A Survey of Climate Change Law in Sierra Leone: Gaps, Implementation Challenges, and Pathways for Reform

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the first comprehensive survey of climate change law in Sierra Leone, addressing a significant gap in the legal literature of this rapidly developing field. In the absence of a standalone Climate Change Act, the compendium adopts a four-prong practical approach to delimit the scope of Sierra Leone's climate regime: first, by analyzing direct domestic legislation that explicitly addresses climate change, including the Environmental Protection Agency Act 2022 and the National Disaster Management Agency Act 2020; second, by examining indirect legislation that intersects with climate governance, such as the Customary Land Rights Act 2022 and the National Protected Area Authority Act 2012; third, by surveying national climate policies; and fourth, applicable international treaties. The analysis reveals that Sierra Leone's climate jurisprudence is in transition. It is grappling with the "legally disruptive" nature of climate change while being propelled by global climate action that intersects with climate justice. The article underscores Sierra Leone's paradoxical position: contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions (less than 0.01%) yet ranking among the most vulnerable nations and 155th in climate preparedness. The article concludes by recommending the enactment of a comprehensive Climate Change Act and the institutionalization of climate law education.

Key Words: Climate change law, Sierra Leone, Environmental legislation, Paris Agreement, Climate justice

Introduction

This article is a comprehensive overview of climate change law in Sierra Leone, marking the first of its kind in the country's jurisprudence. The compendium addresses a significant gap in legal literature for this rapidly developing field. The goal is to thoroughly define the parameters in this area of law, especially in the absence of a Specific Sierra Leonean Climate Change Act. The compendium underscores the importance of enacting a robust Climate Change Act, as Sierra Leone, which contributes minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions (less than 0.01%),[1] is nevertheless highly vulnerable to climate change and ranks only 155th in preparedness.[2] In this sense, the compendium advances the cause of African climate justice not only for the protection of states but also for the individual rights of persons.[3] This effort arrives at a crucial time when several international tribunals have affirmed that climate change significantly affects human rights. Notably, the 2025 Advisory Opinion of the International Court of Justice (ICJ),[4] along with the 2025 Advisory Opinion of the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACtHR),[5] has established that climate change implicates fundamental rights, including the rights to life and a healthy environment.[6] These opinions underscore a legal duty for states to act and to protect vulnerable groups.[7] Rightly so, these fundamental rights are enshrined in foundational instruments such as the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),[8] the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR),[9] the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR),[10] and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).[11]

As a result, the compendium of law will serve the interests of lawyers, researchers, students, advocates, and others who are working in this area. It will serve as a guide for relevant government institutions to facilitate their comparative analysis with other jurisdictions. However, the author acknowledges that delimiting the scope and content of climate law within a developing nation's jurisprudence can be challenging, as climate change issues involve a more complex interplay of political, social, and economic factors than purely legal ones.

The compendium congregates climate change law up to February 2026. It thus enables the author to interpret the national legal framework, which is shaped by the country's obligations

in response to both domestic needs and international climate treaties, from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, created in 1992, to the Paris Agreement, adopted in 2015.

The Scope of Climate Change Law in Sierra Leone

The first step in delineating the scope of climate change law in Sierra Leone is to define the concept of climate law itself. While climate change has gained recognition as a distinct branch of law, it still faces the challenge of establishing a universally accepted definition in doctrinal terms.[12] This line of reasoning is shared by Thomas L. Muinzer, who, in mapping out the scope of UK climate change law, summarized the puzzlement of other scholars as follows:

> Fisher and colleagues have suggested that climate change can be described as 'legally disruptive,' because the novel, complex, and long-term nature of the phenomenon gives rise to disputes and problems that are not easily addressed by traditional legal doctrines and frameworks.[13]

Similarly, this observation on the legally disruptive nature of climate change is noted by Karl Coplan and his co-authors in their work. They posit that:

> In the preceding decades, the attributes of climate change—including long time horizons, complex science, numerous and widespread contributors, and disparate geographic impacts—repeatedly intersected with political and legal processes to frustrate the development of effective mitigation laws and policies.[14]

This author agrees with this position, which aligns with the observation made in the introduction that the intrinsic nature of climate change renders its solution more a political and economic phenomenon than a purely legal one. This view finds further support in the work of Karl Coplan et al., who argue that "Climate change thus lives up to its billing as a 'super wicked' public policy problem defying ready solutions."[15]

To illustrate the relative infancy of climate change law compared to the traditional doctrinal courses, Thomas L. Muinzer quoted Mayer and Zaher, who traced the earliest dedicated books on the "topic to around 2005, published at a rate of only one or two per year."[16] As for formal climate law courses, he noted their finding that these were "not offered much earlier than 2008."[17] However, fast-forward to less than two decades later—by 2026—this nascent field has become markedly crowded because of its profound global impacts.[18] As Karl S. Coplan et al. note, "regardless of whether climate change law ultimately constitutes a unique subject of legal inquiry, it is imperative—in the sense that our collective future depends on it…"[19] Consequently,

while perhaps not the fastest-growing legal discipline, it is certainly among the most consequential. Laura Mai's 2023 observation underscores this expansion:

> Climate change haunts legal scholars, students, judges, and lawmakers alike across virtually all jurisdictions. To date, more than 5000 climate laws and policies have been identified worldwide; and the number of climate change-related lawsuits has now reached a total of over 2492 cases, which are spread across 56 national and international fora. In light of these statistics, it is no exaggeration to say that climate change has become a central concern for legal experts.[20]

Despite this remarkable surge in global climate law scholarship and practice, the field remains in its early stages in Sierra Leone. Jurisprudence and academic engagement with climate law are still in their early stages, with strikingly limited institutional development. Currently, none of the country's four tertiary institutions offering legal education—Fourah Bay College, University of Makeni, IMAT College (an affiliate of University of Sierra Leone), and Njala University—offers a formal course dedicated to climate law. This jurisprudential gap underscores the timely justification of the article. As indicated above, the article advances climate law education and contributes to the jurisprudence in a nation that remains highly vulnerable to climate disasters.

Given the foregoing discussion on the rapid surge in global climate law scholarship, the difficulty in arriving at a single, universally agreed-upon definition of climate change law now becomes more understandable. However, a golden thread runs through all this scholarship: for scholars and practitioners alike, climate law pertains to, or encompasses, any legislation, regulation, or policy that engages with anthropogenic climate change in a significant way.[21] This definition aligns with the findings of the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report (AR5), stating that anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions cause climate change.[22]

The logical next step is to pose the central question: What is the function of climate law? For this, Bethany Kwoka's analysis is instructive. She argues that climate law is fundamentally designed to achieve three objectives: mitigation of greenhouse gas emissions, adaptation to climate impacts, and the establishment of governance mechanisms to facilitate both.[23] Consequently, the analysis by Lorne Cousins et al. concludes that climate law necessarily integrates core principles from environmental law, energy law, human rights law, and sustainable development frameworks.[24]

In delineating the scope of Sierra Leonean climate change law, a comparative approach is beneficial. Although I could have easily adopted Thomas L. Muinzer's three categories for delimiting the scope of UK climate law, this approach falls short in the Sierra Leonean context. His framework involves:[25]

- Category 1: laws that directly engage with the literal meaning of climate law (such as the UK's Climate Change Act 2008).
- Category 2: laws that are indirectly within scope (such as the UK's Renewable Transport Fuel Obligations Order 2007).
- Category 3: laws focused on matters unrelated to climate change.

In Sierra Leone, Category 1 is partially blank, as there is no standalone Climate Change Act comparable to the UK's; however, there are relevant Acts that directly target climate change through dedicated provisions for mitigation, adaptation, finance, and governance. The most significant is the Environmental Protection Agency Act (2022), which provides for climate mitigation and adaptation actions and establishes the Directorate of Climate Change as the national focal point for all climate-related activities.[26] Complementing this, the National Disaster Management Agency Act 2020, also addresses climate risk management and finances responses to climate-related disasters.[27]

Category 2 reasonably accommodates several Acts through extended authorities relating to climate change. For example, the Customary Land Rights Act, 2022, does not explicitly mention "climate change," but it includes indirect provisions that support climate governance in terms of protecting ecologically sensitive areas.[28] This reliance on indirect provisions, however, underscores the absence of a standalone climate Act; thus leaves the framework overly dependent on indirect connections. Category 3 falls beyond the scope of this compendium.

Given the limitations of this framework and the evolving nature of climate jurisprudence in Sierra Leone, I propose a practical alternative approach. This compendium defines the scope of Sierra Leonean climate change law more functionally to encompass the body of domestic laws (both direct and indirect legislation), relevant national policies, and applicable international treaties.[29]

Domestic Laws: Direct and Indirect Legislations

Due to the inherent complex nature of climate change, Sierra Leone's domestic climate framework encompasses environmental protection, natural resource management, human rights protection, and land governance. These sectors are essential for effective climate adaptation, mitigation, finance, and governance.

1. Direct Legislation Related to Climate Change

This section exclusively analyzes the two leading Acts that explicitly provide for climate adaptation, mitigation, finance, and governance, while dealing with environmental and related matters.

a) Environmental Protection Agency Act of 2022

In the absence of a standalone Climate Change Act, the Environmental Protection Agency Act of 2022 functions as the primary legislative instrument governing this area. This Act repeals and replaces the Environmental Protection Agency Act, 2008 (Act No. 11 of 2008). It provides for the continuation of the Sierra Leone Environment Protection Agency (EPA) as the main body responsible for environmental protection, including the coordination of climate change actions in the nation.

As a pioneering legal framework, the Act establishes a comprehensive definitional foundation by explicitly defining key climate change and ozone layer protection terminologies in its Interpretation section (Section 1). These include:

"adaptation'' – adjustment to natural or human systems in response to actual or expected climatic stimuli or their effects, which moderates harm or exploits beneficial opportunities.

"Climate change" – a change in the climate system caused by significant changes in the concentration of greenhouse gases as a consequence of human activities, in addition to natural climate change observed over a considerable period.

"Emissions" – in relation to a greenhouse gas, means emissions of that gas into the atmosphere attributable to human activity.

"Greenhouse gas" – includes carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons, sulphur hexafluoride, indirect greenhouse gases, and nitrogen trifluoride.

"Mitigation" – efforts that seek to prevent or slow the increase of atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations by limiting current or future emissions and enhancing potential sinks for greenhouse gases.

"Paris Agreement" – the agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change dealing with greenhouse gas emissions mitigation, adaptation, and finance from 2020 onward.

"United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change" – the international environmental treaty addressing climate change, signed at the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro and entered into force in 1994.

The Act also defines terms crucial for ozone layer protection, such as:

"Controlled substance"– including chlorofluorocarbons, halon, methyl bromide, and other ozone-depleting substances.

"Protocol" – referring to the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer adopted in 1987.

"Halon" – a brominated chemical related to chlorofluorocarbons, used in firefighting, with high ozone-depleting potential.

Additional environmental and climate-regulated terms defined include "air pollution," "ambient air," "discharge," "pollution," "spill," "wetlands," and "waters of Sierra Leone." These definitions ensure regulatory clarity across air, water, and land-based environmental management.

By providing these definitions in law, the Act enables precise interpretation and aligns Sierra Leone's regulatory framework with international climate and ozone protection commitments.

Meeting the climate governance structure, Section 17(1) establishes the Directorate of Climate Change, among other sectoral environmental directorates. In line with this foundational role, Section 17(2) designates the Directorate to serve as the National Climate Change Secretariat and the focal point for all climate action in Sierra Leone.

To address the specific challenges posed by climate change in an overarching manner, Section 12(2)(o) empowers the EPA to coordinate all aspects relating to climate change, thereby enhancing consistency in policies, laws, and their implementation. In line with this mandate, Section 12(2)(m) further authorizes the EPA to promote, in collaboration with the Sierra Leone Standards Bureau, the establishment of national standards and guidelines relating to ambient air, water, and soil quality; the pollution of air, water, and land; and other forms of environmental pollution—including the discharge of wastes and the control of toxic substances.

The Act, in Section 24, establishes a crucial framework for Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) licenses. It authorizes the Agency to require EIAs for activities listed in the First Schedule—such as large-scale mining, major infrastructure projects, deforestation, energy developments, and any other projects likely to have significant environmental impacts. Technically, EIAs serve as a critical tool for evaluating a project's contributions to climate change (mitigation) and its vulnerability to climate effects (adaptation).[30] However, fully integrating climate change considerations into the EIA process has proven challenging.[31] It requires specific regulations and guidelines for assessing greenhouse gas emissions and long-term climate resilience, particularly for projects with extended timelines.[32]

The Act further establishes specific provisions for Ozone Layer Protection in Section VII (Sections 36 – 47), regulating the import, export, manufacture, and use of controlled substances and related chemicals that contribute to climate impacts. This includes prohibiting the importation and exportation of such substances, such as aerosol products that use chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) as a gas or propellant.[33]

This is further specified in the Fourth Schedule, which enumerates controlled substances along with their ozone-depleting potentials (ODP) and global warming potentials (GWP). The list includes chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) (e.g., CFC-11, ODP: 1.0), halons (e.g., Halon-1211, ODP: 3.0), and hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs) (e.g., HFC-134a, GWP: 1,430).

Although the Act serves as a major legal framework for addressing climate change by establishing a basis for integrated climate governance through greenhouse gas mitigation, adaptation, coordination of climate actions, and the protection of the ozone layer by regulating substances that contribute to both ozone depletion and global warming, it nevertheless falls short of making climate change mainstream, as a standalone Climate Change Act would and envisioned by the Paris Agreement.

b) The National Disaster Management Agency Act, 2020

The NDMA Act contains two core provisions that directly mention climate topics. These provisions focus on integrating climate risk management and funding for climate risk reduction. The Act, as its name implies, establishes the National Disaster Management Agency in section 2. With respect to climate risk management, section 11(2)(a)(i) mandates the Agency to implement the "Government policy on disaster prevention, disaster risk reduction, and climate risk management."[34]

Regarding climate risk funding, Section 38(1) of the Act establishes the National Disaster Management Fund. It specifies that the Fund is intended to "provide finances for …climate change risk reduction…."

Given the limited references to climate issues in the NDMA Act, it is reasonable to conclude that this framework contributes very little to climate action, as the Act is primarily centered around other forms of disaster management. However, some of these disasters, such as floods and droughts, can be exacerbated by climate change.

c) Sierra Leone Meteorological Agency Act 2017, as Amended 2022

This Act, in Section 12, establishes the Meteorological Agency as the sole agency responsible for meteorological and climatological services throughout Sierra Leone. As part of its functions outlined in Section 12, the Agency has broad responsibilities for climate governance, which include the following: advises the Government on all aspects of meteorology, climatology, climate change, and other climate-related issues; the Agency develops the Government policy in the field of meteorology, climatology, climate change, and other climate-related issues; the Agency issue weather information and forecasts for the safe operation of aircraft, ocean-going vessels, oil rigs, and all other socio-economic activities that require meteorological or climatology services; the Agency promote the use of meteorology in agriculture, food monitoring and in the monitoring of flood, drought, desertification and other related activities.[35]

Furthermore, the Agency collects, processes, stores and disseminates meteorological and climatological information both nationally and internationally in accordance with rules and practices and procedures established under the Conventions of the World Meteorological Organization (WMO), the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), International Maritime Organization (IMO), and other relevant conventions of the United Nations system such as the Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and Convention to combat Desertification, Drought etc; and more.

Consequently, Section 13 empowers the Agency to enter any land for certain purposes which includes: for surveying and taking of meteorological and climatological information; constructing, erecting, placing, operating or maintaining any meteorological and climatological equipment upon or over any premises, or examining, repairing, altering or removing any equipment so placed; monitoring meteorological and climatological components of environmental impacts on pollution, degradation and other concentrations.

2. Indirect Laws Related to Climate Change

The bulk of Sierra Leonean climate change laws fit under this section, as they address environmental protection, disaster management, biodiversity, and related risks that intersect with climate change, such as floods, deforestation, or meteorological monitoring.

a) Customary Land Rights Act 2022

The CLRA framework does not explicitly mention climate change. However, Part VI establishes protections for "Protected, Conserved or Ecologically Sensitive Areas."[36] An ecologically sensitive area is defined broadly in Section 1 to include wetlands, wildlife habitats, steep slopes, virgin or old-growth forests, and areas recognized as sensitive under customary law. Complementing this, Part VI establishes a protective framework: Section 20 mandates authorized officers to prevent their degradation; Section 21 prohibits activities like mining, farming, or development in such areas; and Section 22(1) holds violators liable for penalties and environmental restoration. Notably, Section 22(2) integrates customary rules and enables community co-management with Chiefdom Councils and government agencies, while Section 23(4) safeguards community rights to traditional land use, allowing restrictions to prevent resource depletion, supported by government-provided alternatives.

Furthermore, Section 25 stipulates that investment in protected areas must comply with three key laws: the National Protected Area Authority Act 2022, the Environment Protection Act 2022, and laws relating to marine protection and protected areas.

Collectively, these provisions align with Sierra Leone's climate objectives as outlined in its Nationally Determined Contributions under the Paris Agreement by safeguarding natural carbon sinks and reducing vulnerability to climate-induced hazards like flooding and soil erosion.

b) National Land Commission Act, 2022

The NCA framework intersects with climate change through its establishment of a national, district, and local land governance commission.[37] It supports climate governance by enabling sustainable land use and protection for climate-vulnerable areas. Specifically, Section 44(b) outlines a climate-related function of the Chiefdom Land Committee: to "enforce rules for the sustainable use of natural resources, such as forests, grazing lands, rivers and swamps within the

chiefdom." This effectively promotes the sustainable management of ecosystems vulnerable to climate impacts, such as deforestation and water resource degradation.

Similarly, Section 51(b) assigns a comparable function to the Town or Village Area Land Committee: to "enforce rules adopted by the town or village for the sustainable use of land and natural resources." This supports local-level sustainability and helps climate resilience in community land use practices.

Similarly, Section 55 on Community Rules further reinforces this by stating: "The Town or Village Area Land Committee shall develop and adopt rules or bye-laws to govern the use of their land and natural resources, including rules for the protection of the environment." This authorizes communities to create enforceable environmental protection rules, which can include climate-adaptive measures.

c) National Protected Area Authority Act 2012

The Act, without explicitly mentioning the term "climate" or "climate change," aligns with climate action through several key functions and structures of the Authority.[38] The most relevant sections include the following:

The Act's strongest theoretical connection to climate action lies in its Preamble, which includes the provision "to provide for the sale of ecosystem services in the National Protected Areas." This clause establishes the legal basis for projects such as REDD+ (Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation), a term defined in Section 1.

Accordingly, Part III establishes a broad operational scope that accommodates climate actions. Following the logic set by the Act's preamble, which mentions the "sale of ecosystem services," Section 12 would reasonably encompass mandates related to ecosystem services, carbon sequestration, climate resilience, and habitat conservation as a climate strategy. Thus, the section includes provisions to ensure the protection of natural ecosystems and threatened biodiversity in Sierra Leone, and to establish and maintain representative and sustainable samples. Consequently, this provision also supports collaboration with stakeholders to develop a national REDD+ strategy and promote REDD+ projects as a source of sustainable financing for protected area management.

3. National Climate Policies

Generally, climate action is driven more by policy than by law due to its intricate socio-economic and political dimensions, which require a balance between legal frameworks and policy instruments.[39] This state's dilemma rests on the urgent need for sustainable development: how to foster economic growth without causing wanton destruction to the environment and climate. This challenge is faced not only by Sierra Leone but also by many Global South nations, which suffer a double jeopardy: having contributed least to the climate crisis while bearing its most severe effects.[40] Consequently, Sierra Leone, like other states, has climate policies stemming from both international treaty commitments and domestic obligations.

These polices include the following:

a) Third Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) 2025

The Sierra Leone NDC (NDC 3.0) serves as the strategic blueprint for the nation's climate policy and action for the decade 2025–2030.[41] This document serves as the nation's international legal pledge under the Paris Agreement, of specific targets and plans for mitigating greenhouse gas emissions and adapting to climate change.[42] Consequently, it functions as a critical bridge between the nation's international treaty obligations and their practical implementation at the national level. This position is outlined in the document's executive summary as follows:

> Sierra Leone's updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC 3.0) charts an ambitious course to achieve a climate-resilient, inclusive, and low-carbon future. Covering the period 2025–2035, it aligns with the Medium-Term National Development Plan (MTNDP 2024–2030), the Energy Transition and Green Growth Plan, and the Feed Salone Strategy, while remaining consistent with global frameworks such as the Paris Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals, Agenda 2063 of the African Union, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.[43]

Furthermore, the executive summary indicates that the updated "NDC 3.0 has an emissions reduction target of 19,987 Gg CO_2e by 2035, representing 36.2% of the business-as-usual (BAU) economy-wide emissions."[44] In terms of the funds needed to achieve this objective, it submits that "The total financial requirements for implementing the NDC 3.0 from 2025 to 2035 are estimated at US$2,974 million (2.974 billion). This comprises US$1,024 million (1.024 billion) for mitigation measures and US$1,950 million (1.95 billion) for adaptation efforts."[45]

b) National Climate Change Policy 2021

The document provides a framework for addressing climate challenges and opportunities under the nation's initial National Adaptation Plan (NAP) submission to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).[46] The objectives of the policy are summarized in its executive summary as follows:

> •To reduce vulnerability to the impacts of climate change by building adaptive capacity and resilience; and
>
> • To facilitate the integration of climate change adaptation, in a coherent manner, into relevant new and existing policies, programs and activities, in particular development planning processes and strategies, within all relevant sectors and at different levels, as appropriate.[47]

c) National Energy Policy and Strategic Plan

The document references the nation's ambition regarding climate change, greenhouse gas abatement technologies, and renewable energy. This ambition is formally articulated in Objective Five, which states:

> To protect the environment, through the use of low carbon and renewable energy resources and the application of clean technologies Strategies To meet this objective, the Government, through the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources will: (a) Reduce harmful vehicle emissions, through the introduction of unleaded gasoline and low-sulphur diesel and enforcement of emission pollution standards (b) Promote the development and dissemination of improved stoves that reduce emission of harmful gases, through improved combustion as well as reduce fuel use, thus reducing deforestation (c) Provide support for the importation of LPG, in order to promote its widespread use.[48]

d) Second National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2026

This policy outlines the nation's objectives for biodiversity, agricultural biodiversity, wildlife, forests, freshwater, and marine and coastal biodiversity, to be achieved by 2026.[49] In line with these objectives, the Climate Change Laws of the World Center summarizes this strategic action plan as having the following core aim:

> Practical methods and mechanisms enhanced and functioning to safeguard biodiversity, resulting in improved conservation status of threatened and rare species; Practical and robust conservation actions are significantly enhancing the status of species, habitats, sites and ecosystems in and outside protected areas; Improved living standards, ecosystem services and opportunities provided to people, particularly local communities through sustainable and inclusive biodiversity conservation actions; and Improved sectoral

> and public involvement, and enhanced capacities and awareness, are contributing to effective planning and result-oriented execution of conservation programmes.[50]

e) Renewable Energy for Sierra Leone

The policy provides a framework for harnessing the nation's clean energy potential in hydropower, bioenergy, solar, and wind. As stated in its foreword, one of its objectives is:

> to advance the global shift toward environmentally sustainable energy use in response to climate change. Sierra Leone stands to benefit from falling global prices for renewable energy technologies, enabling greater use of indigenous resources and reduced reliance on imported fossil fuels. Coupled with market incentives to promote renewable energy technologies, this trend can become a reality in Sierra Leone. Significant unexploited renewable resources offer substantial potential to improve energy access and power production.[51]

f) Energy Efficiency Policy of Sierra Leone

The policy mandates the implementation of the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan to enhance energy access by transforming the energy sector toward greater sustainability. As part of its climate action agenda, achieving this goal requires sectoral and cross-sectoral measures coordinated across ministries, such as the Ministry of Energy, the Ministry of Environment, and the Ministry of Finance.[52]

g) National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) of the Republic of Sierra Leone (2015-2030)

As endorsed by the Sierra Leone Energy Efficiency Policy, the National Energy Efficiency Action Plan (NEEAP) promotes enhanced energy efficiency, acknowledging that continued reliance on petroleum products, inefficient lighting, and electrically powered equipment hinders poverty mitigation and environmental protection.[53]

h) Forestry Policy 2010

The policy makes several references to climate action, establishing mechanisms for research, education, and awareness around climate change. It also emphasizes the need to attract international donor funding for adaptation and mitigation.[54]

i) Conservation and Wildlife Policy 2010

This document scope also encompasses research on climate change adaptation, mitigation, and carbon sequestration, as well as donor or private funding related to these areas.[55]

In conclusion, Sierra Leone's climate policy framework operates on two distinct levels. On the one hand, unlike climate laws with no standalone climate legislation, it encompasses specific policies dedicated solely to addressing climate issues. On the other hand, similar to the climate laws, it integrates policies that intersect with environmental, energy, and other related sectors to govern climate action.

4. Applicable Climate Treaties

Sierra Leone's international commitment to tackling climate change is primarily guided by the structure of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and implemented through national policies and plans, as discussed in the previous section.

a) United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

Sierra Leone acceded to this treaty in 1995. This foundational climate agreement enlists the nation as a Non-Annex I party, recognizing its status as a developing country. Notwithstanding, it carries the obligation to take climate actions, in line with the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities." As a result, the UNFCCC requires Sierra Leone to undertake climate actions, which include reporting greenhouse gas inventories through National Communications and Biennial Update Reports.[56]

b) Kyoto Protocol

Under the requirements of the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol was established in 1997 but entered into force in 2005, as the world's first legally binding instrument for cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Sierra Leone ratified the Kyoto Protocol on November 10, 2006. More importantly, however, as a non-Annex I (developing) party, Sierra Leone had no binding emission reduction targets under the treaty. Furthermore, the protocol enabled Sierra Leone to participate in the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which allows for investment in emission-reduction projects in developing countries.[57]

c. Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement succeeded the Kyoto Protocol as the primary international framework for climate action. Sierra Leone ratified this treaty on November 1, 2016. Currently, it is the most authoritative treaty driving the nation's climate action. The Paris Agreement aims to hold the increase in the global average temperature to "well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels," while

pursuing efforts to "limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels." To achieve this, all Parties are required to submit and implement national climate action plans. Specifically, each state party must communicate a nationally determined contribution (NDC) every five years; however, states have the freedom to determine the content and level of these contributions. However, as a developing nation, Sierra Leone's obligation to meet emission reduction targets is contingent on financial and other support from developed nations in the global north.[58]

c) **African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan (2022-2032)**

Sierra Leone, as a member of the African Union, also aligns its climate action with the African Union's Climate Change and Resilient Development Strategy and Action Plan. The AU's Agenda 2063 makes it clear that climate-resilient communities and economies are an integral component of the continent's vision for an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa—driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the international arena.[59]

The foregoing treaties underscore the principle that climate change is a global problem requiring a global solution. Accordingly, Sierra Leone is actively advancing its global climate action obligation, which cascades into its national laws and policies.

Recommendation for Improvement

Given the foregoing analytical overview of Sierra Leone's climate change jurisprudence – its legal and policy framework – the following two curated recommendations are proposed to address identified gaps, institutionalize climate law education, and strengthen implementation to enhance the nation's resilience and compliance with its international commitments.

1. **Enact a Comprehensive Climate Change Act**

The most significant gap in the analysis above is the absence of a standalone Climate Change Act, leaving Sierra Leone's jurisprudence overly reliant on indirect provisions within other related laws. Therefore, a dedicated Act would mainstream climate action, provide a comprehensible legislative mandate for mitigation, adaptation, finance, and loss and damage, and ensure stronger accountability. Eventually, this action would help fulfill the nation's obligations under the Paris Agreement

2. **Institutionalize Climate Law Education and Capacity Building**

The fact that no tertiary institution in Sierra Leone currently offers a dedicated climate law course means there is a reasonable urgency to replicate the global momentum of integrating this discipline into legal and policy curricula. This can be achieved by establishing formal courses and climate law clinics at universities, as this will empower the next generation of legal professionals to navigate this 'legally disruptive' field. In addition, professional training programs and continuing legal education for judges, lawyers and government officials will build the domestic expertise required to interpret, implement, and leverage the evolving climate jurisprudence.

Conclusion

This compendium establishes the foundation for understanding the budding yet fast-evolving landscape of climate change law in Sierra Leone. It methodically maps the existing legal framework, comprising direct and indirect domestic legislation, a collection of national policies, and applicable international treaties. The analysis reveals a jurisprudence in transition, that is grappling with the "legally disruptive" nature of climate change while being propelled by global climate action that intersects with climate justice. The work also underscores Sierra Leone's paradoxical position: as a minimal contributor to global emissions, bearing severe climate impacts. Finally, while the current framework of laws and policies provides a starting point, the compendium convincingly argues that the jurisprudential maturity of climate action in Sierra Leone hinges on enacting a robust, standalone Climate Change Act. This legal instrument is essential for consolidating efforts, ensuring coherence, and providing the authoritative framework needed to secure a resilient and just future for the nation.

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[3] See *Climate justice and reparations*, AFR. FUTURES LAB, https://www.afalab.org/research-and-impact/our-programs/climate-justice-and-reparations-1/ (last visited Feb. 5, 2026).
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[27] National Disaster Management Agency Act, 2020, (Act No. 6 of 2020) §§ 11(2)(a)(i), 38(1) (S. Leone).

[28] Customary Land Rights Act, 2022, (Act No. 16 of 2022) §§ 20–23 (S. Leone) (establishing protections for "ecologically sensitive areas," defined in § 1).
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