

Gender Analysis of Water Policies and Governance in Nigeria

Sarah Appiah, Charity Osei-Amponsah and Alan Nicol

June 2026



Authors

Sarah Appiah, Senior Research Officer - Social Scientist, International Water Management Institute (IWMI), Accra, Ghana

Charity Osei-Amponsah, Senior Regional Researcher - Governance Institution and Inclusion, IWMI, Nigeria

Alan Nicol, Principal Researcher- Water Governance and Political Economy, IWMI, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Author Contributions

Conceptualization: Sarah Appiah and Charity Osei-Amponsah; Methodology: Sarah Appiah and Charity Osei-Amponsah; Validation: Stakeholders in water and gender related institutions in Nigeria; Formal analysis: Sarah Appiah and Charity Osei-Amponsah; Investigation: Sarah Appiah and Charity Osei-Amponsah; Resources: Sarah Appiah, Charity Osei-Amponsah and Alan Nicol; Data curation: Sarah Appiah and Charity Osei-Amponsah; Writing – original draft: Sarah Appiah and Charity Osei-Amponsah; Writing – review & editing: Sarah Appiah, Charity Osei-Amponsah and Alan Nicol; Supervision: Charity Osei-Amponsah and Alan Nicol; Project administration: Sarah Appiah, Charity Osei-Amponsah and Alan Nicol

Acknowledgments

This work was initiated under the CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies and finalized with support from the Governance and Political Economy—Area of Work 3 (AoW3)—of the CGIAR Policy Innovations Program. We would like to thank all funders who supported this research through their contributions to the CGIAR Trust Fund (www.cgiar.org/funders).

CGIAR Policy Innovations Program

The CGIAR Policy Innovations Program delivers science-based evidence to strengthen policies, markets, and institutions. The initiative supports coherent policies across food, land, and water systems by analyzing policy synergies and trade-offs, the political economy of natural resources system transformation, just transition, and cocreating solutions in partnership with policymakers and think tanks for effective, impactful, and equitable policymaking.

Learn more about the program:

<https://www.cgiar.org/cgiar-research-portfolio-2025-2030/policy-innovations>

Citation

Appiah, Sarah, Charity Osei-Amponsah, and Alan Nicol. 2026. *Gender Analysis of Water Policies and Governance in Nigeria*. International Water Management Institute (IWMI).

© 2026 International Water Management Institute (IWMI). Some rights reserved. This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0).

Front cover photo: Participants in a group photo after the Workshop (photo: Sapphire media)

Back cover photo: Participants actively engaged in a collaborative validation session during the stakeholder validation workshop. (photo: Sapphire media)

Disclaimer

This publication has not been independently peer reviewed. Responsibility for editing, proofreading, layout, opinions expressed, and any possible errors lies with the authors and not the institutions involved.

Content

Executive Summary	4
1. Background and Context	5
1.2 Objective of the Study	6
2.0 Overview of water sector governance and gender issues in Nigeria	7
2.1 Water governance structures	7
2.2 Why gender matters in water governance in Nigeria	7
2.3 Gender mainstreaming in water sector	8
2.4 Conceptual framework for gender analysis	10
3. Methodology	12
3.1 Desk Review of Literature and Policies	12
3.2 Data Collection	13
3.3 Data Synthesis and Analysis	14
4. Findings and Analysis	15
Review of Policies and legal frameworks in Water governance	15
5. Summary and Discussion of Key Findings	31
6. Conclusion and Recommendations	33
Recommendations	33
7. Strengthening Stakeholder Capacity: From Research to Practice	36
8. References	37
Appendices	40

Executive Summary

This technical report presents a gender analysis of water policies and governance in Nigeria, with the aim of identifying key barriers and opportunities for integrating gender equity into water policy and practice. Using a two-pronged methodology comprising a comprehensive policy review and in-depth interviews with stakeholders at both federal and state levels, the study evaluates the extent to which gender considerations are embedded within Nigeria's water governance framework. The analysis applies Buchy et al.'s (2024) Gender Policy Analysis Framework, structured around six thematic areas (contextual justification, intersectionality, evidence, operationality, budgeting and coherence), to examine how institutional, legal, and socio-cultural dynamics shape gender outcomes in the sector. The framework also applies a policy coherence lens to interrogate the alignment (or lack thereof) between national gender frameworks and sector-specific water policies.

Findings reveal that despite some progress in gender awareness and data generation, meaningful gender integration remains weak. Core water policies such as the National Water Resources Policy (2016), Water Resources Act (1993), and the proposed National Water Resource Bill (2020) lack clear gender provisions, implementation mechanisms, and accountability structures. Stakeholder perspectives underscore persistent institutional inefficiencies, socio-cultural and religious barriers, particularly at the state level as well as inadequate financing and poor policy coordination across sectors levels.

To address these gaps, the report recommends actionable steps across five thematic areas:

- Policy Revision and Legal Reform – including gender-responsive amendments to existing water laws and regular policy reviews based on gender analysis.
- Implementation and Institutional Strengthening – such as building technical and leadership capacity, strengthening gender focal points, and improving policy dissemination.
- Stakeholder Engagement and Cultural Change – with emphasis on grassroots participation, community dialogues, and shifting social norms.
- Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Use – focusing on the collection and application of sex-disaggregated data and gender-sensitive indicators.
- Financing and Sustainability – through gender-responsive budgeting and reduced reliance on donor funding.

The report underscores the need for deliberate, coordinated, and well-resourced efforts to mainstream gender in water governance. Advancing gender equity in the sector is not only a matter of justice but also critical to enhancing resilience, efficiency, and sustainability in water resource management across Nigeria.

1. Background and Context

This report presents a gender analysis of water policies and governance in Nigeria. It establishes the critical importance of gender integration in water resources management, identifying systemic challenges within the sector, articulating the study's objectives, defining its boundaries, and highlighting its potential contributions to equitable and sustainable water management.

Water is a fundamental resource for food security, economic development, human well-being and public health across Nigeria (Isukuru et al., 2024; Shehu and Nazim, 2022; Ngene et al., 2021). Its effective management is crucial for ensuring availability, quality, and equitable distribution, particularly given the nation's diverse climatic, hydrological, and socioeconomic landscapes. Nigeria's rapidly growing population is increasing the demand for water, particularly in urban areas, placing significant pressure on existing water resources and infrastructure (Isukuru et al., 2024). Climate change impacts related to increased frequency and severity of droughts and floods, is further putting pressure on the resource, necessitating its effective management and governance (Ngoran et al., 2015).

Water management and gender equality in a development context are inextricably linked. For instance, gender inequalities are deeply entrenched within Nigeria's water sector, with women and girls disproportionately bearing the brunt of water scarcity and poor management (FMWR, NBS, UNICEF, 2022). A significant burden of unpaid labor falls on them, as 69% of Nigerian households rely on women and girls to fetch water, often from distant and unsafe sources (FMWR, NBS, UNICEF, 2022). This daily task exposes them to considerable health risks and safety threats, while also severely limiting their opportunities to pursue education, engage in economic activities, or assume leadership roles (FMWR, NBS, UNICEF, 2022). Beyond the physical burden, women are frequently excluded from decision-making processes concerning water resource management, often due to prevailing cultural and religious norms. This exclusion leads to limited leadership opportunities and can foster a perception among many women that they are not empowered to act as agents of change within their communities. Women remain significantly underrepresented in staffing, leadership, and decision-making positions across the Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH) and Water Resources Management (WRM) sectors at all levels. For instance, only about 5% of Commissioners for Water Resources and 6% of local council chairpersons are women.

Despite Nigeria being a signatory to numerous international and regional policy instruments promoting gender equity in water resources management including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the Dublin Principles, the Africa Water Vision 2025, and the ECOWAS Gender Policy there is limited evidence to suggest that effective gender mainstreaming has occurred on the ground (Adeoti, 2021). This disparity between high-level commitments and on-the-ground realities indicates that the challenge is not merely a lack of policy recognition, but rather significant hurdles in translating policy into practice.

A critical underlying factor contributing to these disparities is the absence of explicit gender provisions in key foundational water legislation and governance structures. The Water Resource Act of 1993, for example, contains no specific clause on gender, thereby hindering efforts to promote equality in access and decision-making (Adeoti, 2021). This absence of legal backing means that gender mainstreaming often remains an optional consideration rather than an enforced requirement, limiting accountability and resource allocation for gender-responsive initiatives. Furthermore, there is limited sex disaggregated data on water usage, needs, and decision-making roles, which impedes the ability to tailor programs effectively and monitor their gendered impacts (Appiah et al. 2025). There is a need to better understand these gender inequalities and develop institutional capacity to minimize them. A gender analysis can

illuminate these specific burdens and highlight the invaluable local, ecological, social, and political knowledge that women possess, which can significantly inform and contribute to climate change adaptation strategies and improved project outcomes. Applying a gender lens is essential to uncover the "entry barriers" to gender mainstreaming, necessitating fundamental changes to main water resources policy and legal instruments (Adeoti, 2021). This analytical approach is vital to move beyond mere advocacy and instigate concrete investments and systemic change within the sector. Therefore, this study offers a gender policy analysis designed to unpack the extent of gender integration in water policies and governance in Nigeria's water sector and provide evidence-based insights and actionable recommendations.

The International Water Management Institute (IWMI) under the CGIAR Initiative on National Policies and Strategies, conducted this study on gender analysis in water system policies and governance with case studies undertaken at the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja), Oyo and Nasarawa States levels in order to better understand key issues and suggest solution pathways.

The potential beneficiaries of this study are diverse and span multiple levels of governance and civil society. Policymakers at federal, state, and local government levels will gain critical data and analysis to inform the development, review, and implementation of gender-responsive water policies and legislative reforms. Water sector practitioners and agencies, including State Water Agencies, River Basin Development Authorities, and the Nigeria Integrated Water Resources Management Commission, will benefit from insights that guide the design, implementation, and monitoring of gender-sensitive water programs and projects. Civil Society Organizations and Non-Governmental Organizations, such as WaterAid Nigeria, FEMinWASH, and WASHMATA Initiatives, will be empowered with robust evidence to strengthen their advocacy efforts, community engagement strategies, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality in the water sector. Development partners and donors will find the findings instrumental in guiding the strategic allocation of resources and technical support for gender-transformative water initiatives in Nigeria. Researchers and academics will benefit from the study's significant contribution to the existing body of knowledge on gender and water resource management in Nigeria, addressing a previously identified gap in knowledge and providing a foundational basis for future scholarly inquiry.

1.2 Objective of the Study

The study explores the extent of gender considerations in water policies and implementations in Nigeria using Buchy et al.'s (2024) gender policy analysis framework. Specifically, it answers the following two questions: To what extent are gender perspectives integrated in water sector policies in Nigeria? And what are the barriers and opportunities for gender mainstreaming in water governance in Nigeria?

2. Overview of Water Sector Governance and Gender Issues in Nigeria

2.1 Water governance structures

Water governance in Nigeria is complex. It involves coordination across federal, state, and local government levels. The Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation (FMWR&S) leads the formulation of national water policies and oversees large-scale infrastructure projects, such as dams and irrigation systems. FMWR also collaborates with various agencies to ensure effective water resource management across the country. At the basin level, River Basin Development Authorities manage specific river basins, focusing on irrigation, flood control, and water supply, while the National Water Resources Institute conducts research and training related to water resources management.

Water Agencies or Boards at state level are responsible for potable urban water supply and local water management, governed by laws which can vary significantly between states. This contributes to fragmented governance under Nigeria's federal system. Local governments are tasked with implementing water supply initiatives but often lack the necessary resources and authority to effectively manage water systems and are typically reliant on state-level support for infrastructure development and maintenance.

Local Government Authorities (LGAs) are mandated to oversee rural water supply and WASH services. Their roles include the construction and maintenance of boreholes, handpumps, and small-scale water systems, often in partnership with community-based organizations and non-governmental actors. In practice, LGAs often face substantial capacity and resource constraints, which hinder effective service delivery. The absence of clearly defined legal and financial frameworks at the local level also weakens accountability and reduces community participation, particularly from marginalized groups such as women and rural dwellers. While national institutions provide strategic direction and oversight, state and local actors are critical to service delivery, particularly in rural areas. However, systemic challenges including fragmented coordination, inadequate funding, and limited gender integration continue to affect the sector's performance. Strengthening institutional collaboration, capacity, and gender-responsive governance at all three levels remains vital for achieving equitable and sustainable water resource management in Nigeria.

2.2 Why gender matters in water governance in Nigeria

In Nigeria, just as in most sub-Saharan African countries, women play critical roles in household and community levels water collection and management, yet their representation in decision-making positions remains limited. Women are disproportionately affected by water scarcity, as they bear the primary responsibility for water collection in many communities (Graham, et al., 2016). They experience the direct consequences of water scarcity and poor governance. For instance, inadequate water supply exacerbates health risks, especially for women during pregnancy and menstruation, underscoring the need for gender-responsive water policies (UNEP-DHI, GWP and UN Women, 2025; Ogunyemi et al., 2022). However, existing water policies do not adequately address structural barriers such as socio-cultural norms, gender, power imbalances, and lack of institutional support for women's participation. Although Section 2 of the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria upholds the principle of non-discrimination, the country continues to fall short in ensuring equal opportunities for men and women in access to resources and advancement (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD), 2024).

Gender disparities persist, and existing regulations often fail to adequately address them. For example, the Water Resource Act of 1993 lacks explicit provisions on gender. This omission limits efforts to ensure equitable access to water resources and inclusive decision-making processes, ultimately reinforcing gender imbalances in the sector (Adeoti, 2021; Appiah et al., 2025). The proposed National Water Resources Bill (2020), though acknowledging the importance of gender inclusion, lacks concrete mechanisms to ensure women's participation in governance structures at all levels. Despite its focus on equitable access and sustainable development, the bill fails to directly establish clear, enforceable measures to integrate women into decision-making processes. While Subsection (2) of the bill requires institutions to facilitate "participation and consultations with states, local governments, communities, women, and other stakeholders" it provides no clear framework to ensure meaningful female representation in decision-making processes. Aside the lapses in the legal provisions, cultural and religious norms restrict women from taking on leadership roles, creating systemic barriers to their participation in water governance in Nigeria (Nwogu & Okonkwo, 2023). These deeply ingrained societal expectations make it challenging for women to be considered for decision-making positions. Nigeria remains a deeply patriarchal society, where men hold dominant roles in both public and private spheres, often exerting significant control over women's lives. Women are frequently relegated to subordinate positions, with limited influence in decision-making (FMWASD, 2024). Additionally, societal norms tend to favor male children over female children, reinforcing gender disparities from an early age. As a result, despite ongoing awareness efforts, many women struggle to see themselves as leaders or key agents of change in the sector, further reinforcing gender imbalances in water governance in Nigeria.

Efforts to integrate gender considerations into water governance in Nigeria have been largely driven by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and international organizations, such as the UN Women Gender and Water Initiative, but often face resistance due to deeply rooted cultural and political norms. A common misconception within development projects is that pro-poor interventions such as water projects benefit both men and women equally, overlooking the distinct priorities, access levels, and challenges faced by each group (Cairns et al. 2017). Over the past two decades, the unequal and often overlooked role of women in decision-making, water collection, and water management has become increasingly recognized (Esha, 2024). However, where the differential roles, needs, and concerns of men and women are not accommodated in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of strategies and projects it may perpetuate inequities in access and development (Mitra and Rao, 2019). Without targeted gender-inclusive policies, water governance initiatives risk reinforcing existing inequities in opportunities, limiting their effectiveness and long-term impact.

2.3 Gender mainstreaming in the water sector

Gender mainstreaming is a strategic approach aimed at achieving gender equality by integrating gender perspectives into all policies, programs, and institutional structures. It emerged as a global policy framework following the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing (1995). It is founded on feminist institutional theories, which contend that structural inequalities are embedded in organizational practices, norms, and policies (Walby, 2005). Feminist institutionalism investigates how formal and informal institutional structures determine gender power dynamics and the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts. It criticizes traditional institutional approaches that perpetuate gender hierarchies and aims to reform them by incorporating gender-sensitive norms, policies, and practices (Guido et al. 2023; Holmes, 2020; Mackay, Kenny, & Chappell, 2010; Krook & Mackay, 2011). Applying a feminist institutional perspective to gender mainstreaming provides valuable insights into the structural barriers and opportunities for advancing gender equality within institutions. It extends gender mainstreaming beyond addressing gender disparities by seeking transformative change within institutions (Novovic, 2023). As argued by Novovic (2023) and Gupta et al. (2023) the incorporation of a gender perspective into policymaking has generated a variety of 'productive tensions in theory and

practice'. It aims to shift systemic perspectives from needs-based approach where women are seen mainly as beneficiaries of development projects (Klug et al., 2024) to a human rights-based approach where they are seen as agents of change with economic, social, cultural, civil and political rights in the water sector.

Gender in water governance is a fundamental component of achieving equitable and sustainable water management. Within the water sector, women, especially in rural and low-income communities, bear the primary responsibility for water collection, yet they have limited decision-making power in water governance structures (Singh, 2020). Although gender mainstreaming has had some success, it still faces significant hurdles such as resistance to change, insufficient resources, and a lack of political commitment (Kelkay, 2022), competing priorities, and lack of expertise (Gupta et al., 2023). Addressing gender disparities fosters social equity and ensures that all stakeholders benefit from water resources. Research indicates that gender-inclusive water management leads to more effective and sustainable outcomes (Women's knowledge and participation contribute to improved conservation, distribution, and innovation in water use. Successful gender mainstreaming requires institutional commitment, capacity-building, and accountability mechanism (Appiah et al., 2024).

Many water governance structures are male-dominated, excluding women from key decision-making processes (Mutanda and Nhamo, 2024), particularly in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, where cultural norms and practices reinforces patriarchal dominance. Gender norms in many societies restrict women's participation in governance, perpetuating existing inequalities (Meinzen-Dick et al., 2019). Women's organizations and gender-focused water initiatives are often limited in capacity, funding and institutional support (Appiah et al. 2025). Within the legal, governance and policy structures, although gender-sensitive policies exist, implementation gaps persist due to weak enforcement and limited political will (Sultana, 2020)

Gender mainstreaming faces several barriers, these include:

- Institutional Resistance - Organizations often exhibit entrenched power structures that hinder gender-sensitive reforms (Tildesley, 2023).
- Symbolic Adoption - Many institutions adopt gender mainstreaming rhetorically without substantive change in practices (Gupta et al., 2023; Appiah et al., 2024).
- Lack of Expertise - Limited technical knowledge and resources constrain effective implementation (Gupta et al., 2023).
- Competing Priorities - Gender concerns may be sidelined due to political and economic pressures (Appiah et al., 2024). Research indicates mixed outcomes of gender mainstreaming interventions. In some cases, such as the European Union's gender policies, mainstreaming has led to legislative and policy advancements (Debuscher, 2023). However, in other contexts, gender mainstreaming remains fragmented and poorly institutionalized, limiting its transformative potential (Gupta et al., 2023). The effectiveness of gender mainstreaming largely depends on institutional commitment, robust accountability frameworks, and sustained political will (Appiah et al., 2024; Sultana, 2020).

2.4. Conceptual framework for gender analysis

Development reports have often highlighted a “lack of political will” or a “lack of an enabling environment” as a significant setback against project or policy implementation successes (Buchy et al. 2024). Of major importance is that a basic resource such as water, crucial for human life and livelihoods, requires better understanding of the structures and power relations for its effective use and governance. As noted by Buchy et al. (2024) water challenges do not only arise from a lack of resources, technical capacities, or infrastructure, but are often rooted in hidden dynamics of power and structures in society. The issues of gender inequalities between different social groups on water access and control, and the political and economic dimensions of water governance are important for informing the development of effective policies and practices. However, many studies overlook the intricate power and gender dynamics that influence water governance.

This study utilizes Buchy et al.'s (2024) gender policy analysis framework to conduct an inquiry into gender considerations in water policy design, implementation, and monitoring. While the study examines the extent of gender considerations in policy implementation and monitoring from the perspectives of federal and state level authorities in relevant ministries and departments, analyzing the degree to which these policies are implemented and their impacts on households is beyond the scope of this study. The term gender can be fluid, reflecting a broad concept of inclusion. However, in this study, gender is considered in a binary sense, referring specifically to men and women in alignment with Buchy et al's framework.

Gender policy analysis is a systematic examination of the nature, extent, and dimensions of gender in a certain policy area. It tries to identify how far the policy addresses the necessary changes in structures that function as bottlenecks to gender equality and a rebalancing of power relationships between the different social groups. Most policy analysis with gender considerations only focuses on identifying gaps in policy with regards to gender, however, the gender policy analysis does a detailed review of policies based on a set of pre-identified list of criteria. It also examines policy coherence by evaluating how the overarching national gender policy is implemented across different levels of governance and sectors, ensuring alignment within all relevant policy documents. The framework outlines a six-thematic enquiry (Table 1) to explore gender inclusion in policy documents.

Table 1: Six-thematic inquiry adapted from Buchy et al. (2024)

Theme or Inquiry	Description
Contextual Justification	It explores whether the policies provide an assessment of existing gender inequalities, outlines a clear vision for gender-equity, and analyzes the root causes of these disparities. It also considers whether power dynamics are explicitly addressed and whether key actors influencing gender outcomes are identified.
Intersectionality	It assesses whether the policy acknowledges the intersections between gender and other forms of inequality, such as ethnicity, class, age, disability, religion, and sexuality. It examines how these overlapping factors shape experiences of exclusion and whether policies address the diverse challenges faced

Evidence	It examines whether the policy is evidence-based, informed by reliable research, gender-disaggregated data, and meaningful stakeholder engagement.
Operationality	It assesses whether policies include clear implementation strategies, assign responsibilities, allocate resources, and incorporate monitoring frameworks to ensure gender-responsive outcomes.
Budgeting	It examines whether the policy outlines funding strategies for its proposed activities and whether a dedicated budget is allocated to initiatives aimed at reducing gender inequality.
Coherence	It assesses whether the policy maintains consistency between its objectives, target groups, and proposed activities. It also examines alignment with broader gender equality policies at national, state, and sectoral levels, as well as the presence of mechanisms for monitoring compliance with gender-based outcomes.

This study is designed to provide a national-level gender analysis of water policies and governance within Nigeria. Cases from two states and the Federal capital in Nigeria are used for illustrative examples. However, the primary analytical lens is applied to national policies and their broader implications across the country.



Stakeholders engage in a validation exercise focused on strengthening inclusive water governance and policy frameworks in Nigeria.

(photo: Sapphire media)

3. Methodology

This study employs a desk review of literature on water and gender related policies and regulatory frameworks in Nigeria. It also utilizes qualitative methodologies such as key informant interviews, and insights from a stakeholder validation workshop to collect primary data from stakeholders at the federal and state governance levels to assess the extent of gender integration in water policies and governance. Using the Gender Policy Analysis framework by Buchy et al. (2024), the study explores how gender is integrated in policies and governance structures in the sector. Findings from the study are analysed using thematic analysis.

3.1 Desk review of literature and policies

This study employed a desk review to analyze gender considerations in water governance in Nigeria. The review incorporated academic literature, government policies and legal frameworks, to provide a better understanding of how gender is integrated into water governance structures. Key sources included peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, policy documents, and studies by international organizations. Additionally, a review of grey literature was conducted to provide practical insights and contextual depth. This included policy briefs, NGO publications and working papers which offer valuable perspectives on the real-world implementation of gender-responsive policies.

The study focused on key water and gender related national policies and laws, including the National Water Resource Policy (2016), the Water Resource Act (1993), the National Gender Policy (2021-2026), the Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016), and the National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change 2020. Also, the draft National Water Resource Bill 2020, even though it is not situated within a specific Ministry yet. Details of these policies are outlined below. These documents were analyzed using the six-thematic inquiry framework by Buchy et al. (2024), which examines contextual justification, intersectionality, evidence, operationality, budgeting, and coherence. Relevant clauses addressing these themes were identified within each document to evaluate the extent to which gender considerations are integrated into water governance policies. This structured approach provides a comprehensive evaluation of gender inclusion across policy and regulatory frameworks. By combining academic research with grey literature, this study ensures a holistic analysis that captures both theoretical insights and real-world policy implementation challenges.

National Water Resources Policy 2016

The Nigeria National Water Resources Policy 2016 provides a comprehensive framework for the sustainable development, management, and utilization of the country's water resources. It aims to ensure equitable access to safe water for all Nigerians, support economic activities, and protect the environment. The policy emphasizes integrated water resources management, promoting coordination among stakeholders at all levels. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of federal, state, and local institutions in water governance to improve efficiency, accountability, and sustainability in the sector.

The Water Resources Act of 1993

The Water Resources Act of 1993 is a legal framework that governs the management, use, and control of the country's water resources. It vests the ownership and control of all surface and groundwater resources in the Federal Government, through the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation (FMWR&S). The Act provides for the establishment of river basin development authorities and regulates water abstraction, pollution control, and water-related infrastructure.

National Gender Policy 2021-2026

The National Gender Policy (2006, revised in 2021) serves as the national framework for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment across all sectors. It aims to eliminate gender-based discrimination and foster equitable access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making processes for all genders. The revised 2021-2026 national gender policy strengthens commitments to affirmative action, recommending a minimum of 35% representation for women in governance and leadership roles. It also outlines strategic objectives and implementation frameworks to mainstream gender in national development planning, with emphasis on accountability, institutional coordination, and monitoring. The policy recognizes access to water and sanitation as a critical gender issue and emphasizes the need to integrate gender perspectives into water resource management and infrastructure planning.

The Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016)

was developed to promote gender equity and equality in the agricultural sector by addressing systemic disparities affecting women and other vulnerable groups. Developed as a complementary strategy to the National Gender Policy (2006), it was initially drafted in 2014 to address gender gaps identified in the Agricultural Transformation Agenda (2011-2015). It seeks to promote and ensure the adoption of gender-sensitive and responsive approaches in planning and programming, so that both men and women have equitable access to and control over productive resources and facilities, ultimately working to close existing gender gaps. The policy emphasizes the importance of women's participation in decision-making and recognizes their contributions to food security and rural development.

National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change 2020

The National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020) was developed by the Department of Climate Change under the Federal Ministry of Environment to integrate gender perspectives into Nigeria's climate policies and actions. It recognizes that climate change impacts men and women differently and advocates for gender-responsive strategies that promote inclusive participation in climate-related decision-making. The plan targets five priority sectors; agriculture, water, energy, health, and forestry and aligns with global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement and Nigeria's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). It also outlines concrete milestones to address gender-specific vulnerabilities to ensure that women, youth, and other marginalized groups play active roles in building a climate-resilient nation.

National Water Resources Bill 2020

The National Water Resources Bill 2020 was proposed to consolidate existing water laws and establish a unified legal framework for water resources management across the country. It seeks to bring all water resources under the control of the federal government, centralizing regulation, usage, and development of both surface and underground water. The bill emphasizes integrated water resources management, licensing, and regulation of water use for domestic, agricultural, and industrial purposes. However, it has faced criticism for lacking clear provisions on public participation, raising concerns about its potential impact on equity, local control, and marginalized groups. The bill promotes privatization and "public-private partnerships" for water services against public demands.

3.2 Data collection

Beyond reviewing policies and legal frameworks, this study examines gender inclusion in water policies and governance through the perspectives of stakeholders in key institutions responsible for water and gender affairs at both the federal and state levels. Two key policies were referenced in the stakeholder interviews, as they were widely known among stakeholders. These include the National Water Resources Policy 2016 and the National Gender Policy (2006, 2021-2026). The aim was to gather information from stakeholder perspectives on the extent of coherence between these policies as well as to examine how well they reflect gender equity goals. To gather in-depth insights, interview guides were developed with targeted questions adapted from the Buchy et al. (2024) framework.

The interviews also explored contextual issues such as traditional practices, social norms, and unwritten rules in relation to gender and how they influence policy processes, key challenges and opportunities for gender mainstreaming in water governance at both federal and state levels. These were done through focus group discussions and key informant interview. Specifically, officials from the Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation, the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development, State Water Boards/Agencies, State Ministries of Women Affairs, water and gender-focused civil society organisations (CSOs) and subject matter experts at both federal and state levels were interviewed as outlined in Appendix 1. The qualitative data was collected at the federal capital territory (Abuja); then from Oyo and Nasarawa States to unpack the extent of gender considerations in water governance at both levels.



Participants engage in a hands-on session on data collection, reviewing tools and recording inputs to support the validation process

(photo: Sapphire media)

3.3 Data synthesis and analysis

The study employed a qualitative approach to synthesize and analyze data collected from policy reviews and key informant interviews.

Policy and Document Analysis

The analysis of policy documents and legal frameworks was conducted using the six-thematic inquiry framework explained in section 3.0 above. This framework provides a structured approach to identifying gender-related provisions, assessing their effectiveness and gaps in promoting women's participation in water governance.

Primary data Analysis

Qualitative data from key informant interviews were transcribed and analyzed thematically to identify patterns, gaps, and challenges in gender inclusion efforts within water governance structures. The responses were categorized based on the six inquiry themes, enabling a comparative assessment of gender integration at the federal and state levels. To ensure credibility and reliability, findings from the policy review and interview data were validated at a [stakeholder workshop](#), allowing for a comprehensive and contextually grounded evaluation of gender responsiveness in Nigeria's water governance framework.

4. Findings and Analysis

This section is structured around the six thematic inquiries, presenting findings and analysis for each through the policy review and from stakeholder perspectives.

4.1 Review of Policies and legal frameworks in Water governance

The review of policies and legal frameworks to assess the extent of gender integration in water governance included key documents such as the National Water Resource Policy 2016, Water Resource Act 1993, National Gender Policy 2006, 2021-2026, the Draft National Water Resource Bill 2020, National Agriculture Gender Policy 2016 and National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020). The review of these policies and legal frameworks reveals significant gaps, efforts and opportunities in the integration of gender considerations across key dimensions. While some policies reference gender broadly, they often fall short of offering actionable strategies or implementation mechanisms to ensure inclusivity in water governance. The analysis, guided by the six thematic areas: Contextual justification, intersectionality, evidence, operationality, budgeting and coherence highlights the following key findings:

4.1.1 Contextual Justification

This theme presents findings on whether policies assess gender inequalities, outline visions for gender equity, and address power dynamics. The contextual justification for gender integration across Nigeria's water-related policies and frameworks varies significantly in depth and focus. Among the six reviewed policies, only a few provided a comprehensive analysis of gender disparities, with water-specific documents generally lagging in articulating the structural inequalities that affect women's participation in water governance.

The National Gender Policy (2021-2026) stands out for its robust contextual grounding. It offers a clear analysis of systemic gender inequalities and the socio-cultural, legal, and institutional barriers that hinder women's empowerment. The policy acknowledges the influence of Nigeria's tripartite legal system-English, Customary, and Sharia law as a significant barrier to gender equality, noting that:

"Gender inequality in Nigeria is exacerbated by the tripartite legal system... which often conflict and create barriers to women's rights."

The Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016) similarly provides a detailed justification for addressing gender disparities, particularly in land ownership, access to credit, and training. It frames gender inequality as a major obstacle to agricultural productivity and development and links its redress to national and global development goals such as the SDGs. However, while it touches on power dynamics, it does not clearly identify the actors responsible for driving or challenging these disparities. In contrast, the National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020) takes a strong approach by emphasizing how women are disproportionately affected by climate change due to socio-economic vulnerabilities and underrepresentation in decision-making. It situates these gender disparities within broader structural and political contexts, framing women not only as vulnerable but also as critical actors in climate resilience and governance.

However, this level of contextual depth is not replicated in core water governance frameworks. The National Water Resources Policy (2016) recognizes water as a basic human right and the need for equitable access but fails to offer a thorough analysis of gender-based disparities in water use or control.

While it briefly acknowledges the role of women in water resource management, it lacks a structured diagnosis of the gender gaps in access, participation, and governance. The Water Resources Act (1993) is entirely silent on gender. Despite being a foundational legal framework for water management in Nigeria, it neither references women nor acknowledges their critical role in household and community-level water management. This omission signals a misalignment with the lived realities of water access and governance, particularly in rural areas where women bear the primary responsibility for water-related tasks. The Draft National Water Resources Bill (2020), which is intended to modernize and harmonize water laws, includes a reference to the importance of equitable access and mentions women in consultation processes. However, it does not provide any meaningful analysis of the structural or regional disparities that affect women's participation in water governance. Its lack of engagement with power relations or intersectional vulnerabilities means that it, too, fails to offer a transformative gender lens.

In effect, while national gender and climate-related policies provide strong contextual justifications for gender integration, core water policies and legal frameworks including the National Water Resources Policy 2016, the Water Resource Act 1993, and the Draft National Water Resource Bill 2020 fall short of this. They lack comprehensive assessments of gender inequalities and do not situate gender disparities within the broader social, legal, or political realities that shape water governance in Nigeria. This limits their ability to inform inclusive and transformative policy interventions in the sector.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Contextual Justification

Stakeholder perspectives reveal that gender advancement is acknowledged in recent policy documents including both the National Water Resources Policy (2016) and the National Gender Policy (2006; 2021-2026) as critical to addressing inequality, however, these references are largely symbolic rather than transformative. Gender provisions are often broad statements with no structured execution plan. From a policy coherence perspective, this points to a disconnect between high-level policy rhetoric and practical, operational integration across governance levels. Despite the inclusion of gender mainstreaming language in policy texts, stakeholders noted that these provisions often lack clear implementation pathways, accountability mechanisms, or contextual relevance particularly for different regions of the country. For instance, the 2021-2026 National Gender Policy includes an implementation plan, yet many actors, especially at state levels, reported limited access to the document. This lack of access impedes the policy's influence, undermining its coherence with governance realities on the ground.

"The policy addresses gender issues to some extent, but there's always room for improvement to enhance the policy and the gender consideration in our water resources policy."- Government official, FMWR, Abuja.

Stakeholders consistently emphasized that gender is often reduced to 'women's issues,' signaling a limited understanding of structural inequalities and the broader goals of gender mainstreaming. This narrow framing fails to engage with systemic challenges such as power asymmetries, exclusionary norms, and institutional biases, factors crucial for a coherent gender-responsive governance approach. Cultural and religious norms were repeatedly cited as major barriers, particularly in Northern Nigeria, where women's participation in water governance is constrained by restrictive social roles and mobility limitations. However, these culturally embedded barriers are rarely acknowledged, let alone addressed, in water-related policy frameworks. This lack of alignment between policy content and socio-cultural context undermines the coherence and efficacy of national gender priorities in practice.

"Culture has made some women feel inferior... culture and religion do not permit women to lead or carry out some tasks at certain times of the day."-Government official, Nasarawa State Water Board.

“In the far north, they don’t allow their women to know what is really happening, and that is a major problem.”
– government official, Ministry of Women Affairs

Moreover, institutional practices such as inadequate maternity protections, rigid workplace hierarchies, and limited career advancement opportunities compound these structural disadvantages. Stakeholders explained that even within professional environments, gendered expectations and workplace discrimination limit women’s leadership prospects and decision-making roles.

“Women are structured in a way that limits them... maternity leave, career progression—these factors limit how far women can go.”– Government official, FWMR&S, Abuja

Stakeholders further attributed the persistent gender gaps in water governance to weak political will, weak representation of women in leadership, and structural barriers imposed by patriarchal norms. They explained that even though progress has been made through increased advocacy and the implementation of the 35% affirmative action policy for women in politics, these efforts have not been effectively extended to the water sector. Women remain largely excluded from decision-making, even on issues that directly impact them.

“Most times, in many sectors, women are not considered in decision-making. Even decisions that affect them directly are made without their input.”– NGO representative, Oyo State.

These findings highlight the absence of a systematic, cross-sectoral framework for integrating gender in water governance. Gender-related commitments are often made in silos and are not reinforced by water-specific legislation, regulatory guidelines, or sectoral strategies. Consequently, gender considerations remain inconsistently interpreted and informally implemented, with little institutional backing.

4.1.2 Intersectionality

This theme analyzed how policies acknowledge and address the intersecting forms of inequality (ethnicity, class, age, disability, religion, sexuality) in relation to gender and water. The extent to which intersectionality is addressed in Nigeria’s water-related policies and gender frameworks varies considerably, with a clear divide between gender-focused documents and water governance documents. Most water sector policies and legal frameworks do not reflect an inclusive understanding of how gender intersects with other identity markers such as age, disability, class, and geographic location, limiting their effectiveness in reaching diverse and vulnerable populations.

The National Gender Policy (2021-2026) offers the most comprehensive recognition of intersectionality. It explicitly identifies how gender inequality is shaped by additional factors like poverty, disability, age, education, and location. The policy acknowledges that rural women and persons with disabilities are particularly marginalized in terms of access to economic and social opportunities, stating:

“Particular attention is given to rural women, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized groups who face multiple layers of discrimination in accessing economic and social opportunities.”

This framing provides a nuanced foundation for inclusive policymaking, although it is general in scope and does not include detailed guidance for intersectional integration within the water sector. Similarly, the National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020) adopts an intersectional lens by identifying that climate change impacts are not gender-neutral and are compounded by poverty, age, disability, and rural residence. The policy calls for deliberate inclusion of vulnerable groups such as women, youth, and the elderly in climate and sectoral planning, including water-related adaptation

strategies. More so, the Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016) mentions some intersectional categories, including rural women and female-headed households, and acknowledges their unique challenges. However, it does not explore how multiple identities overlap to create compounded disadvantages, nor does it propose tailored responses for diverse sub-groups of women in agriculture.

The key water governance documents namely, the National Water Resources Policy (2016), the Water Resources Act (1993), and the draft National Water Resources Bill (2020) largely fail to apply an intersectional lens. The National Water Resources Policy 2016 refers to socio-economic barriers in general terms but treats gender as binary and uniform. The draft National Water Resources Bill 2020 mentions “stakeholder participation” without any indication of how marginalized groups are specifically considered or included. The Water Resources Act 1993 entirely omits any reference to gender or vulnerable populations, ignoring the differentiated roles and challenges men, women, and other groups face in accessing and managing water.

The findings shows that generally, intersectionality is poorly integrated into Nigeria’s water policies and frameworks, with only gender-specific documents providing meaningful attention to the layered and intersecting nature of inequalities. While the national gender-specific policies begin to address these complexities, water governance frameworks remain largely blind to the ways in which overlapping social identities affect access, participation, and decision-making in water management. This gap poses a significant limitation to the design and implementation of inclusive and effective water governance strategies.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Intersectionality

Stakeholder perspectives highlight the absence of a structured intersectional approach in most policy frameworks, which weakens efforts to create an inclusive and equitable water governance system.

Gender, Culture, religion and Regional Disparities

Stakeholders emphasize that gender inequality is not uniform across Nigeria, as cultural, religious, and regional factors shape women's access to resources and involvement in governance differently. In Northern Nigeria, for example, women face greater restrictions on mobility and decision-making, limiting their ability to participate in governance structures.

“While women in Southern Nigeria are gaining greater confidence and visibility, Northern women still require male permission to engage in governance processes. Their men still need to take decisions, even on access to resources like water.”- NGO Representative, Oyo State

“Gender inequalities in water governance intersect with cultural, religious, and regional disparities but these realities are often not addressed in the policies.” – Gender expert, Oyo State

Patriarchal norms reinforce male dominance in governance and restrict women’s participation. Similarly, religion and religious leaders hold significant authority in shaping gender norms, and their influence often reinforces gender disparities, making it harder for women to challenge existing power structures. A stakeholder highlighted that *“religious leaders need knowledge on gender issues because once they make pronouncements, people take them as final.”- NGO Representative, Nasarawa State*. These are however, least addressed in policy documents.

Economic Status and Access to Resources

Stakeholders highlight that economic inequalities intersect with gender disparities, further marginalizing women, particularly in rural and low-income communities. Women from these backgrounds face greater barriers to accessing financial resources, governance spaces, and development opportunities, limiting their ability to participate in decision-making. Those with financial and political influence continue to dominate leadership roles, effectively excluding women and youth from governance structures. However, existing policies fail to incorporate an intersectional approach that addresses these overlapping inequalities, leaving economically disadvantaged women without the necessary support to engage in governance. As one expert noted, *“low-income and rural communities face additional disadvantages, as they often lack access to resources, funding opportunities, and representation in governance structures. However, there is no formal mechanism within the policy framework to address these overlapping inequalities.”* - Gender and Policy Expert, Abuja

Additionally, traditional gender roles reinforce economic disparities, as women are often expected to manage household water needs while being excluded from leadership in water governance. This perception of water management as a domestic rather than a governance issue prevents women from influencing policy decisions. A stakeholder emphasized, *“Power dynamics, poverty, and economic inequalities are key drivers of gender inequality. Those with power control decision-making, often excluding women and youth.”* - NGO Representative, Nasarawa State

These indicate that gender inequalities in water governance intersect with cultural, religious, economic, and regional disparities, yet policy documents fail to reflect this complexity. While policies acknowledge gender mainstreaming, they rarely incorporate intersectional considerations, making them less effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by marginalized groups. Women in Northern Nigeria, rural communities, and low-income households for instance continue to experience heightened exclusion, as policies fail to provide targeted strategies to address their specific needs.

4.1.3 Evidence

This theme assessed the extent to which policies are informed by research, gender-disaggregated data, and stakeholder engagement. Findings reveal significant gaps in evidence-based policymaking, as gender considerations in water governance policies are often not backed by comprehensive research or structured data collection frameworks. Some progress have been made in generating gender-disaggregated data, however, stakeholders highlighted limited capacity to utilize this information effectively in policy formulation and implementation. Like the other themes, we found the extent to which gender-related policies and water governance frameworks in Nigeria are grounded in evidence to vary considerably, with significant implications for their effectiveness and responsiveness. While gender-specific policies tend to be more data-informed, water sector policies are largely lacking in the use of gender-disaggregated data or participatory evidence.

The National Gender Policy (2021-2026) highlights the critical role of sex-disaggregated data in designing gender responsive policies, and advocates for gender audits and sector-specific research. The policy candidly acknowledges:

“The lack of sex-disaggregated data across sectors remains a major challenge in designing and implementing gender-responsive policies.”

It draws on national surveys and stakeholder consultations to inform its strategies. However, while generally evidence-based, the policy does not provide detailed gender-disaggregated insights into the water sector specifically, which limits its utility for water governance planning.

The Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016) is relatively strong in its use of data. It identifies gender disparities in land access, training, and input usage through situational and statistical analysis and promotes the integration of gender indicators in monitoring and evaluation systems. While it encourages gender-sensitive data collection, references to baseline studies and evaluations are minimal, and there are acknowledged gaps in data on market and input access.

In the National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020), a participatory process was used to engage federal and state institutions, civil society, and vulnerable groups. The plan references national data and global sources (e.g., IPCC, FAO) to support its understanding of gender-differentiated climate impacts. Despite this strength, systematic integration of gender-disaggregated data throughout the policy remains inconsistent.

Conversely, the National Water Resources Policy (2016) is weak in its use of evidence for gender integration. It does not employ gender-disaggregated data nor reflect consultations with gender experts or women's organizations. This limits the policy's ability to respond effectively to the lived realities of women in water management. Likewise, the Water Resources Act (1993) is primarily a technical and regulatory document with no gender-disaggregated data or evidence-based justification regarding water access disparities. Gender was not a consideration in its development, reflecting the policy environment at the time it was developed. Similarly, the Draft National Water Resources Bill (2020) reflects limited evidence of gender-informed policymaking. This undermines the credibility and inclusivity of its provisions on equitable water access.

Overall, on the policy front there is a clear divide between gender-focused policies, which generally strive to be evidence-based, and water governance frameworks, which lack sufficient data or stakeholder engagement to support gender integration. The limitation of gender-disaggregated data and evidence-informed approaches in water sector policies undermines their responsiveness to the needs of women and marginalized communities.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Evidence Use

Stakeholders assessed the extent to which water governance policies are grounded in robust evidence, such as reliable research, gender-disaggregated data, and inclusive stakeholder engagement. Their perspectives reveal persistent gaps in the use of such evidence to inform and shape policy decisions. While there have been efforts to generate gender-disaggregated data, these remain fragmented and underutilized due to limited technical capacity and weak integration into policy processes. As a result, gender dimensions in water governance are often addressed without the support of comprehensive data or structured research, undermining the effectiveness and inclusivity of policy outcomes.

Limited availability and utilization of gender-disaggregated data

Most stakeholders were unsure whether policies are informed by evidence-based research. A major concern among stakeholders is the absence of gender-disaggregated data to assess policy impact and track progress in achieving gender equality. Without explicit analysis of gender inequalities within the water sector, developing effective interventions remains a challenge.

"For the National Water Resource policy 2016, no, I don't think so. Maybe just the general disparities were considered, because I didn't see any study carried out to inform it." – Gender Expert and NGO Rep- Oyo State

"Limited gender-disaggregated data to assess the impact of policies and track progress in achieving

“Limited gender-disaggregated data to assess the impact of policies and track progress in achieving gender equality is a challenge.The lack of an explicit analysis of gender inequalities in the water sector hinders the development of effective interventions.” – Gender and Policy expert, Abuja.

Although Nigeria’s National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) has made progress in generating gender-disaggregated data, stakeholders highlight a disconnect between data availability and its effective use in policymaking. Many policymakers lack the capacity to interpret and integrate this data into governance structures, limiting its impact on gender-responsive policies.

“Gradually, we are moving forward with donor assistance, as most of our data is now gender-disaggregated. The National Bureau of Statistics sees to that. However, many policymakers lack the capacity to use this data effectively in decision-making.” – Gender Expert and NGO Rep, Oyo State.

At the state level, data collection remains inconsistent and poorly implemented, making it difficult to develop policies that reflect regional gender disparities. Many state governments depend on federal policy frameworks without adapting them to local contexts, leading to a one-size-fits-all approach that fails to address unique challenges faced by women in different regions.

“There is lack of gender-disaggregated data and poor awareness of gender policies, particularly at the state level. The state governments rarely develop their own policies, instead rely on federal frameworks without contextualizing them for local realities.” – Gender Expert and NGO Rep, Oyo State

Weak stakeholder engagement and limited documentation of Consultations

Stakeholders also highlight gaps in stakeholder engagement during policy formulation, particularly regarding the involvement of policy think tanks, private sector actors, and gender experts. Some stakeholders noted that while government ministries claim to involve multiple actors, the actual level of engagement and the extent to which stakeholder input influences policy development remain unclear.

Another key issue is the lack of formal mechanisms to document and integrate gender-related consultations into policy frameworks. Government ministries, CSOs, and donor organizations engage in stakeholder consultations, yet there is no structured system for ensuring that gender-specific recommendations shape policy outcomes. In effect, the actual influence of these engagements on shaping gender considerations in water governance remains unclear, as some policies lack documented evidence of stakeholder contributions. However, with the current National Gender policy 2021-2026, stakeholders highlighted there were extensive consultations to inform its design and implementation plan.

These findings suggests that while some progress has been made in generating gender-disaggregated data to support policymaking, its practical application especially at the state level remains limited. Stakeholders affirmed that key policies, including the National Water Resources Policy (2016), often lack a strong foundation in structured research, gender-focused analysis, and inclusive consultation processes. The absence of explicit gender analysis and systematic data collection frameworks means that such policies risk overlooking the varied experiences and needs of women across different regions and socio-economic backgrounds, ultimately weakening the potential for inclusive and effective water governance.

4.1.4 Operationality

This theme examined the presence and clarity of implementation strategies, assigned responsibilities, resource allocation, and monitoring frameworks for gender-responsive outcomes in policy frameworks. A critical review of the six selected policies reveals considerable variation in the operationality of gender integration across Nigeria's policy landscape. The gender-specific policies were found to offer relatively strong frameworks for implementation. However, most water governance policies lack concrete mechanisms to translate gender commitments into action.

The National Gender Policy (2021-2026) and its implementation strategy demonstrate clear operational structure through the proposed National Gender Management System (NGMS), which is tasked with coordinating gender mainstreaming across sectors. The policy outlines defined roles, timelines, and performance indicators and integrates mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. However, it acknowledges persistent implementation challenges. The Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016) is also relatively strong in operational planning. It provides clear institutional responsibilities, targets, and gender-sensitive guidelines for implementation, particularly within agricultural training, leadership, and service delivery. Nevertheless, the policy falls short in terms of timelines and enforceability, and does not address the interface with water policy, despite the sector's integral role in agriculture. In contrast, the National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020) includes sectoral action plans including for water and sanitation with specific objectives, timelines, and institutional responsibilities (pp. 27-57). It proposes capacity-building initiatives, infrastructure investments, and awareness-raising programs. However, the plan lacks detailed enforcement and monitoring mechanisms, particularly at subnational levels, which limits consistent implementation.

The National Water Resources Policy (2016) outlines broad strategies for sustainable water management but fails to define any operational pathway for gender integration. It does not assign responsibilities, include monitoring indicators, or propose capacity-building for gender-sensitive governance. Gender considerations are vague and non-enforceable, reducing the policy's practical value in achieving gender equity in the sector. Similarly, the Water Resources Act (1993), while establishing key institutions like River Basin Development Authorities, provides no guidance on gender inclusion in governance structures. It lacks any provisions for women's participation in water management and does not include implementation guidelines, making it largely inapplicable in addressing gender issues in modern water governance. The Draft National Water Resources Bill (2020) however reflects minor improvements in language by including a clause on stakeholder consultations, mentioning women among groups to be engaged. However, these references are broad, and the bill does not offer any mechanism for ensuring women's participation, monitoring outcomes, or enforcing accountability. It fails to provide targets or institutional roles for advancing gender equality, rendering it largely symbolic in operational terms.

This shows that gender-focused policies like the National Gender Policy, National Action plan on Gender and Climate and National Agricultural Gender Policy present structured implementation frameworks, but water sector policies, including the National Water Resources Policy, the Water Resource Act, and the Draft National Water Resource Bill, lack the operational tools necessary to achieve meaningful gender integration. Across water governance frameworks, there is an absence of enforceable strategies, assigned responsibilities, and monitoring systems, which significantly undermines efforts to institutionalize gender equity in the sector. Bridging this gap will require the mainstreaming of gender through clearly defined action plans, accountability structures, and resource commitments within all water-related policy instruments.

Stakeholder Perspective on operationality of water policies and frameworks

Stakeholders shared their views on how well policies support implementation to achieve gender-responsive outcomes. Similar to the findings from the policy analysis, they highlighted that most policies lack structured action plans, defined accountability mechanisms, and dedicated budgets. As a result, implementation remains weak and inconsistent.

Weak implementation frameworks and lack of accountability

Stakeholders identify weak implementation frameworks as a major gap in water governance policies. They explained that while the National Gender Policy 2021-2026 has a separate implementation plan, the National Water Resources Policy 2016 lacks a clear strategy for gender mainstreaming. The National Water policy 2016 assigns responsibilities to federal and state institutions, but there is no structured mechanism to track whether gender-related actions are being implemented.

“The National Water Policy 2016 allocates responsibilities to federal and state institutions, but there is no clear mechanism to track whether gender-related actions are being implemented. The absence of monitoring and accountability frameworks weakens the effectiveness of gender provisions.” – Gender and Policy Expert, Abuja

Additionally, gender-related decisions in water governance are often made informally and on an ad hoc basis, rather than through a structured gender-responsive framework.

“Gender issues don’t come out clearly in these documents. In practice, people remember that women fetch water, so they site boreholes close to them, but in policy, gender is not intentional.” – A government official, Nasarawa State

This lack of structured implementation results in limited accountability, as there are no systematic mechanisms to assess progress or identify areas for improvement.

Limited awareness, access and trainings on policies

Interviews with stakeholders further indicate that many stakeholders, including CSOs working in gender advocacy, lack awareness of key policy documents and their relevance to water governance. This hinders effective implementation, as stakeholders are often unaware of the specific gender provisions and how they should be operationalized.

“I know the gender policy exists, but I cannot quote any provisions from it because we don’t have copies.” – NGO Representative, Nasarawa State

At the state level, gender mainstreaming efforts are even more fragmented, as state ministries rarely develop their own policies and instead rely on federal frameworks without adapting them to local realities. This one-size-fits-all approach weakens the impact of gender inclusion efforts in diverse governance contexts.

“... The state governments rarely develop their own policies, instead they rely on federal frameworks without contextualizing them for local realities.” – NGO Representative, Oyo State

Again, stakeholders highlight insufficient training and resources as key barriers to effectively integrating gender considerations into water governance. Many women lack the necessary institutional support to participate in leadership and decision-making, which limits their influence in policy implementation. Notwithstanding, they recognize that gender mainstreaming is gaining traction across institutions, driven in part by growing global awareness and commitments under SDG 5. However, its implementation

remains weak, particularly within government institutions, where translating gender policies into concrete, actionable programs continue to be a challenge.

Gender mainstreaming limited to WASH and domestic roles

Moreover, stakeholders highlight that gender inclusion in water governance is largely restricted to WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) and household water management, reinforcing traditional gender roles rather than promoting women's participation in leadership and governance.

"Women are invited to WASH committee meetings to provide input on water schemes, as they are the primary users and managers of household water." -Government Official, Nasarawa State

Stakeholders also emphasize that gaps in policy implementation are largely driven by the absence of gender-responsive budgeting. Many gender initiatives depend on donor funding rather than sustained government financial commitments, making them financially unstable and difficult to scale. Likewise, the absence of continuity and institutional memory of gender-focused policies and strategies has significantly weakened the effectiveness of past interventions. Stakeholders recall that previous gender mainstreaming efforts, such as those included in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategy (NEEDS), were discontinued due to political transitions and shifting government priorities. This lack of policy consistency has made it difficult to sustain long-term gender inclusion efforts in many sectors including water governance, as policies are often developed without ensuring their continued relevance and implementation.

4.1.5 Budgeting

This theme examines whether policies outline funding strategies and allocate dedicated budgets for proposed gender equality initiatives. Budgeting plays a crucial role in determining the sustainability and effectiveness of policy implementation and gender inclusion efforts in water governance.

An assessment of budgeting provisions across the six reviewed policies reveals that gender-responsive budgeting remains a significant weakness, especially within water sector governance frameworks. While gender-specific policies acknowledge the need for dedicated funding, most policies either fail to allocate financial resources explicitly for gender initiatives or rely heavily on donor funding, compromising sustainability and implementation.

The National Gender Policy (2021-2026) clearly acknowledges the importance of gender-responsive budgeting and calls for the integration of gender concerns into national and sectoral financial planning. However, it highlights a critical gap in practice, stating:

"Despite commitments to gender-responsive budgeting, funding remains sporadic and often dependent on donor support rather than government allocation."

Even though the policy proposes institutional strengthening for public finance systems, budgetary support for gender programs remains inadequate and inconsistent, limiting the policy's impact. The Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016) also encourages gender mainstreaming in budgetary processes and suggests that federal, state, and local budgets reflect gender priorities. It calls for tools and guidelines to facilitate this process. However, like the National Gender Policy, it does not include explicit financial allocations, making gender-focused initiatives difficult to sustain or scale with no dedicated funding. The National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020) identifies various potential funding sources, including national budgets, donor agencies, and climate finance mechanisms such as the Green Climate Fund (GCF). Despite these references, the plan lacks specific financial

allocations or earmarked budgets for the gender-responsive actions it outlines, reducing the feasibility and accountability of its financial commitments.

In contrast, the National Water Resources Policy (2016), the Water Resources Act (1993), and the Draft National Water Resources Bill (2020) do not contain any gender-responsive budgeting provisions. These documents discuss general funding for water infrastructure and service delivery, yet they fail to allocate resources for gender-specific programs such as training for women inclusion in governance, or capacity-building for gender mainstreaming. This lack of financial commitment undermines the implementation of gender-related goals and signals a limited institutional priority on equity and inclusion within water governance.

Across the reviewed policies, there is a critical disconnect between gender commitments and financial support. Even though gender-focused policies acknowledge the importance of gender-responsive budgeting, actual budget allocations remain vague or absent, especially in water-related frameworks.

Stakeholder Perspectives on Gender Responsive Budgeting

Stakeholders highlighted that financial commitments for gender initiatives exist, but they remain largely inadequate and inconsistent, limiting their impact. Most gender-related programs depended heavily on donor funding, as government institutions fail to allocate dedicated budget lines or had limited budget for gender mainstreaming. This raises concerns about the long-term sustainability of gender-responsive policies, as external funding is often unpredictable and subject to shifts in donor priorities.

“Funding for gender-related activities is often externally driven, with development partners and international organizations playing a bigger role than the government.” – Gender Expert, Oyo State

A key issue identified by stakeholders is that government funding for gender initiatives is often either delayed or not fully disbursed, making implementation difficult. While some funds are allocated through national and state budgets, they are rarely released in time to support planned activities. Additionally, gender-focused budgeting suffers from a lack of institutional memory, leading to policy fragmentation and poor continuity across government administrations. Even when gender initiatives receive financial support, there is little effort to institutionalize these commitments, resulting in inconsistent prioritization of gender initiatives over time.

The National Gender Policy 2021-2026 outline funding mechanisms, however stakeholders note that these budget allocations are vague and not effectively linked to gender-specific interventions in the various sectors including the water sector. Stakeholders further highlighted that the National Water Resources Policy (2016) also does not include a dedicated budget for gender-related activities, further reinforcing the lack of structured financial planning for gender inclusion in water governance. These confirms the findings from the policy analysis.

At the state level, gender initiatives lack specific budget lines, with funding often coming from general institutional budgets or the goodwill of leadership. This approach makes gender mainstreaming efforts vulnerable to changing leadership priorities rather than securing long-term, structured financial planning.

“We currently don’t have a budget line specifically for gender activities, but the water board general manager has been supportive. It’s just now that we are including that into our budget line against 2025.” – Government Official, Nasarawa State

Stakeholders also highlight that the Ministry of Women Affairs, responsible for gender-focused policies, remains one of the least funded ministries, further affecting the implementation of gender initiatives particularly at the state level. Even when budget provisions exist, they are often insufficient or not fully implemented, creating gaps in gender-related programs.

“The Ministry of Women Affairs is one of the least funded ministries, and that affects gender program implementation.”- Government official, Oyo state

These findings indicate that the absence of dedicated financial commitments for gender mainstreaming significantly weakens the ability to implement gender-responsive policies in the water sector at both governance levels. Without clear budget allocations, timely fund disbursement, and structured financial planning, gender inclusion efforts will remain underfunded, inconsistent, and heavily reliant on donor support. Consequently, the implementation of gender-inclusive water governance will remain aspirational rather than actionable.



A participant shares input during a plenary discussion, contributing insights to inform the validation process (photo: Sapphire media)

4.1.6 Coherence

This theme assesses whether policies maintain consistency between their objectives, target groups, and proposed activities. It also examines alignment with broader gender equality policies at national, state, and sectoral levels, as well as the presence of mechanisms for monitoring compliance with gender-based outcomes. An evaluation of policy coherence reveals a fragmented landscape in the alignment between gender-focused policies and water governance frameworks in Nigeria. While some documents show alignment with national and international gender commitments, most water-related policies lack coherence with the National Gender Policy and broader gender equality goals, leading to inconsistent and ineffective implementation of gender-responsive strategies.

The National Gender Policy (2021-2026) demonstrates strong alignment with key international frameworks, including Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the SDGs, and the African Union Protocol on Women's Rights. It calls for cross-sectoral collaboration and emphasizes gender mainstreaming across governance structures. However, it falls short of ensuring integration with specific sectoral policies like the National Water Resources Policy pointing to a lack of coordination between national gender objectives and water sector governance.

The National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020) is similarly aligned with international commitments such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Paris Agreement, and Nigeria's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). It aims to complement the National Gender Policy and addresses sectors like water, energy, and health. However, the plan does not establish a formal cross-sectoral implementation mechanism, which limits its ability to harmonize efforts and ensure consistency in gender-responsive climate and water actions. Similarly, the Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016) also reflects alignment with the National Gender Policy (2006), the Agricultural Promotion Policy, and global frameworks like CEDAW and the SDGs. Nevertheless, it lacks a clear structure to monitor coherence or to track how its gender provisions are implemented in tandem with other policies, including those in the water sector.

By contrast, the National Water Resources Policy (2016) shows weak coherence. Although it references national development goals and SDG 6 on water and sanitation, it fails to engage explicitly with national gender policies. There is no institutional mechanism in place to ensure that gender equality principles are mainstreamed across water sector strategies or that they align with broader gender goals at federal or state levels. The draft National Water Resources Bill (2020) demonstrates even less coherence. It does not reference the National Gender Policy 2006, nor does it coordinate with relevant gender institutions such as the Ministry of Women Affairs. The absence of a framework for monitoring gender-related outcomes further compounds this disconnect, undermining the Bill's capacity to advance inclusive water governance. Similarly, the Water Resources Act (1993) is entirely disconnected from both national and international gender and development frameworks. It was developed prior to major gender equality commitments like the SDGs and contains no provisions or alignment with policies that promote gender-responsive governance or equitable access to resources.

The findings indicate that gender-specific policies in Nigeria demonstrate high levels of alignment with national and international gender equality frameworks, yet this coherence does not extend to water sector policies and legal instruments. Water governance documents including the National Water Resource Policy 2016, Draft National Water Resource Bill 2020, and Water Resource Act 1993 fail to reference or integrate national gender frameworks, and lack mechanisms for cross-sectoral coordination, monitoring, or accountability. This disconnect severely limits the capacity for integrated and transformative gender mainstreaming in water governance and undermines the effectiveness of existing gender equality efforts. Strengthening policy coherence will require deliberate institutional coordination and the integration of gender frameworks into sectoral policy formulation and implementation particularly in the water sector.

Stakeholder Perspective on Policy Coherence

Stakeholders highlight significant gaps in policy coherence, particularly in the alignment between national gender policies and sectoral policies, including water governance. They explain that while the National Gender Policy provides broad guidance, many ministries and agencies fail to reference or integrate it into their sectoral policies, leading to fragmented implementation. This was in part attributed to lack of awareness on the provisions in the national gender policies as some explained that dissemination and capacity building on such policies are limited. A government official at the Federal Ministry of Water Resource explained *“I have not had the chance to lay hold on the national gender policy. So, I’m not sure how the water resources policy aligns to what the gender policy is saying”*.

Moreover, as explained by a gender expert at the federal capital, and an NGO rep at the Oyo State, the National Water Policy 2016 does not adequately incorporate gender provisions, resulting in a disconnect between gender goals and water governance strategies. This reaffirms the findings from the policy analysis.

“There is policy fragmentation and weak alignment between national and sectoral policies. Even though the National Gender Policy includes sectoral provisions, individual ministries and agencies often fail to reference it when formulating their own policies” Gender Expert, Oyo State

Additionally, stakeholders point to a lack of domestication at the state level, where most states rely on national frameworks without contextualizing them for regional challenges.

“...sectoral policies align with national frameworks in principle, but they are rarely domesticated at the state level. Many states do not contextualize national gender policies, making implementation inconsistent across different regions”- Government official, Nasarawa State

Furthermore, weak coordination mechanisms limit the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming efforts. Gender desk officers and units exist across ministries, but their roles remain unclear, and their influence on decision-making is minimal. A Stakeholder acknowledges that gender mainstreaming structures exist but emphasizes the need for better coordination, stating, *“Yes, we have gender desk officers from each ministry within the state, but it is not clear how their roles are coordinated.”* The absence of structured monitoring and evaluation frameworks further weakens policy coherence, making it difficult to track gender-related progress across ministries and sectors.

This suggests that although policies at the national and sectoral levels are theoretically aligned, there is no effective system to track implementation and ensure gender considerations are consistently applied. This gap underscores the need for stronger policy coordination mechanisms to ensure gender considerations are systematically integrated across all sectors, including water governance. Without stronger alignment between policies, clear accountability structures, and context-specific adaptations at the federal and state level, gender integration in water governance will remain inconsistent and ineffective.



Table 2: Summary review of policies and frameworks using the six thematic enquiries

Policy Document	Contextual Justification	Intersectionality	Evidence	Operationality	Budgeting	Coherence
National Water Resources Policy (2016)	Acknowledges equity in general terms; lacks detailed gender analysis	Not addressed	No gender-disaggregated data or stakeholder engagement documented	No implementation plan or roles for gender inclusion	No gender-responsive budgeting provisions	Weak alignment with National Gender Policy; gender goals not reflected in sectoral plans
National Gender Policy (2021-2026)	Strong contextual analysis of gender inequality across sectors	Explicitly addressed (age, disability, geography, etc.)	Based on national data and stakeholder consultations	Clear implementation framework with assigned responsibilities and indicators	Calls for gender-responsive budgeting but implementation is limited	Well-aligned with national/international gender frameworks; limited sector-specific application
National Gender Policy 2006	Highlights gender disparities in all sectors, including water	Recognizes marginalization due to class, culture, region	Sets agenda for gender data collection and institutional development	Recommends sectoral gender units and integration mechanisms	Emphasizes gender budgeting but with limited implementation	Outlines sectoral provisions like water
Revised National Agricultural Gender Policy (2016)	Strong analysis of gender disparities in agriculture	Mentions some intersectional categories briefly; lacks depth	Based on some situational analysis	Detailed roles, targets, and coordination frameworks	Advocates gender budgeting but lacks clear allocations	Aligns with national gender goals but not fully connected to water governance frameworks

National Action Plan on Gender and Climate Change (2020)	Detailed analysis of women's vulnerability to climate change, including water sector	Clearly acknowledged (age, geography, socio-economic status)	Draws on global/national evidence and consultations	Sector-specific action plans (e.g., water, sanitation); some indicators provided	Funding sources identified, but no detailed allocations	Aligned with SDGs, Paris Agreement, NDCs; links to water and gender, but coordination gaps remain
National Water Resources Bill (2020)	Mentions equitable access but lacks gendered contextual analysis	Not addressed	No evidence of stakeholder input or use of gendered data	General institutional roles outlined; no gender-specific strategies	No financial commitment to gender-related provisions	Poor alignment with gender policy; fails to reference national/international gender commitments
Water Resource Act (1993)	No reference to gender or equity in access; purely technical and regulatory	Absent	No evidence-based or participatory development; no gender considerations	Does not include any provisions for gender inclusion or representation	No budgeting considerations; gender aspects entirely absent	Predates gender frameworks like the National Gender Policy; no alignment

5. Summary and Discussion of Key Findings

The study reveals a significant disconnect between Nigeria's formal commitments to gender equity and the realities of policy implementation in the water governance sector. While national policies such as the National Gender Policy (2006; 2021-2026) and Nigeria's endorsement of regional and international frameworks signal intent, core water governance instruments including the Water Resources Act (1993), the National Water Policy (2016), and the draft National Water Resources Bill (2020) either lack gender provisions entirely or treat gender considerations as general or symbolic. These policies often fail to include actionable strategies, robust implementation mechanisms, or gender-responsive budgeting, thereby limiting their effectiveness.

Likewise, insights from the policy review analysis reflect the contrast between national gender related policies and the core frameworks governing water in Nigeria. While gender-related policies provide strong contextual justifications for integrating gender considerations, the main water governance instruments fall short of similar depth. They lack comprehensive assessments of gender inequalities and do not situate gender disparities within the broader social, legal, or political realities that shape water governance in Nigeria. This limits their ability to inform inclusive and transformative policy interventions in the sector.

Gender, in particular women's participation in water-related initiatives is often approached through a welfare lens, positioning them primarily as beneficiaries rather than as active agents in governance. This tokenistic approach does little to address the underlying power imbalances in decision-making. This is exacerbated by patriarchal norms, especially in the northern regions, further marginalizing women from leadership roles. Additionally, limited awareness of existing gender-related policies, weak data systems (especially for sex-disaggregated data), and poor inter-sectoral coordination significantly hamper gender mainstreaming efforts. While some progress has been made in data generation and institutional awareness, efforts remain fragmented and under-resourced.

These findings directly address the study's core objectives: (1) to assess the extent to which gender perspectives are integrated into water sector policies, and (2) to identify the barriers and opportunities for gender mainstreaming in Nigeria's water governance. The evidence shows that although gender perspectives are referenced in some policies, integration is shallow and largely symbolic. Structural, institutional, and cultural barriers continue to obstruct progress, making gender equity more aspirational than operational within the sector. The lack of coherent, gender-responsive action plans and accountability mechanisms across water-related policies underscores the urgent need for policy reform grounded in transformative gender analysis. Likewise, the fact that both federal- and states-level stakeholders relied on national policies to guide water operations underscores gaps in the need for effective policy dissemination strategies, enhanced stakeholder engagement, and tailored capacity-building efforts to ensure effective gender integration in Nigeria's water governance at all levels.

The gender policy analysis framework employed in this study proved effective for unpacking the depth and quality of gender integration across water sector policies. It examined policy content against pre-identified criteria to assess how far policies address systemic power imbalances, structural inequalities, and coherence with overarching gender frameworks, and offered a structured and comparative lens for evaluating gaps. Unlike conventional policy analysis, which aims to identify whether gender is mentioned or absent, the gender policy analysis framework applied here evaluated not just inclusion, but the effectiveness, coherence, and actionability of gender provisions across water governance documents. This was particularly relevant in the Nigerian context, where the gap between gender policy aspirations and actual implementation remains wide. Moreover, integrating stakeholder perspectives enriched the analysis, revealing how policies are experienced on the ground. Future research could improve by expanding the scope to include a larger number of states and by deepening

analysis at the implementation level, especially within subnational institutions at the local governance level as well as perspectives from grassroots women and community water users to complement institutional insights.

The study's findings echo broader concerns in the literature about the symbolic nature of gender mainstreaming in policy contexts across Sub-Saharan Africa. Similar to patterns observed in other sectors, Nigeria's water governance exhibits a gap between rhetoric and practice. Globally, the SDGs particularly Goal 5 (Gender Equality) and Goal 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) emphasize the need for inclusive governance. At the continental level, the African Union Gender Strategy and Agenda 2063 call for deeper integration of gender in environmental and natural resource policies. Nigeria's fragmented efforts fall short of these ambitions, reinforcing the need for alignment between national frameworks and international obligations.

To advance gender equity in water governance, Nigeria must move beyond symbolic inclusion toward structural transformation. This requires embedding gender analysis into the full policy cycle from design and budgeting to implementation and evaluation. Strengthening institutional capacity, promoting inter-agency coordination and ensuring sustained political and financial commitment are critical. Additionally, addressing socio-cultural norms that restrict women's agency and leadership is essential to ensuring that gender policies result in meaningful change. The findings suggest that without deliberate, regionally responsive strategies and enforcement mechanisms, gender integration in water governance will remain uneven and ineffective with long-term development consequences.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study underscores the centrality of gender-responsive governance in fostering equitable, resilient, and sustainable water management in Nigeria particularly in the face of growing socio-economic and environmental pressures. Applying Buchy et al.'s Gender Policy Analysis Framework, the study provides a comprehensive assessment of the extent to which gender perspectives are integrated into water policies and governance systems at both federal and state levels.

Findings reveal a persistent gap between gender equity commitments and implementation realities. Although national gender policies articulate inclusive goals, sector-specific frameworks such as the Water Resources Act 1993 and the National Water Policy 2016 remain weak in operationalizing these intentions. Inadequate enforcement mechanisms, limited stakeholder understanding, budgetary constraints, and entrenched cultural norms continue to hinder women's participation and dilute the transformative potential of gender mainstreaming in the water sector.

Recommendations

Addressing the identified barriers to gender integration in Nigeria's water governance requires coordinated, multi-level action by government agencies, civil society, donor partners, and communities. The following actionable recommendations are structured by thematic areas and relevant stakeholder groups:

Policy Revision and Legal Reform

Responsible Institution: Federal Ministry of Water Resources and Sanitation (FMWR&S), Ministry of Women Affairs, State Ministries

- **Amend existing water laws to include gender provisions:** Revise the Water Resources Act (1993) and the National Water Policy (2016) to include explicit gender provisions, intersectional analysis, and alignment with national gender policies.
- **Institutionalize regular policy reviews:** Establish a review cycle for water governance policies to ensure they remain relevant, inclusive, and evidence based. Each review should include comprehensive gender analysis informed by current realities and disaggregated data.
- **Ensure actionable strategies in policy documents:** Move beyond rhetorical gender mentions to include measurable indicators, dedicated budgets, and enforcement mechanisms that support implementation at all levels.

Policy Implementation and Institutional Strengthening

Responsible Institution: FMWR&S, State Water Agencies, River Basin Authorities, Ministry of Finance, Development Partners

- **Strengthen policy dissemination and awareness:** Launch targeted sensitization campaigns to ensure implementers from senior officials to local actors are aware of policy provisions, their responsibilities, and the benefits of inclusive governance.

- **Build institutional capacity for gender mainstreaming:** Provide tailored training for government staff, water managers, and planners on gender analysis, human rights-based approaches, and inclusive leadership. Special emphasis should be placed on women's leadership and participation.
- **Establish and empower gender focal points:** Institutionalize dedicated gender focal persons within water-related ministries and agencies at federal and state levels to champion, coordinate, and monitor gender integration efforts.

Stakeholder Engagement and Cultural Change

Responsible Institution: Civil Society Organizations, Traditional Leaders, Women's Groups, NGOs, Community-Based Organizations

- **Foster inclusive community dialogues:** Promote forums that include women, youth, traditional authorities, and religious leaders to discuss the value of gender inclusion in water governance. Encourage male allies to support inclusive practices.
- **Create and support women-led user groups:** Facilitate the formation of women-only water user associations or committees, particularly in underserved or conservative regions, to enhance women's access to and control over water resources.
- **Promote gender awareness at the grassroots:** Develop culturally sensitive advocacy materials that challenge harmful gender norms and promote shared responsibility in water management

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Data Use

Responsible Institution: National Bureau of Statistics, FMWR&S, Ministry of Women Affairs, State Ministries, Donor Agencies

- **Institutionalize collection and use of sex-disaggregated data:** Establish standard protocols for collecting, analyzing, and applying gender-disaggregated data on water access, usage, and governance at all administrative levels.
- **Develop gender-responsive M&E frameworks:** Integrate specific indicators into national and state water monitoring systems that assess progress in gender inclusion and equity outcomes. Ensure regular reporting and feedback loops with stakeholders.
- **Promote evidence-based policymaking:** Link academic and practitioner research with policymaking processes by commissioning gender-focused studies and policy briefs that guide future reforms.

Financing and Sustainability

Responsible Institution: Government, Ministry of Finance, FMWR&S, Budget Office, Donor Agencies

- **Allocate dedicated funding for gender mainstreaming:** Introduce gender-responsive budgeting in the water sector, ensuring that a portion of sector budgets is earmarked for gender initiatives, training, and institutional support.

- **Reduce dependency on donor funding:** Strengthen domestic financing mechanisms to ensure sustainability of gender equity interventions beyond donor cycles.
- **Incentivize cross-sectoral collaboration:** Encourage joint programming and funding between gender and water agencies to improve policy coherence and program delivery.

These efforts will contribute to building effective water governance system that upholds the principles of equity and sustainability, ensuring that both women and men have a voice in decision-making and equitable access to water resources in Nigeria.



Stakeholders engage in discussions during the validation workshop. (photo: Sapphire media)

7. Strengthening Stakeholder Capacity: From Research to Practice

Building on the analytical findings of the study, this project translated evidence into action through targeted capacity strengthening. Under the CGIAR Policy Innovations Science Program, International Water Management Institute conducted a capacity needs assessment as a direct follow-up to the study. The assessment evaluated the readiness of stakeholders to integrate gender considerations into water programmes and governance processes at federal and state levels.

The assessment revealed persistent gaps in knowledge, practical skills, inter-ministerial coordination, and implementation mechanisms across water-and gender-related ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs). These findings directly informed the development of context-specific training tools, ensuring that capacity-building efforts responded to identified needs rather than generic best practices. The training workshops operationalised the research recommendations by equipping seventy (70) key stakeholders at federal and state levels, particularly gender focal points from relevant MDAs, NGOs, and academia with practical tools to mainstream gender in water governance. The workshop delivered seven integrated modules aligned with the capacity gaps identified:

- Policy frameworks and commitments (SDGs, AU Agenda 2063, and the Nigerian context)
- Gender analysis concepts and application of the Gender Analysis Matrix
- Development of Gender Action Plans using a structured checklist
- Principles and practice of Gender-Responsive Budgeting
- Institutional roles, coordination, and collaboration, including the role of gender focal points
- Data, monitoring and evaluation, and digital literacy for gender programmes; and
- Change management, mentorship, and sustainability strategies.

Through this approach, the program demonstrates a clear line from research and diagnostics to practical support. The workshop participants have gained practical skills to translate gender policy commitments into concrete, gender-responsive actions within Nigeria's water governance and programming landscape. This reinforces CGIAR's commitment, through the Policy Innovations Program, to supporting national governments in transforming food, land, and water systems as a foundation for inclusive and sustainable agrifood system transformation.

8. References

- Abubakari, M. A. (2025). Gender-inclusive governance in rural water management in Ghana. *Discover Water*, 5(1), 55.
- Adeoti, O. (2021) Barriers to mainstreaming gender in water resources management in Nigeria, *Water Science*, 35:1, 127-134, DOI: 10.1080/23570008.2021.1978770
- Appiah, S; Osei-Amponsah, C; Nicol, A; Sanchez Ramirez, J. C; & Andam, K (2025). The challenges and pathways to mainstreaming gender in Nigerian's water sector governance. <https://hdl.handle.net/10568/179229>
- Appiah, S., Osei-Amponsah, C., & Nicol, A. (2026). Stakeholders' Validation and Capacity Assessment for Gender Integration in Nigeria's Water Sector Policies and Governance. International Water Management Institute (IWMI).
- Appiah, S., Plutshack, V., Agradi, M., Klug, T. W., Nunoo, I & Saparapa, R. (2024). The political economy of gender mainstreaming in energy access in Sierra Leone. *Environmental Research: Climate*, 3, 045025. Doi: 10.1088/2752-5295/ad8f59
- Buchy, M., Bhattacharjee, S., Dikshit, M., Karki, D., Pradhan, M., & Taneja, G. (2024). Gender Analysis in South Asia: Structuring new methods and approaches in Nepal and India. CGIAR initiative on National Policies and Strategies. Policy Brief Guidance. No.2
- Cairns, M. R., C. L. Workman, & I. Tandon. 2017. "Gender Mainstreaming and Water Development Projects: Analyzing Unexpected Enviro-Social Impacts in Bolivia, India, and Lesotho." *Gender, Place & Culture* 24 (3): 325–342. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0966369X.2017.1314945>
- Debuscher, P. (2023). The EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025: the beginning of a new season? In *Social policy in the European Union: state of play 2022: policymaking in a permacrisis* (pp. 91-110). ETUI; OSE.
- Esha, A. A. (2024). Beyond drinking water supply infrastructure: gendered lived experiences in coastal Bangladesh. *Gender & Development*, 32(3), 707–725. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2024.2424623>
- Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development (FMWASD) 2024. National Beijing + 30 Review, Federal Republic of Nigeria. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2024-11/b30_report_nigeria_en.pdf
- Federal Ministry of Water Resources (FMWR), Government of Nigeria, National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) and UNICEF (2022). *Water, Sanitation and Hygiene: National Outcome Routine Mapping (WASHNORM) 2021: A Report of Findings*. FCT Abuja. Nigeria
- Graham, J. P., Hirai, M., & Kim, S. S. (2016). An analysis of water collection labor among women and children in 24 sub-Saharan African countries. *PloS one*, 11(6), e0155981.
- Guido, L., Walsh, L., & Banaszak, L. A. (2023). Understanding feminist governance through feminist institutionalism: an overview. In M. Sawer, L. A. Banaszak, J. True, & J. Kantola (Eds.), *Handbook of Feminist Governance* (pp. 38-50). Edward Elgar Publishing.

- Gupta, G.R., Grown, C., Fewer, S. et al (2023). Beyond gender mainstreaming: transforming humanitarian action, organizations and culture. *Int J Humanitarian Action* 8, 5.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s41018-023-00138-1>
- Holmes, G. (2020). Feminist institutionalism. In: Oksamytna, K. and Karlsrud, J. (eds.) *United Nations Peace Operations and International Relations Theory*. Manchester University Press, Manchester. ISBN 9781526148872 Available at <https://centaur.reading.ac.uk/86471/>
- Isukuru, J.E., Opha, O. J., Isaiah, W.O., Orowwighose, B. & Emmanuel, E. S. (2024). Nigeria's water crisis: Abundant water, polluted reality. *Cleaner Water* (2) 100026.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2950263224000243>
- Kelkay, A. D. (2022). Gender Mainstreaming Challenges and Opportunities in Government Agencies in Selected Government Offices in Fogera District, Ethiopia. *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 24(5), 16.
- Klug, T. W., Saparapa, R., Plutshack, V., Agradi, M., Appiah, S., & Nunoo, I. (2024). The political economy of gender mainstreaming in energy access in Senegal. *Environmental Research: Climate*, 3(4), 045011.
<https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/2752-5295/ad6bb5/pdf>
- Krook, M.L. & F. Mackay. (2011). *Gender, Politics, and Institutions: Toward a Feminist Institutionalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Mackay, F, Kenny, M and Chappell, L. (2010). New Institutionalism Through a Gender Lens: Towards a Feminist Institutionalism? *International Political Science Review*, 31, 5.
- Meinzen-Dick, R. S., Rubin, D., Elias, M., Mulema, A. A., & Myers, E. (2019). Women's empowerment in agriculture: Lessons from qualitative research (Vol. 1797). International Food Policy Research Institute.
- Mitra, A. & N. Rao (2019) 'Gender, water and nutrition in India: An intersectional perspective', *Water Alternatives* 12(3): 930.
- Mutanda, G. W., & Nhamo, G. (2024). Gendered perspective on water security, rights and conflicts in sub-Saharan Africa: a systematic review. *Frontiers in Water*, 6, 1399415.
- National Water Resource Bill 2020.
https://washnigeria.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/National_Water_Resources_Bill_2020.pdf
- Ngene, B. U., Nwafor, C. O., Bamigboye, G. O., Ogbiye, A. S., Ogundare, J. O., & Akpan, V. E. (2021). Assessment of water resources development and exploitation in Nigeria: A review of integrated water resources management approach. *Heliyon*, 7(1), e05955. Elsevier.
- Ngoran, S. D., Dogah, K. E., & Xue, X. (2015). Assessing the impacts of climate change on water resources: The Sub-Saharan Africa perspective. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development* (6) 185–193. Available online at: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/234646812.pdf>
- United Nations, 2016. Report of the inter-agency and expert group on sustainable development Goal indicators (E/ CN.3/2016/2/Rev.1).
- Novovic, G. (2023). Gender mainstreaming 2.0: emergent gender equality agendas under Sustainable Development Goals. *Third World Quarterly*, 44(5), 1058–1076.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2174848>

Nunoo, I. K., Klug, T., Plutshack, V., Agradi, M., Appiah, S., & Saparapa, R. (2025). Who has power over policy? The political economy of Kenya's 2019 gender policy in energy access. *Energy Research & Social Science*, 127, 104201. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S2214629625002828>

Nwogu, M. I. O., & Okonkwo, A. N. (2023). Cultural and legislative constraints militating against women's rights in Nigeria: The way forward for a more inclusive protection. *Nnamdi Azikiwe University Journal of International Law and Jurisprudence*, 14(1), 42-53.

Örsel, I. B. (2024). The gap between policy and action on gender mainstreaming. *Political Science Today*, 4(3), 10-10.

Shehu, B.; Nazim, F. (2022). Clean Water and Sanitation for All: Study on SDGs 6.1 and 6.2 Targets with State Policies and Interventions in Nigeria. *Environ. Sci. Proc.* 2022, 15, 71. <https://doi.org/10.3390/environsciproc2022015071>

Singh, S., Shrestha, K., Hamal, M., & Prakash, A. (2020). Perform or wither: role of water users' associations in municipalities of Nepal. *Water Policy*, 22(S1), 90-106.

Sultana, F. (2020) 'Embodied intersectionalities of urban citizenship: water, infrastructure, and gender in the global South', *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 110: 1407–24.

Tildesley, R. (2023). Transforming academic research? Resistances to gender mainstreaming implementation in universities. *European Journal of Women's Studies*, 30(4), 486-501.

UNEP-DHI, GWP and UN Women, 2025. Mainstreaming gender equality in water resources management: Global status and 7 pathways to progress.

Walby, S. (2005). Gender mainstreaming: Productive tensions in theory and practice. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 12(3), 321-343.

Appendix 1: List of Stakeholders interviewed

Interview Location	Institution	Stakeholder Type	Gender of interviewee(s)
Abuja- FCT	Federal Ministry of Water Resources	Government	Men and women
Abuja	Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development	Government	Men and women
Abuja	FemiWash	CSO/Gender and Water Expert	Woman
Oyo State	Water Corporation of Oyo State	Government	Women
Oyo State	Oyo State Ministry of Women Affairs	Government	Men and women
Oyo State	Oyo State Rural Water Supply and Sanitation (RUWASSA)	Government	Men and Women
Oyo State	Environmental Conflict Mediation and Women Development Initiative	CSO/ Expert	Women
Nasarawa State	Nasarawa State Water Board, under State Ministry of Water Resources	Government	Men and Women
Nasarawa State	Nasarawa State Ministry of Women Affairs	Government	Men and Women
Oyo State	Centre for Enterprise Development and Action Research	CSO/ Gender	Woman
Nasarawa State	Young Men Christian Association (YMCA)	Government	Man



About CGIAR

CGIAR is a global research partnership for a food-secure future. CGIAR science is dedicated to transforming food, land, and water systems in a climate crisis. Its research is carried out by 13 CGIAR Centers/Alliances in close collaboration with hundreds of partners, including national and regional research institutes, civil society organizations, academia, development organizations and the private sector. www.cgiar.org

To learn more about this and other Science Programs in the CGIAR Research Portfolio, please visit <https://www.cgiar.org/cgiar-research-portfolio-2025-2030/>

