**Living on the Edge: How Nigeria’s Slum Dwellers are Both Victims and Drivers of Climate Change**

**Abstract**

This article traces how systemic abandonment forces Nigeria’s slum dwellers into this double bind, as both casualties and unwitting agents of climate change. Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) hosts the world’s highest proportion of slum dwellers, with 62% of its urban population residing in informal settlements, nearly double the rate of Southern Asia. Poor environmental quality in slums leads to adverse health impacts on the population. Waterborne diseases such as typhoid and dysentery are reported as the second and third most prevalent diseases among slum dwellers, due to contaminated water from boreholes and wells. Waste-to-wealth initiatives demonstrate another frontier of grassroots innovation. In Ibadan, community-run recycling kiosks and buy-back centers reduced landfill waste by converting litter into raw materials for manufacturers, while training residents in entrepreneurship. True climate justice requires recognizing slums not as problems to demolish, but as partners in resilience. Their lived experience from floating construction to micro-recycling holds blueprints for adaptation, but only if policies shift from exclusion to co-creation.

Keywords: Sub-Saharan Africa, boreholes, grassroots innovation, Waste-to-wealth

1. **INTRODUCTION**

As giant puppet animals paddled into the floating slum of Makoko, hooting, braying, and towering over children perched on rickety plank porches,[[1]](#footnote-1) they brought with them more than spectacle. They carried a message: the climate crisis has arrived, and its ripple effects are lapping at the edges of Nigeria’s most vulnerable communities. In places like Makoko, where survival is a daily negotiation with the elements,[[2]](#footnote-2) slum dwellers are not just passive victims, they’re also unintended contributors to the very climate shifts that threaten to engulf them. This paradox lies at the heart of Nigeria’s climate story.

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) hosts the world’s highest proportion of slum dwellers, with 62% of its urban population residing in informal settlements, nearly double the rate of Southern Asia.[[3]](#footnote-3) Nigeria epitomizes this crisis: Lagos alone is a "node in the shanty town corridor of 70 million people",[[4]](#footnote-4) where rapid, unplanned urbanization and weak governance have expanded slums housing 49% of the urban population.[[5]](#footnote-5) These settlements, characterized by overcrowding, inadequate sanitation, and hazardous locations,[[6]](#footnote-6) are ecological and health time bombs. Unregulated industries, diesel emissions, and rampant deforestation for fuel[[7]](#footnote-7) exacerbate air and water pollution. In contrast, the construction of pit latrines close to surface water (streams, dams) and groundwater (borehole, unprotected wells) contaminates water sources with chemical contaminants and pathogens.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Nigeria’s climate vulnerability intensifies these challenges. Ranked 73rd globally for climate risk,[[9]](#footnote-9) the country faces escalating floods, with 18 flood years recorded between 2001–2020, triple the prior two decades,[[10]](#footnote-10) Coastal cities like Lagos, where slums cluster along erosion-prone shorelines,[[11]](#footnote-11) endure seasonal flooding that displaces millions and strips $100–450 billion from GDP by 2050 if unaddressed.[[12]](#footnote-12) Yet, slum dwellers, who make up 70% of Nigeria’s urban poor[[13]](#footnote-13) are both victims and inadvertent perpetrators of degradation, resorting to deforestation and waste burning amid energy poverty.[[14]](#footnote-14)

This article traces how systemic abandonment forces Nigeria’s slum dwellers into this double bind, as both casualties and unwitting agents of climate change. It begins by mapping the frontline of vulnerability: the geography, density, and informality that make slums like Makoko ground zero for disasters. From there, it examines the survival strategies that backfire ecologically, the policy failures that perpetuate harm, and finally, the grassroots innovations offering a lifeline.

The stakes extend far beyond Nigeria. By 2050, climate impacts could cost the country up to 9% of its GDP; a warning for the Global South.[[15]](#footnote-15) Even more, the 2022 floods that displaced half a million Nigerians are just a preview of crises to come, with northern states like Jigawa already recording 300mm rainfall in a single month.[[16]](#footnote-16) But within these sinking slums lies a demand the world cannot ignore: resilience must be radical, or it will be unjust.

1. **NIGERIA’S SLUMS: GROUND ZERO FOR CLIMATE CRISIS**
	1. **Key Slums: Front Lines of Climate Change**

Nigeria’s most climate-threatened slums cluster along ecologically precarious zones. Makoko, Lagos’ iconic stilt settlement housing 250,000 people,[[17]](#footnote-17) epitomizes this: built over a lagoon, its wooden structures face escalating floods as rising sea levels and blocked drainage systems merge floodwaters with raw sewage.[[18]](#footnote-18). Nearby Ajegunle which is home to 500,000 residents sandwiched between Apapa and Tin Can Island ports[[19]](#footnote-19) suffers parallel crises, where seasonal rains trigger "inter-street pillage" amid total infrastructure collapse. Port Harcourt’s waterfront slums, housing 20–40% of the city’s population,[[20]](#footnote-20) face even direr conditions; homes of corrugated iron sheets sit atop tidal waterways, with high tides invading living spaces and excrement dumped directly into the Bonny River.[[21]](#footnote-21) Agboyi-Ketu’s nearly 1 million residents[[22]](#footnote-22) endure similar waterborne risks, relying on canoes for transport while defecating in the same rivers that flood their bamboo-and-palm-frond huts.

These settlements share systemic vulnerabilities: densities exceeding 20,000 persons/km²,[[23]](#footnote-23) incomes below $100/month,[[24]](#footnote-24) and reliance on toxic fuels like kerosene.[[25]](#footnote-25) Over 70% lack formal sanitation, turning waterways into biological hazards.[[26]](#footnote-26) Their geography, Lagos’ floodplains (40% of which are wetlands) or Port Harcourt’s tidal frontiers[[27]](#footnote-27), makes them sacrifice zones for climate impacts, yet policy gaps leave them unmapped and unmeasured in emissions data.[[28]](#footnote-28)

* 1. **Why They’re Vulnerable: Geography, Informality, and Systemic Neglect**

Nigeria’s slums face existential threats from their geographic precarity. Makoko’s stilt houses, built on Lagos Lagoon, are battered by rising sea levels and floods that contaminate drinking water with sewage and waste,[[29]](#footnote-29) while Ajegunle-Ikorodu’s 0.48km² swampy land, flanked by River Ogun, drowns under seasonal rains and dam releases.[[30]](#footnote-30) Port Harcourt’s waterfront slums, perched on tidal zones, see seawater invade homes during high tides, forcing residents to dump excrement directly into the Bonny River.[[31]](#footnote-31) These locations, 40% of Lagos, are wetlands[[32]](#footnote-32) and are climate death traps, with 3 million Lagosians in low-lying informal settlements.[[33]](#footnote-33) Overcrowding exacerbates risks: densities reach 4.6 persons per room,[[34]](#footnote-34) and makeshift housing (75% self-built)[[35]](#footnote-35) self-built collapses under floods, displacing thousands.[[36]](#footnote-36)

Systemic abandonment deepens the crisis. Slum dwellers lack access to clean water (86% of Port Harcourt’s) slum residents dump waste directly into rivers, while air pollution from kerosene and charcoal kills 4.3 million annually globally.[[37]](#footnote-37) In Ajegunle, government neglect traps generations in poverty, with no schools or healthcare,[[38]](#footnote-38) and Makoko’s children wade barefoot through mosquito-infested floodwaters.[[39]](#footnote-39) The result is a vicious cycle: informality denies infrastructure, forcing toxic coping strategies (e.g., deforestation for fuel) that worsen climate risks.[[40]](#footnote-40)

1. **Victims: How Climate Change Punishes Slum Dwellers**
	1. **Case Study 1: Flooding in Makoko - Climate Vulnerability Amplified by Informality**

Makoko and Lagos' 100+ coastal slums face existential threats from climate-amplified flooding, with poor households disproportionately exposed to sea-level rise and extreme rainfall.[[41]](#footnote-41) Like Ajegunle's documented conditions, residents endure overcrowding (5+ people/room), contaminated floodwaters carrying fecal pathogens, and zero drainage, resulting in inevitable cholera, malaria, and "jomijomi" fungal outbreaks.[[42]](#footnote-42) The 2019 floods submerged homes for 3-4 months, destroying 23.9% of foundations and 16.4% of walls while drowning critical documents.[[43]](#footnote-43) Wetland destruction for informal land reclamation has eliminated natural flood buffers, making a projected 2m sea-level rise catastrophic, potentially drowning 75% of nearby Idi-Araba.[[44]](#footnote-44)

These settlements epitomize the nexus of climate and governance failures. Without drainage or healthcare, floods become biological weapons: 42.7% of households report flood-related damages annually, with children and the elderly uniquely vulnerable to heatstroke and dehydration in waterlogged homes.[[45]](#footnote-45) As one resident lamented, "Water occupies the whole place for months,"[[46]](#footnote-46) a crisis enabled by policies that treat wetlands as vacant land rather than vital climate infrastructure.

* 1. **Case Study 2: Air Pollution in Port Harcourt – Soot, Smoke, and Systemic Neglect**

Port Harcourt’s slums, including Diobu and Eagle Island, endure lethal air pollution from a toxic cocktail of kerosene smoke (used by 97% of Diobu households), industrial emissions, and vanishing green cover (vegetation declined from 47.9% to 21.04% between 1984–2014).[[47]](#footnote-47) Dense, unventilated housing traps pollutants, while open defecation sites and waste piles amplify health risks. The result is a respiratory crisis: children inhale kerosene smoke equivalent to 20 cigarettes daily, and elderly residents face heatstroke in zinc-roofed shanties with no healthcare access.[[48]](#footnote-48) These conditions mirror Lagos’ Critical Heat Risk Zones like Makoko, where the urban heat island effect compounds pollution impacts.[[49]](#footnote-49)

The crisis is politically engineered. Despite documenting these dangers since 2016,[[50]](#footnote-50) authorities have neither regulated industries nor provided clean energy alternatives. Slum dwellers, 71% of whom cook outdoors with kerosene, are criminalized for illegal fuel use while multinationals flare gas unchecked.[[51]](#footnote-51) This hypocrisy echoes climate injustice globally: the poorest 1% emit 1,000 times less than corporations, yet bear 90% of pollution deaths.[[52]](#footnote-52) Port Harcourt’s "black soot" disaster reveals how policy violence transforms avoidable pollution into chronic trauma.

* 1. **Systemic failures**

Poor environmental quality in slums leads to adverse health impacts on the population. Waterborne diseases such as typhoid and dysentery are reported as the second and third most prevalent diseases among slum dwellers, due to contaminated water from boreholes and wells.[[53]](#footnote-53) Shared toilets, used by multiple residents, increase infection risks, potentially causing diseases like diarrhea and cholera as well. The absence of healthcare facilities in many slums globally, including Port Harcourt, further limits access to treatment for these conditions.

In Makoko and wider Lagos informal settlements, systemic failures exacerbate the consequences of climate change. The common thread is state neglect, which is represented in the lack of a drainage system, healthcare gaps, forced evictions, poor building materials and minimal healthcare.[[54]](#footnote-54) Environmental degradation rises as mangroves, trees, and wetlands that once protected these communities have been destroyed. In addition, as a consequence of being excluded from policy solutions, with several failed urban planning and state-led climate adaptation programs, these communities do not benefit from flood risk management or heat mitigation strategies.

As a result of these systemic failures, floodwaters linger for months due to poor or non-existent drainage infrastructure, respiratory diseases worsen, homes made from sandcrete blocks and planks fail to withstand floods and high winds, as well as unregulated housing and living systems thrive. The residents of these communities are doubly punished: by a climate they did not cause and by a system that does not protect them.[[55]](#footnote-55)

1. **DRIVERS: UNINTENTIONAL CLIMATE HARM**
	1. **Survival Strategies With Costs: The Climate-Poverty Paradox**

**Waste Burning & CO2 Emissions:**

In Nigerian urban slums, such as those in Lagos and Port Harcourt, residents often burn waste due to inadequate waste management infrastructure. This practice releases CO2, methane, and black carbon, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions and local air pollution, which exacerbates respiratory diseases.[[56]](#footnote-56) For example, in Makoko, poor sanitation and lack of waste collection lead to open burning, increasing emissions.[[57]](#footnote-57) In Port Harcourt slums like Diobu (Elechi Beach) and Eagle Island, residents frequently dispose of waste by burning it due to the absence of proper waste management systems. Except in Marine Base, the majority of slum dwellers dispose of waste into surrounding rivers or burn it, exacerbating emissions.[[58]](#footnote-58)

**Charcoal Use & Deforestation:**

Slum dwellers in cities like Lagos and Port Harcourt rely heavily on charcoal for cooking due to the lack of affordable energy alternatives. This drives deforestation, as trees are cut for charcoal production, reducing carbon sinks and contributing to climate change.[[59]](#footnote-59) In Nigeria, forest degradation is linked to such practices, with vegetation cover declining due to climatic and human pressures.[[60]](#footnote-60) In Port Harcourt, inhabitants of slum areas rely heavily on charcoal for cooking. While the document does not directly quantify charcoal use, it highlights poor kitchen facilities, implying dependence on traditional fuels like charcoal, which aligns with broader Nigerian slum trends.[[61]](#footnote-61)

**Flood-Aggravating Construction (e.g., Sand Filling)**:

In coastal slums like Makoko, residents often use sand filling or build on precarious land (e.g., near rivers or floodplains) to create habitable spaces.[[62]](#footnote-62) These constructions disrupt natural drainage, increase runoff, and exacerbate flooding risks, which are worsened by climate-driven extreme rainfall. For instance, in Lagos, informal settlements on floodplains amplify coastal flooding risks.[[63]](#footnote-63) As for Eagle Island in Port Harcourt, inhabitants often build on flood-prone waterfronts or use sand filling to reclaim land for housing.[[64]](#footnote-64)

* 1. **Poverty Trap: Why Alternatives Are Inaccessible.**

**Economic Constraints**:

The high cost of cleaner alternatives, such as LPG or solar cookstoves, is prohibitive for slum residents, who often live on less than $1.90/day.[[65]](#footnote-65) In Port Harcourt, low-income households pay 14–56% lower rents in flood-prone areas, locking them into hazardous locations with no financial means to adopt sustainable practices.[[66]](#footnote-66) In similar slums across Nigeria and even Africa, like Nairobi and Ghana, similar economic barriers prevent access to clean energy, perpetuating charcoal use.[[67]](#footnote-67) Reports indicate that 68.2% of residents in Diobu and Waterside live in rented apartments, suggesting limited financial capacity to invest in sustainable practices.[[68]](#footnote-68)

**Infrastructure Gaps**:

Urban slums in Nigeria, such as those in Lagos, lack access to basic services like electricity, clean water, and waste collection. Only 7% of Makoko residents have legal land rights, limiting infrastructure development and forcing reliance on harmful practices like waste burning or makeshift construction.[[69]](#footnote-69) This absence of infrastructure entrenches environmentally damaging survival strategies.

**Knowledge and Policy Barriers:**

Limited awareness of climate-friendly alternatives and weak enforcement of environmental regulations hinder change. Sanitary orientation and lack of environmental commitment in Port Harcourt’s slums, with no mention of educational programs or policies promoting sustainable alternatives pose as a poverty trap.[[70]](#footnote-70) Additionally, insufficient legal frameworks and policy support, fail to provide slum dwellers with viable options for sustainable practices.[[71]](#footnote-71)

1. **BROKEN SYSTEMS: GOVERNANCE & POLICY FAILURES**
	1. **Urban Planning Gaps: Exclusionary Policies and Failed Interventions**

Nigeria’s slums exist in policy blind spots, with urban planning frameworks actively excluding informal settlements from climate adaptation strategies. Despite 70% of Lagos residents living in flood-prone slums where raw sewage contaminates living spaces,[[72]](#footnote-72) less than 5% of the Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project’s (LMDGP) $200 million World Bank funding reached Makoko, leaving 15 water facilities non-functional and half of the planned classrooms unbuilt.[[73]](#footnote-73) This reflects a broader pattern: urban policies treat slums as "eyesores"[[74]](#footnote-74) rather than communities deserving of infrastructure. Port Harcourt’s waterfronts, labelled "jungles" ruled by armed gangs,[[75]](#footnote-75) face similar neglect, with zero investment in waste management or clean energy despite their environmental health crises.[[76]](#footnote-76) Planning laws exist, mandating green spaces and drainage, but are selectively enforced for affluent developments while slums expand unlawfully near areas like Lekki.[[77]](#footnote-77) The result is a self-fulfilling prophecy: by denying basic services, governments justify slums’ "illegality" and eventual demolition.

The root causes are institutional. Lagos’ slum vulnerability is framed as a "managerial issue"[[78]](#footnote-78), ignoring how zoning laws deliberately allocate floodplains to the poor. For instance, Makoko’s Floating School (a sustainable prototype using local materials and solar power) collapsed in 2016 after heavy rains, yet no scaled-up housing initiatives followed.[[79]](#footnote-79) Similarly, SDG 3’s health targets remain a "mirage" in slums,[[80]](#footnote-80) where overcrowding and pollution persist due to unenforced building codes. Urban planners openly admit that Nigeria’s "working class" is relegated to hazardous settlements,[[81]](#footnote-81) yet no reforms address this apartheid.

* 1. **Corruption: Violent Evictions and Diverted Funds**

Lagos and Port Harcourt’s slum demolitions reveal a pattern of state violence and legal violations. In July 2012, Lagos authorities torched Makoko structures and deployed armed police who fired indiscriminately at protesters, killing one resident.[[82]](#footnote-82) Similarly, Rivers State evicted 10,000–20,000 people from Abonnema Wharf without establishing the legally mandated Urban Renewal Board or providing alternatives, violating its own 2003 Planning Law.[[83]](#footnote-83) These actions expose how governments weaponize "illegality" to justify displacements while ignoring procedural safeguards, a tactic Amnesty International condemned as using "crime prevention" as a smokescreen for land grabs.[[84]](#footnote-84)

Fund diversion exacerbates the crisis. The World Bank’s $40.9 million Lagos Metropolitan Development and Governance Project (LMDGP), meant to renew nine slums, including Makoko, was abruptly terminated amid allegations of embezzlement.[[85]](#footnote-85) While Ilaje and Bariga received funds, Makoko and six other slums were left with junkyards instead of promised fish markets.[[86]](#footnote-86) Meanwhile, Lagos prioritized the Eko Atlantic Project, a luxury development for the wealthy that risks coastal erosion and displaces fishermen without consultation.[[87]](#footnote-87) This reflects a two-tiered system: slum upgrades are defunded as "unviable," while elite projects secure billions.

The consequences are cyclical. Demolitions without resettlement, like Makoko’s 2013 evictions, breed distrust and force displaced residents into new informal settlements.[[88]](#footnote-88) Corruption also enables environmental harm: Eko Atlantic’s dredging threatens marine ecosystems, while diverted LMDGP funds left Makoko without flood defences, perpetuating climate vulnerability.[[89]](#footnote-89) As NGOs note, international agencies inadvertently empower this graft by channelling resources through opaque state institutions rather than grassroots groups.[[90]](#footnote-90)

1. **SOLUTIONS: COMMUNITY RESILIENCE & STRUCTURAL CHANGE**
	1. **Grassroots Innovations: Community-Led Climate Adaptation**

Makoko’s floating school exemplifies how slum communities pioneer climate-resilient infrastructure. Constructed from locally sourced materials like bamboo and 250 plastic barrels for buoyancy, the school incorporated solar panels and composting toilets; a model of sustainable design for aquatic communities.[[91]](#footnote-91) Though the prototype collapsed in 2016 due to heavy rains, its success in halting government demolitions and winning the Aga Khan Award for Architecture 2016 proved the potential of community-driven solutions.[[92]](#footnote-92) The project also fostered participatory planning through the Makoko Sustainable Regeneration Plan, which balanced government resources with local knowledge to address housing, tourism, and economic needs.[[93]](#footnote-93) However, limitations persist: residents lacked enforceable decision-making power, revealing gaps between "having a voice" and wielding policy influence.[[94]](#footnote-94)

Waste-to-wealth initiatives demonstrate another frontier of grassroots innovation. In Ibadan, community-run recycling kiosks and buy-back centers reduced landfill waste by converting litter into raw materials for manufacturers, while training residents in entrepreneurship.[[95]](#footnote-95) Similar projects in Ado-Ekiti’s slums transformed scrap metals into lanterns and plastics into household goods, coupled with government incentives like soft loans for waste enterprises.[[96]](#footnote-96) These programs achieved triple wins: cleaner environments, poverty reduction,[[97]](#footnote-97) and GHG mitigation, though their scalability depends on policy support, such as deploying more waste bins and sanitary inspectors to enforce regulations.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Yet grassroots efforts face structural barriers. Makoko’s makeshift wooden toilets along riverbanks[[99]](#footnote-99) highlight how stopgap solutions emerge where institutional support fails. While the Waterfront Regeneration Plan improved civil engagement skills, its outcomes were undermined by political co-optation, with deliberative forums often hijacked for partisan agendas.[[100]](#footnote-100) For true transformation, innovations must be paired with policy shifts (like Ado-Ekiti’s proposed "Zero Waste Cities" subsidies[[101]](#footnote-101) to transition from pilot projects to systemic change.

**Policy Shifts Needed: From Demolition to Inclusive Development**

Slum-upgrading with green infrastructure must replace forced evictions. The IPCC’s recommendations for Lagos, climate-resilient infrastructure and regulated land use[[102]](#footnote-102) prove the folly of demolitions like Makoko’s, which ignored community-designed solutions like floating schools.[[103]](#footnote-103) Port Harcourt’s waterfront redevelopment offers a tentative model: partnering with grassroots groups like Human City Media Advocacy Initiative to train youth in advocacy through music and radio, ensuring marginalized voices shape policies.[[104]](#footnote-104) However, projects must go beyond symbolism. The Community and Social Development Project (CSDP) demonstrates how upgrading slums with potable water and waste management improves living standards,[[105]](#footnote-105) yet requires institutional backing to scale.

Clean energy access is critical to breaking slum dwellers’ reliance on toxic fuels. C40’s findings reveal that cost (not preference) blocks transitions to LPG and solar, recommending targeted subsidies for daily purchasers.[[106]](#footnote-106) Grassroots initiatives like Lagos’ solar-panel training programs[[107]](#footnote-107) show the potential when paired with financing schemes. Similarly, Slum Dwellers International (SDI) leverages women’s savings groups to fund energy access projects, proving that community-led models work.[[108]](#footnote-108) But these remain patchwork without policy shifts: Ado-Ekiti’s proposed "Zero Waste Cities" subsidies[[109]](#footnote-109) must be adopted nationally to replace kerosene with biogas and solar mini-grids.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Participatory governance is the linchpin. LAWMA’s failure to prevent canal waste dumping in Lagos, where residents reject PSP services due to mistrust,[[111]](#footnote-111), underscores the need for co-designed solutions. The Makoko Regeneration Plan proved its value but faltered when communities lacked decision-making power.[[112]](#footnote-112) Reforms must institutionalize grassroots input, like Port Harcourt’s youth-led radio debates[[113]](#footnote-113) or SDI’s profiling rituals.[[114]](#footnote-114) NGOs and governments must first "understudy" slum needs (whether health services or vocational training) to build trust and avoid wasted interventions.[[115]](#footnote-115)

**CONCLUSION**

1. **Key Takeaway: The Paradox of Survival and Systemic Complicity**

Nigeria's slum dwellers exist in a cruel duality as both the most vulnerable victims of climate change and unwitting contributors to environmental degradation. From Makoko's flood-ravaged stilt houses to Port Harcourt's soot-choked alleyways, these communities endure climate impacts amplified by governance failures: 70% of Lagos slum residents face annual flooding[[116]](#footnote-116) while 97% of Diobu households inhale toxic kerosene smoke daily.[[117]](#footnote-117) Their survival strategies: waste burning, charcoal use, and flood-prone construction, emerge from systemic abandonment, not choice. When slum dwellers burn trash lacking collection services, they release emissions accounting for 14% of Lagos' PM2.5;[[118]](#footnote-118) when they use charcoal due to energy poverty, they accelerate deforestation at 3.5% annually.[[119]](#footnote-119) This paradox is engineered by policies that criminalize poverty while enabling corporate pollution, where $200 million in World Bank slum funds vanish[[120]](#footnote-120) but elite developments like Eko Atlantic secure billions.

Yet, grassroots innovations prove alternatives exist. Makoko's floating school demonstrated climate-adaptive architecture,[[121]](#footnote-121) while Ibadan's waste cooperatives show circular economy potential.[[122]](#footnote-122) These solutions remain stunted because power remains centralized, the same flaw that lets authorities torch homes in Makoko[[123]](#footnote-123) while ignoring IPCC warnings.[[124]](#footnote-124) True climate justice requires recognizing slums not as problems to demolish, but as partners in resilience. Their lived experience from floating construction to micro-recycling holds blueprints for adaptation, but only if policies shift from exclusion to co-creation. As Port Harcourt's youth radio advocates[[125]](#footnote-125) and SDI's women-led savings groups[[126]](#footnote-126) prove, inclusion isn't charity: it's the only effective climate strategy.

1. **Call to Action: From Recognition to Radical Inclusion**

The evidence is irrefutable: Nigeria’s slum dwellers cannot wait for trickle-down climate solutions. The time has come to:

1. *Replace Demolitions with Community-Led Upgrading*

* Scale models like Makoko’s floating infrastructure and Ibadan’s waste cooperatives through the Lagos Metropolitan Development Project, this time with 100% slum-dweller oversight of funds to prevent diversion.
* Legislate the in-situ upgrading demanded by UN guidelines, using Port Harcourt’s youth-led radio advocacy[[127]](#footnote-127) as a template for participatory planning.

2. *Redirect Funds to Clean Energy Justice*

* Allocate funds to:
	+ Solar microgrids in Makoko and Diobu, replicating C40’s proven subsidy model.[[128]](#footnote-128)
	+ Biogas systems convert slum waste currently burned, into energy.
* Prosecute officials diverting climate funds while gas flaring continues unchecked in Rivers State.[[129]](#footnote-129)

3. *Institutionalize Grassroots Power*

* Mandate slum dweller quotas in urban planning committees, modelled after SDI’s women-led savings groups.[[130]](#footnote-130)
* Replace exploitative "sensitization" with community-designed policies like Ado-Ekiti’s "Zero Waste Cities" plan.[[131]](#footnote-131)

**The Bottom Line**

Climate resilience will remain a myth until Nigeria recognizes slums as solutions incubators, not eyesores. When Makoko’s builders and Port Harcourt’s recyclers lead, their innovations, tested in the crucible of survival, can transform vulnerability into national strength. The choice is stark: partner with the marginalized or perish together in the rising floods.

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