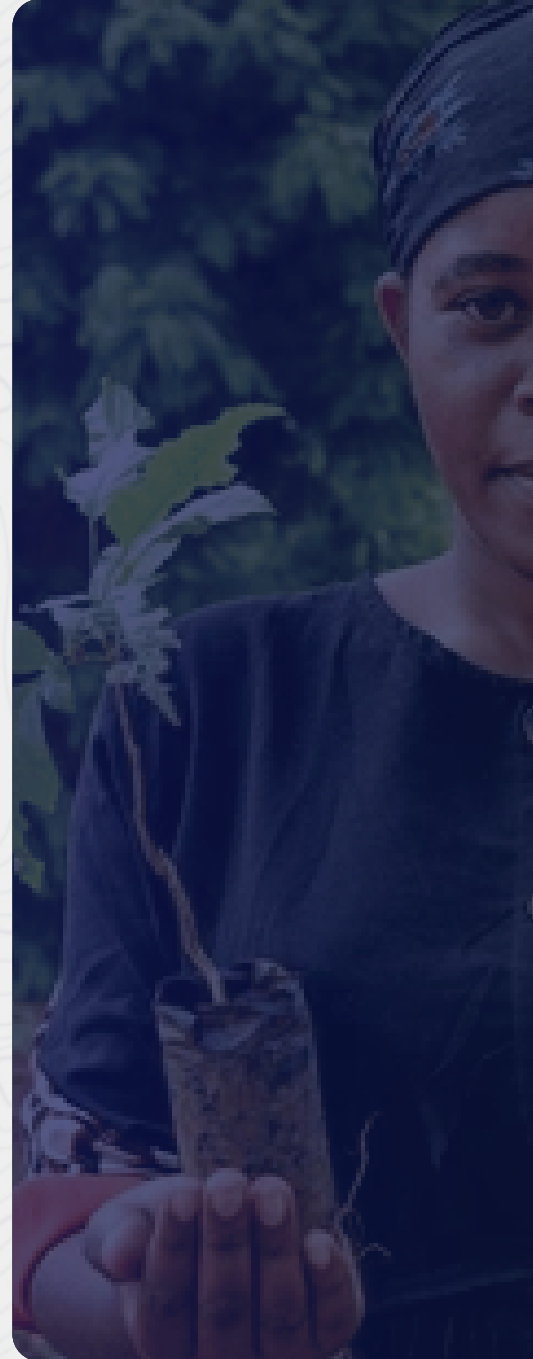


Policy Brief

Invisible Burdens, Hidden Costs:

Understanding Climate Change,
Unpaid Care Work, and Women's
Resilience in Kaduna and
Taraba States

August 2025



Executive Summary

Women in Kaduna and Taraba States are at the frontline of climate change, absorbing its shocks through unpaid care work. Erratic rainfall, recurrent floods, and prolonged droughts have intensified food insecurity, water scarcity, and disease outbreaks. The burden of compensating for these crises falls disproportionately on women and girls, whose caregiving responsibilities have deepened while institutional and policy responses remain inadequate.

Key findings show that:



Over two-thirds of women report increased unpaid care burdens, with many forced to cut meals, abandon paid work, or pull children out of school.



More than **85%** of households in both states report receiving no formal or informal support for care giving during climate shocks.



Income poverty is acute, especially in Kaduna where the **N10,000-N20,000** bracket dominates, leaving little capacity to adapt.

Women's participation in community decision-making is minimal, with over **84%** not attending meetings.



Harmful coping strategies such as reliance on charcoal and firewood sales, especially in Taraba drive deforestation and worsen climate risks.

Institutional frameworks exist but remain fragmented, poorly enforced, and largely blind to unpaid care work.

This brief calls for urgent action to integrate care work into climate adaptation policies, backed by the Four R Lens (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, Represent). Policy priorities include investment in clean energy and water systems, enforcement of environmental laws paired with affordable alternatives, expansion of social protection, and inclusion of women in decision-making.

Introduction

Climate change is increasingly recognized as a multidimensional crisis with far-reaching environmental, social, economic, and political consequences (Aliyu & Sheriffdeen, 2022). While its physical impacts such as droughts, floods, and heatwaves receive wide attention, the social dimensions are less explored, particularly the intersection with gender and the often-invisible labour of unpaid care work (Narayan, 2017).

In many parts of the Global South, particularly in rural and low-income contexts, climate disruptions compound pre-existing structural inequalities (Tripathi et al., 2022). Women carry the heaviest share of unpaid care work, water collection, food preparation, caregiving for children and the elderly, and household management labour that is indispensable to community survival yet systematically marginalised in policy and economic statistics (Musyoka et al., 2024; Oxfam, 2022). As climate risks escalate, these responsibilities intensify, creating a double burden that restricts women's opportunities for education, paid work, and participation in decision-making (Defina et al., 2024).

Globally, this link is gaining recognition. FAO's *The Unjust Climate* shows female-headed rural households lose more income than male-headed ones during floods and heatwaves (FAO, 2023). UN Women's *Climate Care Nexus* paper stresses that adaptation policies must integrate care burdens (UN Women, 2023a), while its *West Africa* brief highlights the urgent need for clean cooking solutions, time-saving infrastructure, and green skills for women to prevent exclusion from sustainable transitions (UN Women, 2023b). Yet less than 11% of countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) mention unpaid care, illustrating a global neglect of this critical nexus (UN Women, 2023c).

Theoretically, feminist political ecology and social reproduction theory provide critical lenses, showing how climate change reshapes social reproduction and places invisible costs on women's labour. Without embedding care-sensitive approaches into climate policy, adaptation will remain inequitable and incomplete.

Context

In Nigeria, climate change is already reshaping daily survival, particularly in states like Kaduna and Taraba. Erratic rainfall, prolonged droughts, and recurrent floods devastate agriculture, strain water systems, heighten disease risks, and destabilize households. Women, as primary caregivers, absorb these shocks through unpaid labour: walking longer distances to fetch water, rationing food, tending to sick family members, and compensating for falling household income with intensified domestic and care work.

Research in Kaduna and Taraba reveals how this burden is magnified by poverty, weak infrastructure, and limited institutional support. In both states, most households reported increased care demands and widespread reliance on harmful coping strategies such as cutting meals or withdrawing from income-generating activities. Focus group discussions illustrated how widows and divorced women face even steeper challenges, while many women turn to charcoal and firewood trading adaptation strategies that provide short-term income but drive deforestation and worsen climate risks.

Despite Nigeria's robust legal and policy frameworks, including anti-deforestation laws and state climate policies, enforcement remains weak and care-sensitive measures are absent. This disconnect mirrors global patterns: women in Kaduna and Taraba are doing the work of adaptation, but without policy recognition or systematic support, leaving household survival dependent on invisible, unpaid, and increasingly unsustainable labour.

Problem

The central problem is that climate change intensifies unpaid care burdens while institutional and policy frameworks fail to address them. Women in Kaduna and Taraba States are compensating for climate shocks with their time, energy, and health, rather than with state-supported systems or services. This invisible labour sustains households but undermines long-term resilience.

The impacts are multidimensional:

Households: Food insecurity worsens as women ration meals, cut diets, or exit paid work. Children, especially girls, are withdrawn from school to support caregiving.

Women's health: Increased care demands and water collection under harsh conditions strain physical and mental health, compounding risks during floods or heatwaves.

Economy: Income losses are amplified by time poverty, particularly in Kaduna where most households fall in very low-income brackets.

Environment: Coping strategies such as charcoal and firewood trading in Taraba accelerate deforestation and undermine Nigeria's climate commitments.

Governance: Despite multiple ministries and policies, unpaid care work remains unrecognised as infrastructure, resulting in fragmented and reactive interventions.

Unless care is recognised, reduced, and redistributed, climate adaptation will remain incomplete, deepen inequalities, and compromise both state and national resilience.

Evidence and Analysis

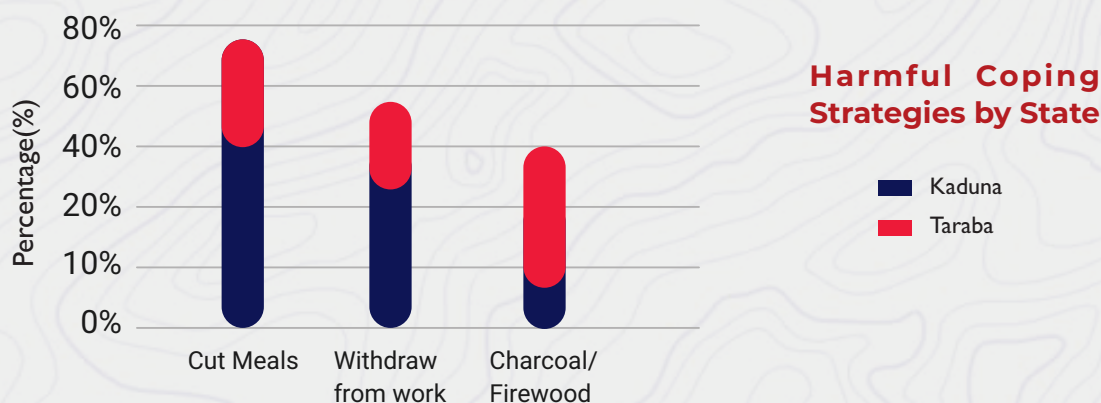
- 68.6% of women in Kaduna and 65.2% in Taraba reported increased care burdens.
- Over 85% in Taraba and 91% in Kaduna reported receiving no external support.
- More than 60% of households adopted harmful coping strategies such as cutting meals or withdrawing from income-generating work.
- Only 16% of women reported attending community meetings, reinforcing exclusion from decision-making.

Survey Findings:



Focus Group Discussions (FGDs):

- Women in Makera, Kaduna described stopping businesses due to lack of capital and climate stress, with widows and divorced women citing feeding as their biggest challenge.
- In Taraba (Kona and Kpantinapu), women reported rationing food and water; stopping paid work to fetch water, and increased caregiving during droughts and heatwaves. Many women rely on charcoal and firewood sales despite knowing the environmental risks.



Key Stakeholder Interviews:

Officials acknowledged weak enforcement of climate and environmental laws, lack of gender data, and absence of care-sensitive indicators in state climate policies.

- Both Kaduna and Taraba ministries highlighted overlapping mandates and poor coordination, limiting effective support.

Institutional and Policy Landscape:

- Kaduna: Strong frameworks such as the State Development Plan and Women's Economic Empowerment Policy exist but remain vague on unpaid care.
- Taraba: The Climate Change Policy and WASH Policy establish inclusive foundations but lack operationalisation of care-sensitive strategies.

Recommendations through the Four R Lens

A care-responsive climate adaptation agenda in Kaduna and Taraba requires embedding unpaid care into policy, planning, and investment priorities. The Four R Lens (Recognize, Reduce, Redistribute, and Represent) offers a framework for action:

Recognize

- Officially acknowledge unpaid care work as a form of climate infrastructure in both Kaduna and Taraba State Climate Change Policies.
- Incorporate care indicators into climate financing, monitoring, and reporting systems.
- Develop gender-disaggregated data systems to capture time use, caregiving responsibilities, and women's adaptation burdens.

Reduce

- Invest in labour-saving and time-saving infrastructure such as safe water systems, solar-powered boreholes, and clean cooking solutions (LPG, briquettes, solar cookstoves).
- Expand rural health infrastructure to address climate-linked diseases, reducing caregiving demands on women.
- Strengthen food security interventions (climate-smart agriculture, drought-resistant seeds, irrigation) to lessen the need for rationing meals.

Redistribute

- Introduce social protection programmes cash transfers, school feeding, health insurance targeted at vulnerable women caregivers, including widows, divorced women, and women with disabilities.
- Design public works programmes that include childcare, enabling women to participate without deepening their care burden.
- Foster partnerships with NGOs, religious systems (e.g., zakat), and community-based organisations to share responsibility for caregiving support.

Represent

- Foster partnerships with NGOs, religious systems (e.g., zakat), and community-based organisations to share responsibility for caregiving support.
- Build the leadership capacity of women's groups and cooperatives to advocate for care-sensitive adaptation.
- Establish feedback and accountability mechanisms so that women's voices directly influence state-level climate and development strategies.

The Four R lens

Recognize unpaid care work as climate infrastructure in Kaduna and Taraba State Climate Policies.

Redistribute responsibilities through social protection, public works with childcare, and gender-sensitive labour policies.

Reduce care burdens by investing in clean cooking, safe water systems, and climate-resilient health infrastructure.

Representation ensures women, especially widows, disabled, and low-income caregivers, participate meaningfully in adaptation planning.

Cross-Cutting Priorities

- **Green skills and alternative livelihoods:** Train women in renewable energy supply chains, agroforestry, and sustainable enterprises to transition away from charcoal and firewood trade.
- **Enforcement paired with alternatives:** Strengthen enforcement of anti-deforestation laws while ensuring women have access to affordable and viable clean energy sources.
- **Financing:** Allocate a dedicated percentage of state climate funds and donor programmes specifically for care-responsive adaptation.

Call to Action / Conclusion

Women in Kaduna and Taraba States are carrying the weight of climate adaptation on their shoulders, often at the cost of their health, livelihoods, and futures. Yet their contributions remain invisible in policy and planning. A care-responsive climate agenda that integrates women's unpaid labour into adaptation strategies is no longer optional; it is essential.

Policymakers, development partners, and civil society must act urgently to support women with clean energy, water systems, green skills, and inclusion in decision-making. Recognizing, reducing, redistributing, and representing care work is the pathway to sustainable resilience in Nigeria.

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