

Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection



Promoting Faith and Justice

POLICY BRIEF

THE EFFICACY OF ZAMBIA'S CLIMATE CHANGE AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY FRAMEWORKS

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For the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection**

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Acronyms

HDI	Human Development Index
NAP	National Adaptation Plan
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution.
NGGS	National Green Growth Strategy
NHDR	National Human Development Report NHDR
UNDP	United Nation Development Programme

1. INTRODUCTION

This policy brief evaluates the efficacy of Zambia’s policy and legal frameworks governing climate change and environmental protection, conducted in response to the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection’s terms of reference for research supporting their Community Action on Climate Change Adaptation and Environmental Management project. The policy brief highlights Zambia’s key policies, plans and regulation that governs climate change and environmental protection; such as the National Policy on Climate Change (2016), Environmental Management Act (2011), Forestry Act (2015), Water Resources Management Act (2011), Renewable Energy Policy and Strategy, international commitments including the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, National Adaptation Plan (NAP), National Green Growth Strategy (NGGS) and the institutional framework comprising various government agencies. Additionally, the assessment analyses the Climate Change Gender Action Plan (2019) as a critical cross-cutting instrument.



Credit: Bernard Mwaba, JCTR - Image of a tree captured in Lwatembo, Western Province, Zambia

Zambia is among vulnerable countries from Sub-Saharan Africa that is grappling with increased impacts of climate change and variability, which act as a major threat multiplier across multiple sectors, ultimately, hindering progress towards achieving national economic growth and resilience building. The threat multiplier effects of climate change translate into a complex interplay of vulnerabilities, including a decline in agricultural production, slow economic growth, increased vulnerability, poverty and inequality, forced displacement caused by heavy floods and severe drought, food insecurity, water scarcity and high crime levels among others. Climate change is projected to cause an increase in average

temperatures in Zambia and a decline in rainfall, particularly in the southern and western regions. The country experiences high rainfall variability, which climate change is expected to exacerbate, resulting in likely higher frequency and intensity of already reoccurring extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods. (Mean annual temperature in the country has already increased by 1.3°C since 1960, at an average rate of 0.29°C per decade).

As a signatory to the Paris Agreement on climate change and committed to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, Zambia has developed a number of policies, plans, strategies and legal frameworks aimed at addressing the negative impacts of climate change and promoting environmental protection. However, questions remain about the effectiveness of these policies, plans and frameworks in delivering tangible outcomes, particularly for vulnerable communities who bear the greatest burden of climate impacts and environmental threats.

According to the recent UNDP report (NHDR 2025), Zambia's Human Development Index (HDI) can be improved by 1% by 2030 and by 3% by 2050 through the implementation of existing policies, principally the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and the National Green Growth Strategy (NGGS) with significant gains in life expectancy, education, and income.

1.1 Objectives

1.1.1 General Objective

To produce a comprehensive policy brief assessing the efficacy of Zambia's policy and legal frameworks on climate change and environmental protection.

1.1.2 Specific Objectives

- Assess the policy and legal frameworks governing climate change and environmental protection in Zambia.
- Examine the effectiveness of these frameworks in achieving their intended outcomes
- Analyse challenges and gaps in policy enforcement and implementation.
- Provide strategic recommendations for enhancing the implementation and enforcement of climate change and environmental policies.
- Identify opportunities for strengthening community engagement in climate policy processes

2. METHODOLOGY

This assessment employed a mixed-methods approach combining desktop research with stakeholder consultation and field observations. The analysis utilized a structured Excel-based Policy Review Tool to systematically evaluate key frameworks across multiple dimensions including objectives, legal mandates, institutional clarity, gender responsiveness, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, and alignment with international obligations.

3. KEY FINDINGS

3.1 Policy Analysis

This comprehensive assessment reveals that Zambia has developed a robust foundation of climate and environmental policies demonstrating strong alignment with international commitments and recognition of national development priorities. The National Policy on Climate Change, updated Nationally Determined Contribution, Environmental Management Act, and supporting frameworks provide a comprehensive architecture for climate action. However, significant gaps exist between policy intent and implementation reality. The absence of legal backing through dedicated Climate Change legislation, fragmented institutional coordination, limited budget allocation, weak monitoring systems, and insufficient community engagement mechanisms significantly reduce the effectiveness of these frameworks in delivering tangible outcomes for vulnerable communities.

3.2 Critical Success Factors

Legal and Institutional Foundation: Success requires comprehensive Climate Change legislation providing clear institutional mandates, coordination mechanisms, and enforcement authority. Central coordination through a dedicated Climate Change Commission or Authority is essential for reducing fragmentation and improving policy coherence.

Financial Sustainability: Sustainable climate action requires diversified financing including dedicated government budget allocations, innovative financing mechanisms, and reduced dependence on donor funding. Integration of climate considerations into national budgeting and fiscal planning processes is critical. The budget allocation for Zambia's Green Economy & Climate Change Program (Program 2156) under the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment shows a steady allocation of approximately ZMW 330.7 million in 2022 and 2023, a sharp increase to ZMW 451.35 million in 2024, and a significant reduction to ZMW 135.19 million in 2025. The spike in 2024 likely reflects major project investments, while the 2025 drop suggests possible fiscal reprioritization or the completion of specific projects.

Community Engagement and Ownership: Meaningful community participation through formal mechanisms, integration of traditional knowledge and governance structures, and capacity building for local-level climate governance are essential for effective implementation and sustainable outcomes.

Institutional Capacity and Coordination: Enhanced technical capacity across government levels, effective coordination mechanisms, and robust monitoring and evaluation systems are fundamental for translating policy into practice and achieving measurable outcomes.

3.3 Transformation Pathway

Immediate Priorities: The most urgent priority is enacting comprehensive Climate Change legislation providing legal foundation for effective implementation. Simultaneously, establishing interim coordination mechanisms and beginning systematic capacity building across government levels can lay groundwork for enhanced effectiveness.

Medium-term Development: Once legal frameworks are established, focus should shift to operationalizing coordination mechanisms, establishing sustainable financing systems, and building comprehensive implementation capacity. Community engagement mechanisms must be developed and traditional governance structures integrated into formal processes.

Long-term Vision: The long-term vision encompasses climate-resilient communities with effective adaptation and mitigation systems, sustainable domestic financing for climate action, and integrated governance systems linking national policies with community-level implementation. Success will be measured by reduced climate vulnerability, enhanced adaptive capacity, and meaningful progress toward national and international climate commitments.

4. CONCLUSION

Zambia has a solid climate policy framework, but effective implementation requires strengthened legislation, improved coordination, sustainable financing, and enhanced institutional and community capacity. Prioritizing inclusive participation especially of vulnerable communities is essential. Scaling up proven community-based models, such as those from the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection's Community Action project, can support more responsive and impactful climate governance.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made;

- *Government:* Fast-track Climate Change Act with strong community participation; establish dedicated and transparent climate financing; strengthen coordination and institutional capacity; and formalize inclusive community decision-making in climate governance.
- *Development Partners:* Support climate legal and institutional reforms; align funding with national systems and priorities; invest in community and traditional authority capacity; and help develop sustainable domestic climate finance mechanisms.
- *Civil Society:* Advocate for strong climate legislation and accountability; build community capacity for engagement and implementation; monitor government performance; and facilitate knowledge exchange between communities and formal institutions.
- *Traditional Leaders:* Strengthen customary natural resource governance; actively participate in climate policy processes; build partnerships with government and civil society; and mobilize communities for climate resilience.
- *Private Sector:* Invest in climate-resilient infrastructure and technologies; develop inclusive green finance products; adopt strong corporate climate responsibility practices; and partner with communities and government for shared climate action.
- *Communities:* Engage in policy and implementation processes; strengthen traditional resource governance systems; build capacity to use climate information; and develop partnerships for technical and financial support.

About the Author

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About the Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR)

The Jesuit Centre for Theological Reflection (JCTR) is a faith-based social justice organisation established in 1988 and inspired by Catholic Social Teaching. JCTR promotes a just and equitable society through research, policy analysis, civic engagement, advocacy, and community action. The Centre works across thematic areas including social and economic justice, governance, climate justice, human rights, and value transformation to contribute to the well-being and dignity of all people in Zambia.



Disclaimer:

The views expressed in this policy brief are those of the JCTR and do not necessarily reflect the official position of its partners.

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