigates how climate policy implementation institutionalizes gender responsiveness as a governance principle in Busia County. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the study integrates survey data from 435 respondents across seven sub-counties, eight key informant interviews, four focus group discussions, and documentary analysis of eight policy and fiscal instruments. Findings indicate predominantly neutral perceptions of gender integration across policy-clarity dimensions, although perceived policy clarity was strongly associated with perceived gender integration ( $r = 0.776$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Qualitative and documentary evidence reveals a persistent policy-to-practice gap: women are formally represented in participatory structures but exercise limited influence over decisions, while county fiscal instruments do not consistently demonstrate gender-tagged climate allocations or mechanisms for tracing equitable benefits. The article advances the normative–operational cascade as a diagnostic framework for explaining how gender commitments can remain visible across governance tiers yet lose operational force during budgeting, implementation, and accountability. It argues that devolution creates institutional proximity without necessarily securing substantive gender responsiveness.

**Keywords:** Busia County, Climate Change Policy, Decentralised Governance, Feminist Political Ecology, Gender Mainstreaming, Gender-Responsive Budgeting, Implementation Gap, Normative-Operational Cascade, Policy Clarity, Devolution

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

The accelerating climate crisis exposes profound inequalities in the distribution of vulnerability and adaptive capacity across regions, livelihoods, and social groups. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimates that approximately 3.3 billion people live in highly climate-vulnerable contexts, with women disproportionately represented among populations facing constrained adaptive capacity owing to entrenched socio-economic and institutional inequalities (IPCC 2022a). Across Sub-Saharan Africa, climate variability disrupts ecological systems, agricultural livelihoods, water security and public health, while exposing governance weaknesses in the implementation of inclusive adaptation (Niang et al. 2014; Eriksen et al. 2021). Busia County, with its differentiated exposure to flooding, drought, rainfall variability, and water insecurity, provides an important context for examining whether devolved climate governance translates recognition of gendered vulnerability into equitable outcomes.

Located along the Kenya-Uganda border and stretching from Lake Victoria to the semi-arid inland plains, Busia experiences highly differentiated climatic realities across its seven sub-counties. The lakeshore and floodplain zones of Budalang'i and Funyula face recurrent flooding, shoreline erosion and waterlogging that displace households and contaminate water sources (Government of Busia County 2023; Opere et al. 2013). The agricultural zones of Butula, Nambale and Matayos contend with erratic rainfall, declining soil fertility and pressure on wetlands that undermine rain-fed agriculture and food security (FAO 2018; Tambo and Wünscher 2017). The drier uplands of Teso North and Teso South face recurrent drought, rising temperatures and water scarcity affecting both crops and livestock (Herrero et al. 2010; Thornton et al. 2018).

These climate realities are not experienced uniformly. Women, youth, the elderly, persons with disabilities and low-income rural households bear disproportionate burdens because of unequal access to land, finance, climate information and decision-making structures (Agarwal 2018; Rao and Brooks 2022). Women in Busia remain heavily dependent on climate-sensitive activities, such as subsistence agriculture, fishing-related trade, and water collection, yet face insecure tenure, constrained access to extension services and under-representation in governance institutions (FAO 2018; Cousins 2018). As wetlands recede and agricultural productivity becomes unpredictable, women absorb the hidden social costs of climate disruption through unpaid care and household survival strategies (Mies and Shiva 2016; Dankelman 2010). Although policy frameworks increasingly acknowledge gendered vulnerability, institutional responses remain only partially aligned with the material realities they are intended to address.

This contradiction reflects a broader governance challenge across decentralised systems in Sub-Saharan Africa. Gender mainstreaming in climate governance is characterised by a persistent implementation gap in which formal commitments to inclusion coexist with weak operational integration: gender principles appear in policy documents and participatory structures formally include women, yet rarely translate into substantive influence over budgeting, resource allocation, monitoring or enforcement (Lombardo et al. 2009; Walby 2005; Terry 2009). This gap is not accidental but structurally embedded within institutional arrangements, socio-cultural norms, and bureaucratic practice (Goetz 1997; Cornwall 2003). The central analytical concern is therefore not whether gender gaps exist, but which mechanisms reproduce and sustain them within devolved contexts such as Busia.

Kenya's devolved framework, established under the Constitution of Kenya 2010 and operationalised through the Climate Change Act 2016, assigns county governments primary responsibility for translating national climate and gender commitments into local planning, budgeting, and accountability (Government of Kenya 2010, 2016). Counties thus occupy the operational interface between global commitments and community realities. International and national frameworks, including the UNFCCC Lima Work

Programme on Gender, the Paris Agreement and Kenya's national action plans, increasingly emphasise gender-responsive adaptation (UNFCCC 2014, 2015; Government of Kenya 2023). Busia has incorporated gender commitments across several instruments; whether these translate into substantive integration or remain what Walby (2005) terms symbolic mainstreaming, visible in rhetoric but weak in implementation, is the empirical question pursued here.

The article makes three contributions. First, it provides one of the few county-level mixed-methods analyses of the relationship between policy clarity, institutional capacity, and gender integration within Kenya's devolved climate governance. Second, it advances procedural inclusion without substantive integration as a diagnostic framework for explaining why formal participation does not translate into influence over decision-making, budgeting, and resource distribution. Third, it develops the normative-operational cascade to explain how gender commitments remain visible within policy architecture while failing to translate into enforceable fiscal, monitoring and accountability mechanisms at county level.

## **2.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study integrates governance and public-policy implementation theory with feminist theory, specifically feminist political ecology (FPE) and feminist institutionalism, into a single analytical framework. The integration is deliberate. Implementation theory explains the structural and procedural conditions under which policy intent becomes institutional practice; feminist theory interrogates the gendered power relations, material inequalities and informal norms that shape how those conditions operate. Together they provide a layered explanation of governance failure: implementation theory identifies the institutional constraints that undermine execution, while feminist theory explains why gender commitments are especially susceptible to marginalisation within those constraints.

### **2.1 Governance And Public-Policy Implementation Theory**

Pressman and Wildavsky (1973) show that well-designed policies may fail when implementation involves multiple discretionary decision points, each introducing potential deviation from intended outcomes. Lipsky (1980) extends this through street-level bureaucracy: frontline administrators operating under resource constraint exercise considerable discretion, privileging objectives that are clearly specified, measurable and subject to oversight while deprioritising those that are diffuse or non-binding. The implication for gender mainstreaming is direct. Where gender commitments are not linked to enforceable benchmarks and auditable indicators, they are unlikely to be treated as binding requirements. In Busia, Ward Climate Change Planning Committees illustrate this dynamic: operating under fiscal constraint, they prioritise visible infrastructure interventions, such as dyke rehabilitation, over less tangible gender-responsive initiatives such as capacity building.

Sabatier and Mazmanian (1980) identify policy tractability, the clarity, specificity, and institutional assignability of objectives, as a key determinant of implementation success. This underpins the study's central proposition that higher perceived policy clarity is associated with higher perceived gender integration. Hooghe and Marks (2003) add a multi-level governance perspective, emphasising that implementation in decentralised systems requires translation across institutional layers. In Kenya, national commitments must pass through county legislation, planning instruments and budgetary processes, each stage introducing potential for mandate dilution and accountability breakdown.

### **2.2 Feminist Political Ecology And Feminist Institutionalism**

Crenshaw's (1991) concept of intersectionality establishes that gender is constituted through interaction with other axes of identity, including class, age, and marital status. In Busia, a young widow cultivating

leased land in Bunyala and an older married woman in Teso South occupy distinct institutional positions requiring differentiated responses. Connell (2009) demonstrates that gendered authority is reproduced through institutional practices and routine administrative processes; governance institutions do not merely reflect inequalities but actively reproduce them through agenda-setting and resource allocation. Feminist institutionalism (Mackay et al. 2010) explains how formal structures operate within informal gender regimes that shape whose voices are recognised and whose interests are prioritised, so that systems may achieve representational inclusion while reproducing substantive inequality.

Feminist political ecology (Rocheleau et al. 1996; Elmhirst 2011) provides the material grounding that complements these institutional analyses, emphasising that access to and control over land, labour, water, and productive resources determine adaptive capacity. Interventions delivered into structural conditions that constrain their effectiveness will under-perform. In Busia, women clear flood debris from land they do not own, cultivate crops without authority over their sale, and devote increasing time to securing water while governance processes remain male-dominated. From an FPE perspective, the absence of gender-responsive budget allocations are not a technical omission but an institutional manifestation of the systematic undervaluation of women's adaptive labour within patriarchal governance.

### **2.3 Theoretical Synthesis And Analytical Direction**

Synthesising the structural focus of implementation theory with the power-sensitive insights of feminist institutionalism and FPE, the study develops a normative-operational cascade model. Four analytical propositions structure the inquiry: policy clarity functions as a structural governance instrument rather than a textual attribute; formal representational inclusion does not generate substantive influence where informal gender regimes reproduce male-dominated deliberation; fiscal and monitoring instruments are the operative mechanisms through which gender commitments are enforced or evaded; and women's material conditions set structural ceilings on integration that policy frameworks cannot raise without engaging those conditions. These converge in the central concept, the normative-operational cascade, an analytically precise framework for diagnosing the gap between articulation and implementation fidelity.

## **3.0 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature is organised across four domains relevant to the research question, drawing on peer-reviewed studies and key theoretical contributions across global, African, and Kenyan contexts. Sources were identified through searches in Web of Science, Scopus and Google Scholar using combinations of keywords relating to gender mainstreaming, climate governance and decentralisation. The review adopts a critical, synthetic approach focused on conceptual patterns, empirical gaps, and areas of convergence.

### **3.1 Gender Integration In Global Climate Policy**

The normative architecture for gender-responsive climate governance has expanded since the Lima Work Programme (UNFCCC 2014). MacGregor (2010) identifies a foundational tension between acknowledging women's disproportionate vulnerability and structuring responses that address its social sources. Where provisions frame women primarily as vulnerable rather than as rights-bearing agents, mainstreaming tends to remain rhetorical (Terry 2009; Pearse 2017). Dazé et al. (2016) provide the most authoritative operationalisation of gender-responsive adaptation processes, specifying that substantive integration requires clear institutional mandates, sex-disaggregated baseline data, dedicated budget allocations and monitoring systems with gender-differentiated benchmarks; their comparative analysis shows most frameworks satisfy procedural requirements while failing substantive ones, a procedural-substantive gap central to the present analysis. Arora-Jonsson (2011) complicates the picture, showing that discourses of women's environmental virtue can instrumentalise their roles without redistributing authority.

### 3.2 Gender Mainstreaming In African And East African Decentralised Governance

Within Africa, decentralisation is analytically ambivalent: it creates governance proximity conducive to gender-responsive adaptation while risking reproduction of local power hierarchies hostile to gender equity (Ribot 2002). Yaro and Hesselberg (2016) demonstrate that community-level adaptation in West Africa is shaped by male-dominated structures that undercount women's labour and exclude them from resource allocation, and that national rhetoric does not penetrate these structures without explicit enforcement. Agarwal (2010) provides the most rigorous evidence on the conditions under which women's participation produces substantive influence: a critical mass of at least 33% in decision-making bodies, secure land rights and rules that explicitly protect women's voice. Where only one or two conditions are met, formal participation does not translate into power, directly shaping the expectation that representational compliance in Busia will not automatically generate gender-responsive outcomes. Ongoma et al. (2019) document that climate variability is already reshaping Busia's smallholder and fishing systems, with women disproportionately affected, but do not examine how county governance responds. Jost et al. (2016) confirm that institutional responsiveness requires systematic change in extension services, financial products and information, not merely participatory structures.

### 3.3 Policy Clarity As A Structural Determinant Of Integration

The implementation literature identifies policy tractability as a primary determinant of mainstreaming fidelity. Where gender objectives are specified through measurable indicators, defined timelines, and assigned responsibilities, they are more likely to survive discretionary filtering (Sabatier and Mazmanian 1980). Lombardo et al. (2009) distinguish additive from transformative mainstreaming: additive approaches incorporate gender language without restructuring core instruments, whereas transformative approaches embed equity within budgeting, monitoring and accountability; additive mainstreaming systematically produces deprioritisation during resource allocation. Walby (2005) identifies the implementation paradox, whereby mainstreaming extends obligations across all domains yet produces weaker outcomes than targeted policies because enforcement is absent, while Verloo (2005) shows that instruments embedded in mandatory frameworks outperform voluntary guidelines.

### 3.4 Research Gap

Three gaps justify this study. County-level empirical examination of gender integration in Kenyan climate governance is sparse, with most work at national or regional scale. The literature rarely integrates quantitative, qualitative, and documentary evidence in a single study. No existing study applies the combination of implementation theory and feminist political ecology to the policy clarity-gender integration relationship in devolved Kenyan governance. This article addresses all three through a methodologically integrated, theoretically grounded, and contextually specific investigation.

## 4.0 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Drawing on the theoretical synthesis, the study conceptualises gender integration in Busia's climate governance as a function of four interacting domains, presented in Table 1.

**Table 1: Integrated Conceptual Framework For Gender Integration In Devolved Climate Governance**

| Analytical domain         | Theoretical lens                               | Predictive proposition                                        | Key variables                          |
|---------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Policy design and clarity | Implementation theory (Sabatier and Mazmanian) | Clear, enforceable, measurable gender mandates are positively | Policy awareness; gender articulation; |

|                                             |                                                                           |                                                                                                                |                                                                      |
|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                             | 1980; Lipsky 1980)                                                        | associated with perceived gender integration                                                                   | measurability; alignment                                             |
| Institutional architecture and voice        | Feminist institutionalism (Mackay et al. 2010; Connell 2009)              | Formal inclusion does not translate into substantive influence where informal gender regimes operate           | Committee composition; deliberative access; facilitation; confidence |
| Fiscal and monitoring systems               | Implementation theory and FPE (Hill and Hupe 2009; Rocheleau et al. 1996) | Gender-tagged budgets and sex-disaggregated indicators are necessary for verifiable gender-responsive outcomes | GRB allocations; output targets; MRV indicators; reporting           |
| Socio-cultural power and material relations | FPE and intersectionality (Agarwal 2010; Crenshaw 1991)                   | Land-tenure insecurity and patriarchal authority set structural ceilings on institutional gender integration   | Land rights; asset control; household authority; backlash risk       |

*Note: GRB = gender-responsive budgeting; FPE = feminist political ecology; MRV = monitoring, reporting and verification.*

The four domains are mutually conditioning governance layers rather than independent variables. Policy clarity shapes what institutional architecture can enforce; architecture determines whose material interests are represented in fiscal decisions; and socio-cultural relations mediate how formal rules operate in practice. Their interaction produces the study's central concept: procedural inclusion without substantive integration, a condition in which formal compliance with representational requirements coexists with structural failure to redistribute decision authority, resources, and adaptive capacity.

## 5.0 METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Research Design And Positionality

The study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark 2018), dictated by the multi-layered research question. The implementation paradox in Busia, where progressive policy language meets stagnant practice, cannot be captured through a single lens; it requires both population-level statistical description and interpretive depth into the structural mechanisms of governance. The principal investigator's positionality combined institutional proximity with academic distance. As a Kenyan scholar and legal practitioner engaged in gender-governance reform, the researcher drew on contextual literacy, the devolved governance system, the constitutional provisions of Articles 10, 27, 60 and 174, and the cultural idioms of Busia's sub-counties, while mitigating confirmation bias through reflexive practice, including field journaling and deliberate engagement with disconfirming evidence.

### 5.2 Quantitative Methods

Structured surveys were administered to 435 respondents across Busia's seven sub-counties, Bunyala, Butula, Funyula, Nambale, Budalang'i, Teso North and Teso South, using KoboToolbox, which enabled digital capture, real-time skip-logic validation, and automated quality checks. Data were exported to IBM SPSS version 26. Sample size was determined using Cochran's (1977) formula at a 95% confidence level

and 5% margin of error (minimum  $n = 385$ ); the achieved sample of 435 provides an adequate margin. Proportional stratified random sampling was used, with strata defined by sub-county, respondent category (community household members, county officials, civil-society actors, and ward climate committee members) and gender. Eight five-point Likert items measured perceptions of policy awareness, gender-articulation clarity, objective measurability, programme differentiation, gender-responsive budgeting, committee guideline clarity, national alignment, and review regularity (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). The instrument was piloted with 30 respondents from Samia sub-county (excluded from the main study) and refined after cognitive testing. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha (criterion  $\alpha > 0.70$ ). Composite indices, the Perceived Policy Clarity Index, and the Gender Integration Level Index, were constructed from item means, with normality assessed via histogram inspection and Shapiro-Wilk testing prior to Pearson's correlation.

### 5.3 Qualitative Methods

Key informant interviews were conducted with 28 purposively selected participants, including senior county officials (the County Director of Environment and Climate Change and gender focal points), ward climate committee chairpersons from all seven sub-counties, civil-society executives, and community-based organisation leaders. Twelve focus group discussions were held with community-level groups (84 participants), stratified by gender and livelihood, with separate women-only groups to create safe deliberative spaces. Sessions were audio-recorded with informed consent, transcribed verbatim and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic framework. Preliminary findings were shared with five participants for member checking, and saturation was reached after the final six interviews produced no new themes.

### 5.4 Documentary Analysis

Systematic documentary analysis examined eight instruments: the Constitution of Kenya 2010; the Climate Change Act 2016; NCCAP III (2023); the Busia County Climate Change Action Plan (BCCCAP 2023); the CIDP 2023-2027; the Participatory Climate Risk Assessment report; the Approved First Supplementary Budget Estimates FY 2025/2026; and the FLLoCA Gender Assessment for Busia County. A structured framework coded in six dimensions: normative foundations, participatory architecture, institutional coordination, gender-responsive budgeting, MRV specifications and planning-fiscal alignment. Documents were coded independently by two researchers (inter-rater reliability  $\kappa = 0.82$ ).

### 5.5 Integration Protocol And Ethics

Integration followed a structured convergent triangulation protocol. The three strands were analysed independently and then brought together in joint displays mapping each dimension of the research question across sources. Convergence was treated as corroborating evidence; divergence was treated as analytically productive, prompting deeper interrogation rather than dismissal of any strand. Ethical clearance was obtained from Tangaza University's Research Ethics Committee, all participants provided written informed consent, and data handling complied with the Kenya Data Protection Act 2019, with anonymisation using codes (KII001-KII028; FGD-W for women-only groups; FGD-M for mixed groups).

## 6.0 FINDINGS

### 6.1 Quantitative Findings

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics across all eight indicators. The pattern is unambiguous: mean scores cluster in a narrow band straddling the scale midpoint ( $M = 2.75$ - $3.00$ ), with no item approaching the agreement threshold of 3.50. Policy awareness records the lowest mean ( $M = 2.75$ ,  $SD = 1.30$ ) and

national-framework alignment the highest ( $M = 3.00$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ), but that figure sits exactly at neutrality. Not a single dimension of gender-policy integration was, on balance, affirmed.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics For The Extent And Clarity Of Gender-Focused Components In Busia County's Climate Policy Framework**

| Survey item                                                                        | N   | M    | SD   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|------|------|
| I am aware of Busia County's Climate Change Policy and Action Plan                 | 432 | 2.75 | 1.30 |
| Gender is clearly articulated as a principle within the county's climate framework | 433 | 2.77 | 1.12 |
| Gender objectives in climate policy are measurable and time-bound                  | 431 | 2.85 | 1.14 |
| Climate programmes consider the differentiated needs of men and women              | 433 | 2.81 | 1.14 |
| There is evidence of gender-responsive budgeting in county climate programmes      | 433 | 2.76 | 1.10 |
| Climate committees operate under clear guidelines for gender inclusion             | 427 | 2.78 | 1.13 |
| County climate policies align with national gender and climate frameworks          | 431 | 3.00 | 1.11 |
| There is regular review or evaluation of gender integration in climate policies    | 432 | 2.81 | 1.11 |

*Note: Five-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree); scale midpoint = 3.0. Valid N (listwise) = 415. Source: primary field data.*

The highest standard deviations, on policy awareness ( $SD = 1.30$ ) and committee guidelines ( $SD = 1.13$ ), reveal heterogeneity that aggregate means obscure: county officials and civil-society actors with governance access report higher awareness than community household members. Gender integration is more visible to those administering it than to those it is meant to serve, a pattern consistent with a system built for procedural compliance rather than community-level impact.

Prior to analysis, both indices satisfied parametric assumptions on histogram inspection and Shapiro-Wilk testing. Pearson's correlation was  $r = 0.776$  ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $N = 434$ ), a strong, statistically significant positive association. The coefficient of determination ( $r^2 \approx 0.60$ ) indicates that approximately 60% of variance in perceived gender integration is shared with perceived policy clarity, a large effect by Cohen's (1988) conventions. Table 3 presents the matrix.

**Table 3: Pearson Correlation Between The Perceived Policy Clarity Index And The Gender Integration Level Index (N = 434)**

|  | Policy Clarity Index | Gender Integration Index |
|--|----------------------|--------------------------|
|  |                      |                          |

|                                      |         |                |
|--------------------------------------|---------|----------------|
| Policy Clarity Index (Pearson r)     | 1.000   | 0.776**        |
| Gender Integration Index (Pearson r) | 0.776** | 1.000          |
| $r^2$                                |         | $\approx 0.60$ |

Note: \*\*  $p < 0.001$  (two-tailed).  $r^2$  = coefficient of determination. Source: primary field data.

## 6.2 Qualitative Findings: Three Mechanisms Of Failure

Thematic analysis produced three mutually reinforcing themes, each illuminating a mechanism through which formally articulated commitments fail to produce substantive outcomes.

**Structural participation without substantive enablement.** County officials confirmed the formal existence of gender-inclusive structures: ward committees with mandated representation, sex-disaggregated attendance records and declared inter-departmental linkages. What the quantitative data mark as neutral, the qualitative evidence explains. A distinction between women's physical presence and their substantive capacity to influence governance recurred across every sub-county. The County Director of Environment and Climate Change described it candidly:

*Women cannot come out and say this is what we are going to do first. They must consult ... the decision must be made by a man. So even when a woman comes to a ward committee, she sits there, but the real agenda is decided elsewhere. (KII003)*

Civil-society actors reinforced this. The executive director of a gender-focused organisation drew a sharp distinction between documented participation and exercised influence:

*Not that I am aware of ... we have deliberately pushed gender-responsive budgeting through budget advocacy, attended public participation forums across all eight sub-counties, submitted memos and petitions. But there is no formal mechanism inside government that enforces it. It depends on whether the officer in charge cares. (KII004)*

The implication is structurally significant: gender responsiveness in ward-level governance exists where civil-society advocacy is present and largely disappears where it is absent, a compensatory architecture whose fragility is proportional to its dependence on external actors.

**Gendered deliberative norms and the consultation constraint.** Women's groups across multiple sub-counties documented a consistent pattern of informal norms requiring prior household male authorisation before women could publicly assert positions. This is not an attitude captured in survey data but a structural constraint that formal inclusion requirements have not countered. A women's group in Teso North captured the condition:

*We sit in the meeting. We are counted. But when the chairman and the sub-county officer decide which project to bring forward, they talk to the men. We hear the result after. (FGD-W3, Teso North)*

A second group in Nambale connected limited policy literacy to constrained deliberation, locating exclusion not in hostility but in structural neglect:

*We do not know what the plan says. When they tell us to sign, we sign. We want to help our community, but we do not know what we are agreeing to or what we are entitled to ask for. (FGD-W5, Nambale)*

These accounts describe an environment where formal inclusion has been achieved without the enabling

conditions, policy literacy, facilitation support and protected deliberative space that would make it substantive. The committee guidelines contain no women-only pre-consultation mechanisms, no facilitation protocols to counter male-dominated agenda-setting and no agenda-setting rights for women members. The formal structure creates representation without authority.

***Compliance culture and the commodification of participation.*** A third mechanism concerns a governance culture of output compliance over institutional transformation. Respondents described programming structured around short-term deliverables, attendance sheets signed, trainings counted, memos submitted, at the expense of sustained engagement:

*Projects are time-bound and focus on ticking boxes ... implementers may proceed without meaningful participation. When you return after six months, there is little continuity or visible impact. (KII004)*

The gendered consequences are particular. Women's substantive engagement requires sustained confidence-building, policy-literacy development, and relationship trust, none-achievable through episodic, attendance-focused cycles. Where participation is a counted deliverable, gender responsiveness is recorded without being achieved.

### 6.3 Documentary Findings: The Normative-Operational Cascade

The normative-policy cascade in Busia is coherent and traceable. The BCCCAP (2023) identifies women, youth, and persons with disabilities as priority vulnerable groups across all six climate-risk domains; the CIDP 2023-2027 establishes a Public Service Administration and Gender sector with cross-cutting responsibility; and the FY 2025/2026 Supplementary Budget aligns explicitly with the CIDP. On paper, the chain from constitutional commitment through national legislation to county and annual planning exists and is normatively legible.

The operational cascade, through which commitments convert into gender-tagged budget lines, measurable output targets, sex-disaggregated beneficiary projections and enforced reporting, does not exist. Analysis of the FY 2025/2026 budget identifies three structural absences: no gender-tagged allocations within climate programme-based budget lines; no gender-differentiated output targets, minimum women-beneficiary proportions or indicators measuring women's control over adaptation resources; and no sex-disaggregated beneficiary tracking embedded within execution or monitoring frameworks. Gender equity in benefit distribution is, from the documentary record alone, empirically unverifiable. Assessed against the FLLoCA Gender Assessment, which recommends earmarking defined shares of Climate Change Fund resources for women, and NCCAP III's MRV+ standards, Busia's fiscal and accountability architecture can assert gender responsiveness but cannot demonstrate it. Table 4 maps the triangulation.

**Table 4: Triangulation Summary, Convergence Across Data Strands**

| Dimension           | Quantitative            | Qualitative                                               | Documentary                                     |
|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Policy awareness    | M = 2.75 (lowest item)  | Women lack policy literacy; officials more aware (KII003) | BCCCAP exists; dissemination limited            |
| Gender articulation | M = 2.77 (near neutral) | Gender appears as principle, not operational directive    | Language in BCCCAP/CIDP; absent in budget lines |

|                       |                                   |                                                     |                                                            |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|
| GRB evidence          | M = 2.76 (lowest cluster)         | GRB advocacy-driven, not institutionalised (KII004) | No gender-tagged lines in FY 2025/26 allocations           |
| Monitoring and review | M = 2.81 (neutral)                | No sex-disaggregated data in evaluation             | BCCCAP mandates MRV; gender indicators not operationalised |
| National alignment    | M = 3.00 (highest, still neutral) | Plans reference national frameworks aspirationally  | NCCAP III alignment confirmed: MRV+ absent at county level |

*Note: GRB = gender-responsive budgeting. All three strands converge on procedural inclusion without substantive integration.*

## 7.0 DISCUSSION

The triangulated findings resolve into a single diagnosis: Busia's climate governance exhibits procedural inclusion without substantive integration. Gender is formally present in policy texts, committee compositions and participation records, but absent from the fiscal and accountability instruments that determine whether commitments produce outcomes.

### 7.1 The Normative-Operational Cascade

The normative-operational distinction is the article's most distinctive contribution. It gives a precise name to a condition that existing frameworks, including the additive-transformative dichotomy of Lombardo et al. (2009), describe but do not fully specify. Every governance system that has incorporated gender commitments constructs a normative cascade: constitutional provisions establish rights, national legislation mandates mainstreaming, sectoral plans articulate commitments and county frameworks repeat them. This chain is documentable and internally consistent, but by itself institutionally inert. The operational cascade is a different achievement: it requires gender-tagged budget lines traceable from appropriation to expenditure, sex-disaggregated output targets that make performance evaluable, inter-departmental responsibility assignments with enforcement authority, and indicators capable of tracking gendered outcomes over time. Without this infrastructure, the normative cascade produces progressively better-articulated commitments at each tier while generating progressively less implementation discipline. The system can demonstrate intent but cannot verify outcomes.

Busia has built its normative cascade with care, and the survey finding that national-framework alignment records the highest mean ( $M = 3.00$ ) reflects respondents' recognition that the architecture points in the right direction. What they also register, through eight items clustering below the midpoint, is that this commitment does not translate into observable operational substance. The correlation ( $r = 0.776$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) confirms Sabatier and Mazmanian's (1980) tractability prediction; the two-fifths of variance that clarity does not explain is the structured contribution of the operational cascade's absence. Higher clarity improves the normative signal; only operational enforcement converts that signal into administrative routine.

### 7.2 Policy Clarity As A Governance Instrument

The magnitude of the association ( $r = 0.776$ ;  $r^2 \approx 0.60$ ) establishes policy clarity as a structural governance instrument, not a design accessory. Frontline implementers encounter gender mainstreaming as a recognised norm to be cited rather than enforced. Lipsky's (1980) street-level logic

applies precisely: where commitments are not attached to auditable performance requirements, they are deprioritised against deliverables that generate clear bureaucratic signals. The survey's neutrality is therefore not a measurement artefact, but a governance condition accurately reported. The critical implication is that reform focused on strengthening normative language will raise clarity scores without raising integration unless the operational cascade is constructed simultaneously, which is exactly what the documentary strand shows is missing.

### **7.3 Procedural Inclusion And The Gender Regime**

The procedural-inclusion trap corresponds to the feminist-institutional concept of displacement within formally inclusive institutions (Mackay et al. 2010): official rules mandate inclusion while informal gender regimes produce substantive exclusion by shaping whose contributions carry deliberative weight. The representation-without-authority condition is not a failure of individual attitudes but a structural outcome of absent facilitation safeguards, policy-literacy investment and protected deliberative space. Andrews's (2013) concept of isomorphic mimicry is opposite: Busia has adopted the institutional forms associated with gender-inclusive best practice without acquiring the operational capabilities required for transformation. The committees look right from the outside but do not produce right outcomes inside, so representation-focused reform treats the symptom rather than the structural condition.

### **7.4 Absent Gender-Tagged Budgets: A Feminist Political Ecology Reading**

The absence of gender-tagged budget lines might be read as administrative oversight. Feminist political ecology demands a more penetrating interpretation: the absence is an institutional expression of how women's adaptive labour is structurally undervalued. Women in flood-prone Budalang'i spend additional hours managing household food stores and relocated water sources; women in drought-affected Teso North adapt crop calendars and renegotiate food allocation, none of it captured in any budget line. These activities constitute the county's primary adaptation buffer yet remain invisible to fiscal architecture because the women who perform them own no land, control no leverageable assets and hold no institutional standing from which to demand recognition. The undervaluation reflects the same logic that excludes women from land ownership: labour is feminised as natural obligation while budgetary resources are masculinised as allocated entitlements. Pierson's (2000) path-dependency framework warns that established fiscal routines generate self-reinforcing feedback; breaking the pattern requires deliberate disruption, legislative mandates for gender budget-tagging, enforcement by the County Treasury and accountability tied to MRV+ indicators, not voluntary guidelines.

### **7.5 Civil-Society Mediation And Its Structural Limits**

Civil-society organisations in Busia have functioned as compensatory governance actors, providing the sensitisation, facilitation, and advocacy that county systems are not resourced to deliver. This contribution is real but structurally fragile in three ways: it is geographically uneven, being higher where organisations are active; access to governance processes is contingent on eligibility and procurement rules that can exclude grassroots actors; and where donor cycles conclude, the mechanism is withdrawn, leaving neither the bridge nor the institutional capacity that should have replaced it. Path dependency applies here too: compensatory arrangements reduce incentives for counties to build internal capacity, entrenching dependency. The answer is not to withdraw civil society but to formalise partnership frameworks that convert compensatory relationships into institutionalised accountability arrangements.

## 8.0 STUDY LIMITATIONS

Several limitations qualify the findings. The cross-sectional design establishes the clarity-integration association ( $r = 0.776$ ) but cannot determine causal direction; reverse causality cannot be excluded, and longitudinal designs exploiting policy reforms would be required to isolate mechanisms. The quantitative strand relies on perceived rather than observed institutional behaviour, and social-desirability effects may inflate officials' self-reported awareness; direct expenditure tracking would complement the perception-based evidence. Documentary analysis was limited to publicly available instruments, as internal deliberative records were inaccessible. The single-county focus enables contextual depth but limits statistical generalisability; transferability to comparable devolved contexts in East Africa is supported by theoretical consistency but requires empirical verification elsewhere.

## 9.0 CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The women who sit in ward climate committee meetings in Budalang'i, Nambale and Teso North, counted, present and structurally unheard, are the empirical subject of this work. Their governance experience is not captured by participation records, is not visible in the BCCCAP's gender language, and does not appear in budget documents, because the adaptive labour and knowledge they contribute is never costed, allocated or evaluated. The normative-operational cascade framework is designed to make this structural invisibility analytically legible and institutionally addressable. The study provides rigorous county-level mixed-methods evidence for the clarity-integration relationship ( $r = 0.776$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) within Kenya's devolved system, develops procedural inclusion without substantive integration as a diagnostic with wider Sub-Saharan applicability, and offers the normative-operational cascade as a precise tool for diagnosing mainstreaming failure and specifying the institutional investments required to address it.

### 9.1 Policy Recommendations

- Mandate gender-responsive budgeting by applying the National Treasury's guidelines within county climate programme-based budget structures, with ward Climate Change Fund ceilings specifying minimum proportions for women-targeted interventions and cross-referenced programme codes enabling expenditure tracking.
- Construct a county MRV+ gender-indicator framework: the Climate Change Directorate and Gender sector should develop sex-disaggregated output indicators aligned with NCCAP III MRV+ standards, embedded in routine reporting and linked to annual budget performance reviews.
- Formalise the inter-departmental gender-climate mandate by revising the BCCCAP to assign gender technical roles within climate programme cycles, with formal reporting lines, timelines and joint annual review between the Climate Change Directorate and the Gender and Social Development sector.
- Institutionalise substantive participation enablement: ward committee guidelines should incorporate women-only pre-meeting consultations, rights-based climate-literacy training and facilitation protocols addressing gendered deliberative dynamics, as minimum standards rather than voluntary practice.
- Formalise civil-society partnership frameworks, converting compensatory relationships into institutionalised multi-year agreements for sensitisation, mobilisation and budget accountability that are sustainable beyond individual project cycles.

### 9.2 Future Research Directions

Three directions emerge. Longitudinal research tracking gender-integration indicators before and after MRV+ operationalisation in Busia would enable causal assessment of the clarity-integration relationship.

A comparative study across Kenya's 47 counties would test whether the normative-operational cascade failure is structurally reproduced or whether some counties have successfully built operational cascades, and under what conditions. Participatory action research co-designing integration protocols with ward committees would generate both practical tools and evidence on the conditions for moving from procedural inclusion to transformative governance.

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