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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Evaluating the Role of Local Governments in Climate Governance in Sub-Saharan Africa:

A Comparative Study of Mafikeng City (South Africa) and Kisumu City (Kenya)

Stephen Balaka Opiyo, North-West University
Roelof P. Burger, North-West University
Godwin Opinde, Kenyatta University
Niké Wesch, North-West University

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Introduction

Urban areas in Africa are considered one of the most vulnerable and, hence, disproportionately affected by climate change impacts. Against this backdrop, local governments in Sub-Saharan Africa have increasingly been tasked with formulating and implementing climate action plans aimed at mitigating emissions and enhancing urban resilience. However, the effectiveness of the governance structures and strategies of these local governments in addressing urban climate challenges and promoting resilience remains poorly understood. Therefore, with a view to bridging this gap, this study focuses on the comparative climate governance approaches of Mafikeng, South Africa, and Kisumu, Kenya—two representative Sub-Saharan African cities of similar sizes facing distinct yet comparable urban climate challenges.

Objectives

The study assesses and compares the effectiveness of the governance structures and strategies employed by the local governments of Mafikeng City and Kisumu City in addressing urban climate challenges and promoting equitable resilience. It aims to:

- To analyze the institutional frameworks established by local governments in Mafikeng and Kisumu for climate governance.
- To assess the effectiveness of climate action plans implemented by the local governments in addressing urban climate challenges in both cities.
- To identify key success factors and barriers faced by the local governments in implementing climate initiatives effectively and equitably
- To evaluate stakeholder engagement in climate governance processes and its impact on policy outcomes.
- To recommend strategies for enhancing the effectiveness and equity of climate action plans in both urban contexts, based on best practices and lessons learned from the study.

Methodology

A mixed-methods approach was employed, combining quantitative and qualitative data collection techniques, thereby ensuring both breadth and depth in understanding environmental governance practices. In each city, quantitative data were collected through questionnaires administered to governmental employees working in institutions directly involved in environmental management, whereas qualitative insights were obtained through key informant interviews with the heads of governmental and non-governmental institutions and local structures. Data collection comprised 14 interviews and 15 questionnaires in Mafikeng, and 18 interviews and 21 questionnaires in Kisumu. Quantitative data analysis comprised descriptive statistics, Mann–Whitney U test (to examine cross-city differences in perceptions), Chi-square tests (to examine within-city predictors of perceptions), and ordinal logistic regression (to examine determinants of the perceived

effectiveness of climate actions). Qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis to provide deeper insights into institutional dynamics and systemic challenges.

Key Findings

Legislative and Institutional Frameworks for Climate Actions

Kisumu city has a strong climate change framework with clear laws, financing mechanisms, and accountability structures that enable coordinated action from national to county and community levels through ward climate change committees. In contrast, Mafikeng city lacks a dedicated local legislative framework and relies on broader national policies, as the new climate change national law has yet to be cascaded to the provincial level for localization. This gap limits Mafikeng's ability to coordinate, finance, and monitor climate action effectively.

Demographic and Institutional Profiles Shaping Governance Approaches

Mafikeng's workforce is characterized by higher education, experience, and gender balance, providing strong foundations for evidence-based planning and inclusive governance. However, it skews older, which may hinder adaptability. Although lacking gender balance, Kisumu benefits from a younger, technically diverse, and project-oriented workforce, supporting innovative, participatory, and community-embedded climate responses.

Shared Climate Priorities and Role of Local Governments in Building Resilience

Both cities prioritize flooding as a critical climate risk, highlighting the need for resilient drainage systems, early warning mechanisms, and spatial planning to avoid high-risk areas. Water insecurity presents differently: Mafikeng faces supply challenges from drought and heatwaves, while Kisumu contends with lake level rise threatening the lakefront ecosystem and livelihoods. Heat-related risks are perceived differently: Kisumu flags urban heat islands as a growing concern, whereas Mafikeng emphasizes heatwaves, reflecting differences in urban form, hydrology, and climate exposure. There is strong consensus across both cities that municipalities have a critical role to play in building urban climate resilience, though the strength of that conviction varies, with 100% and 76% of respondents agreeing in Mafikeng and Kisumu, respectively.

Participatory Governance and Stakeholder Engagement

Kisumu excels in participatory governance, with higher stakeholder participation, high familiarity and perceived effectiveness of climate plans, strong coordination with non-state actors, and frequent community engagement, suggesting that participatory, transparent governance strengthens internal alignment and community buy-in. Mafikeng struggles with top-down approaches, low awareness of climate plans, and weak coordination with communities and external stakeholders, indicating gaps in communication, participatory mechanisms, and translation of policy into actionable outcomes.

Multi-Level Coordination

Kisumu demonstrates high coordination across local, regional, and national agencies, as well as non-state actors and communities, exemplifying inclusive multi-level governance. Mafikeng's coordination landscape is fragmented, with limited engagement of the local community, NGOs, civil society, and international partners, potentially hindering project delivery and participatory outcomes.

Funding and Resource Constraints Are Critical Bottlenecks

Both cities agree that public sector funding is foundational. Both cities still face financial limitations, though Kisumu leverages diverse sources—including international funds, multilateral development banks, and donor grants—in addition to its dedicated climate change fund that is budgeted annually. Mafikeng, by contrast, remains heavily reliant on government allocations, with no dedicated climate funding mechanism and limited use of external financing or bilateral aid, which constrains its financial flexibility for climate projects.

Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Management

Kisumu employs a networked, multi-actor M&E framework with routine evaluations, fostering adaptive learning, transparency, and evidence-based decision-making. Mafikeng relies on top-down and reactive evaluation approaches, primarily through academic partnerships, which may limit learning, scalability, and technical rigor. Both cities underutilize digital learning platforms, signaling opportunities for blended training approaches to strengthen staff capacity.

Equity and Inclusivity

Kisumu integrates indigenous knowledge and prioritizes vulnerable communities more effectively. Mafikeng lags in inclusive policies and equity assessments, with limited community participation. Community knowledge and integration of vulnerable groups enhance contextual relevance, legitimacy, and adaptive capacity, an area where Kisumu outperforms Mafikeng.

Statistical Differences in Perceptions of Climate Governance

Kisumu reported significantly greater familiarity with city climate actions, stronger perceptions of effectiveness, and perceived stronger integration of local knowledge and attention to vulnerable groups, as well as higher levels of inter-institutional and community coordination, compared to Mafikeng. Within-city drivers differ: experience shapes perceptions in Kisumu, whereas functional role is more influential in Mafikeng. Education level is not a significant predictor in either city. Overall, stakeholder familiarity with climate actions, perceived integration of local knowledge, and coordination mechanisms are significant determinants of perceived climate action effectiveness in both cities.

Recommendations

Enhance Legislative and Institutional Frameworks: Mafikeng should prioritize localized climate change legislation and institutional mechanisms to operationalize national and provincial frameworks at the district/municipal level. This could involve enacting a local climate change regulation, creating a dedicated climate change unit, and integrating climate priorities into planning, service delivery, and budgets. Kisumu county's model—especially its community-driven structures and ring-fenced funding—offers a useful template for strengthening Mafikeng's climate governance.

Enhance Multi-Level and Multi-Actor Coordination Mechanisms: Mafikeng should institutionalize cross-departmental forums, formalize community liaison structures, and build partnerships with non-state actors, including civil society, NGOs, and international development actors, to enhance resource mobilization and project delivery. It should develop mechanisms for meaningful community engagement, including town halls, participatory planning workshops, and public feedback channels. Kisumu should refine its

multi-actor framework by deepening vertical coordination with regional and national agencies to sustain scalability and by ensuring clear accountability mechanisms.

Strengthen Financial Diversification and Resource Mobilization: Reduce overreliance on government allocations in Mafikeng by building capacity to access international climate finance (e.g., GCF readiness programs), public-private partnerships, and donor-supported programs, while Kisumu should continue leveraging multilateral and philanthropic funding. Blended finance models combining national budgets, donor funding, and private-sector investments could help both cities to alleviate resource constraints.

Institutionalize Equity and Inclusion: Both cities should embed structured equity assessments and fair resource allocation frameworks in climate policy. Mafikeng needs to strengthen community participation and indigenous knowledge integration, while Kisumu should ensure that more female staff are incorporated into the environmental management departments and that equity is systematically evaluated across programs.

Improve Monitoring, Evaluation, and Knowledge Sharing: Mafikeng should broaden M&E partnerships by involving universities, NGOs, and donors to enhance rigor, transparency, and learning. It should implement routine, predictive, and learning-oriented evaluations to move beyond reactive assessments. Both cities should institutionalize data-sharing mechanisms across departments to enhance transparency, improve coordination across departments, and support evidence-based decision-making for effective climate action and urban resilience.

Integrate Contextual Climate Risks into Urban Planning: Both cities should prioritize flood resilience measures, water-sensitive designs, and heat mitigation strategies. Kisumu should scale up urban greening, incentivize cool roofs, and enforce climate-sensitive building codes to reduce urban heat risks. Mafikeng should prioritize drought and heatwave response by strengthening early warning systems, investing in water conservation, and integrating heat-health action plans into disaster management.

Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing: Increase regular training and professional development in both cities, focusing on adaptive governance, monitoring and evaluation, and climate innovation. Mafikeng should particularly expand beyond academic partnerships to more interactive and frequent training. Both cities should expand blended digital and face-to-face training programs to build technical and adaptive capacity.

Peer Learning and Benchmarking: Facilitate South-South exchanges between Kisumu and Mafikeng or other African cities to share best practices in community engagement, funding diversification, and adaptive governance strategies.

Conclusion

This study highlights how urban climate governance is shaped by local context, institutional culture, and stakeholder engagement. Kisumu's participatory, multi-actor climate governance fosters high effectiveness, adaptability, and stakeholder engagement, while Mafikeng's research-driven, top-down approach shows strong commitment but limited operational visibility and effectiveness. Both cities regard flooding as the most important climate challenge, yet local conditions shape other climate risks differently. Financial constraints, coordination gaps, and limited community involvement remain key challenges, more so for Mafikeng. Tailored, inclusive, and adaptive strategies that integrate

local knowledge and participatory governance are recommended for building resilient urban futures in Sub-Saharan Africa.