

ETHICAL DEFICIT IN NIGERIA'S CLIMATE GOVERNANCE: A GARDINERIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This essay explores the phenomenon of ethical deficit in Nigeria's climate governance through the theoretical viewpoints of Stephen Gardiner's climate ethical thought. Gardiner's viewpoint of climate change as a 'perfect moral storm' is central to this research because of its ability to provide a dynamic normative basis for evaluating governance failures in Nigeria's climate policy framework. The term 'ethical deficit' signifies the gap between the ethical obligations a state owes to present and future generations and the actual conduct of its climate governance. The gap is often produced by global structural inequities and deliberate domestic failures of government at the grassroots. While Gardiner's model effectively identifies systemic barriers to climate action, its emphasis on structural constraints risks downplaying the role of domestic actors in shaping climate outcomes. This paper argues that Nigeria's climate crisis stems from both sources: global inequities and domestic governance failures, including corruption and inadequate public engagement. A more balanced approach is therefore needed, one that integrates structural critique with local accountability and institutional reform. To this end, dialogical research method was utilized in carrying out this research because of its capacity to strengthening enforcement mechanisms, improving transparency in climate finance and fostering a more engaged citizenry are all essential to advancing sustainable climate governance in Nigeria.

Keywords: Climate Ethics, Nigeria's Climate Governance, Perfect Moral Storm, Institutional Accountability, Policy Implementation Gaps

Introduction

Environmental ethics addresses the issue of human responsibility for ecological degradation, and the intellectual tradition informing this debate is long and richly varied. Early thinkers such as Thomas Malthus (*An Essay on the Principle of Population*, 1826) warned of resource scarcity, while twentieth-century scholars such as Aldo Leopold (*A Sand County Almanac*, 1949) and Arne Naess (*Ecology, Community and Lifestyle*, 1989) advanced ecological ethics by emphasising the interconnectedness of human and natural systems. In contemporary debates, some scholars advocate anthropocentric approaches that prioritise human interests while others promote ecocentric views that argue for the intrinsic value of nature. Peter Singer (*One World: The Ethics of Globalization*, 2002) argues that wealthy nations bear the primary moral burden of global environmental harm, while John Broome (*Climate Matters: Ethics in a Warming World*, 2012) locates responsibility at the level of individual carbon-producing choices. What unites these perspectives is the recognition that environmental inaction is not merely a technical or economic failure – it is a moral one. It is Stephen Gardiner's work that most directly confronts this moral dimension, bridging these perspectives by analysing how moral corruption and intergenerational injustice converge to obstruct effective climate action.

Based on this foundation, this work addresses three interlocking ethical questions: What moral obligations do present generations have towards future generations with regard to environmental sustainability? In what ways do political and economic structures at global and domestic levels contribute to environmental neglect? And how can moral philosophy inform climate policy in contexts marked by institutional weakness and corruption? These questions define the broader discourse on environmental justice and emphasise the urgent need for ethical intervention. Different ethical frameworks offer different approaches to addressing these pressing concerns. Utilitarianism, for example, evaluates environmental policies in terms of overall well-being, whereas deontological ethics emphasises duty-based obligations towards nature and future generations. Deep ecology, meanwhile, transcends traditional moral theories, advocating a radical transformation in the relationship between humans and nature. Gardiner's contribution goes further than any of these frameworks alone: he identifies the specific convergence of global, intergenerational and theoretical pressures that makes climate change not just an ethical problem but a uniquely resistant one.

At the heart of Gardiner's argument is the concept of the 'perfect moral storm', which captures the difficulty of addressing climate change due to its global, intergenerational and theoretical dimensions. He claims that existing political institutions are poorly suited to managing long-term environmental responsibilities resulting in moral corruption and inaction. By exposing these systemic weaknesses, his critique of short-termism and institutional failure offers a vital framework for grasping the ethical obstacles to effective climate policy. Beyond theoretical analysis, Gardiner's work has practical implications. His analysis informs global climate negotiations, urging policymakers to prioritise long-term ethical commitments over short-term economic interests. By linking moral philosophy to real-world governance, his ideas contribute to broader debates about environmental justice, governance, and sustainability. Against this backdrop, this study evaluates Gardiner's framework and assesses the extent to which it can illuminate Nigeria's climate situation. To do so, however, it must also grapple with what the framework leaves out: the domestic actors whose daily choices determine whether climate commitments are implemented or ignored.

The analytical tool through which this paper extends Gardiner's framework is the concept of the 'ethical deficit', defined as the gap between the ethical obligations a state owes to its present and future citizens and the actual conduct of its governance. Unlike a simple policy failure, an ethical deficit implies a moral dimension: decision-makers are not merely ineffective but fall short of standards of responsibility, justice and stewardship that can be articulated and demanded. This distinction matters because it shifts the analytical focus from technocratic problem-solving to moral accountability. It is in this register that Gardiner's framework is both most illuminating and most in need of supplementation. Yet, as this paper argues, Gardiner's framework requires critical extension: its emphasis on structural and global forces risks becoming a lens that inadvertently excuses the domestic actors who make the daily decisions that determine whether a country's climate commitments are honoured or hollowed out.

An Overview of Gardiner's Climate Ethics

Drawing on his pioneering work in environmental philosophy, Stephen Gardiner's

Climate Ethics offers a critical examination of the moral challenges posed by climate change. Gardiner characterises climate change as one of the most complex challenges facing humanity, describing it as a 'perfect moral storm'. In his book *A Perfect Moral Storm: The Ethical Tragedy of Climate Change*, Gardiner argues that climate change is not merely an environmental or scientific issue, but rather a profound ethical crisis. Gardiner conceptualises climate change as a 'perfect storm' that encompasses a rare confluence of factors that intensify a situation in which structural vulnerabilities enable ethical corruption and political inertia. He classifies these factors into three interconnected dimensions; the global storm, the intergenerational storm and the theoretical storm, each of which is discussed below with particular attention to its relevance for Nigeria.

To fully appreciate the depth of Gardiner's analysis, it is important to examine the key elements of his argument. At the heart of his philosophy lies the notion that climate change poses three interconnected challenges: global dispersion, intergenerational impact and theoretical inadequacy. These interconnected dimensions give rise to a unique ethical dilemma, complicating ethical responses by diffusing responsibility across space and time and exposing the limitations of traditional moral frameworks (*A Perfect Moral Storm*, 6). By organising his analysis around these three dimensions, Gardiner offers a thorough critique of the ethical shortcomings inherent in inaction on climate change.

This moral storm is all the more striking when contrasted with natural storms. While natural storms arise from meteorological forces, Gardiner's storm is uniquely moral, shaped by political inertia, ethical complexity, and epistemic uncertainty. This distinction is important because it shows how this convergence delays action and actively undermines moral accountability. As these forces interact, they blur the lines of responsibility, making decisive ethical responses increasingly challenging.

Rather than leading to paralysis, however, Gardiner's analysis which draws on moral philosophy, political theory and practical ethics increases the urgency of confronting these ethical dilemmas. Although the complexity of the moral dilemma might suggest it is impossible to act, he argues that the diffusion of responsibility should instead increase moral urgency. This shift in perspective highlights a key insight: A meaningful ethical response to climate change requires us to move beyond passive recognition and take deliberate, sustained action. Such action must address the scientific and political dimensions of climate change, as well as the ethical implications of inaction.

In this context, effective ethical action must address the spatial, temporal and conceptual challenges inherent in climate change (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm*, 20). Gardiner's categorisation of these challenges as the 'global storm', the 'intergenerational storm', and the 'theoretical storm' provides a structured framework for evaluating the moral shortcomings of climate governance.

The Global Storm

Examining the first dimension of Gardiner's 'perfect moral storm', it becomes evident that the global storm is characterised by the dispersal of causes and effects, blurring the traditional boundaries of responsibility. Unlike localised environmental problems, greenhouse gas emissions from anywhere in the world contribute to global consequences. This diffusion of responsibility challenges conventional ethical and political systems, which are usually designed to address localised issues rather than

interconnected global crises. Gardiner applies game theory, focusing particularly on concepts such as the prisoner's dilemma and the tragedy of the commons (*Perfect Moral Storm* 37), to explain why each country benefits from collective action yet retains an incentive to defect, expecting others to bear the cost of transition. International institutions such as the United Nations lack meaningful enforcement mechanisms, and wealthier nations resist strong action on grounds of economic competitiveness and lifestyle changes (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 52).

For Nigeria, the global storm has a specific and cruel character. The country contributes less than 0.5 per cent of cumulative global greenhouse gas emissions, yet consistently ranks among the most climate-vulnerable nations in the world (*Climate Change Vulnerability Index*, 2016). This asymmetry is precisely the injustice Gardiner's global storm framework captures. However, the framework's emphasis on states as the primary actors obscures the degree to which Nigeria's vulnerability is compounded by choices made within Nigeria: the failure to invest adaptation revenues, the slow uptake of early warning infrastructure, and the political prioritisation of extraction over resilience. The global storm, in other words, does not fully explain Nigeria's climate predicament – it only explains the international dimension of it.

The Intergenerational Storm

While the global storm illustrates the difficulties arising from the spatial dispersion of responsibility, the intergenerational storm reveals the ethical shortcomings stemming from temporal fragmentation. Climate change has a delayed impact, meaning that today's greenhouse gas emissions will trigger environmental changes that unfold over decades and centuries. This time lag creates a paradox: contemporary society enjoys the benefits of carbon-intensive activities while future generations will inherit worsening climate instability (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 36). Future generations cannot advocate for their interests or influence policies that will profoundly shape their world (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 42). This exploitation is most evident in what Gardiner describes as 'intergenerational buck-passing' – the tendency of each generation to defer responsibility for climate action to the next (*A Perfect Moral Storm* 49), compounded by the lock-in effect of continued fossil fuel infrastructure investment (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 53).

In Nigeria's case, the intergenerational problem takes a form that Gardiner's framework only partially anticipates. The country's overwhelming dependence on oil revenues creates a structural lock-in: continued fossil fuel investment is not merely a preference but an economic survival strategy for a state that funds over 70 per cent of its federal budget from petroleum receipts. Each electoral cycle thus reproduces the same short-term calculus, with future generations bearing the compounding costs of deferred transition. What Gardiner's analysis of intergenerational ethics tends to miss is that this buck-passing is not only the product of abstract temporal myopia – it is actively reproduced by patronage structures, electoral incentives and elite interests that benefit from the status quo. The ethical failure is not merely that policymakers fail to think far enough ahead; it is that many have powerful reasons not to.

The Theoretical Storm

Beyond the global and intergenerational dimensions, Gardiner's 'theoretical storm' reveals a deeper intellectual crisis in the way we address climate change. Traditional ethical and political theories, designed to address localised and immediate concerns, are unable to account for the vast temporal, geographical, and ecological scales of

climate change (*A Perfect Moral Storm* 41). Gardiner articulates this challenge directly when he writes:

Even our best moral and political theories are poorly placed to deal with many of the issue's characteristic of long-term global problems such as climate change. These include (but are not limited to) intergenerational equity, international justice, scientific uncertainty, persons whose existence and preferences are contingent on the choices we make, and the human relationship to animals and the rest of nature. When such issues coincide they deliver the third component of the perfect moral storm, the theoretical storm.

This theoretical inadequacy is evident in the difficulty that moral theories have in guiding climate action. Utilitarianism struggles with long-term and uncertain consequences; deontological ethics struggles with dispersed causality. Even practical policy tools such as cost-benefit analysis fail to capture the moral gravity of climate loss that entails the extinction of species, the disappearance of cultures, and the submergence of island nations. The mismatch between theory and reality results in fragmented and ineffective climate action, as reflected in the concerns of leaders such as Al Gore, John Houghton, and Connie Hedegaard, whom Gardiner cites as lamenting the inability of institutions to take decisive action (Amadi and Ogugua, 137). While some scholars, such as Dale Jamieson (“When utilitarians should be virtue theorists” 164), defend utilitarianism's potential to guide environmental policy, Gardiner argues that its reliance on cost-benefit analysis is ill-suited to this task. Likewise, libertarianism, Rawlsian liberalism, and nationalist communitarianism all struggle to address the scale and complexity of climate ethics (Amadi and Ogugua, 137).

Gardiner himself gestures towards virtue ethics as one possible way forward, emphasising that addressing climate change requires not only better institutions but better moral character which encompasses traits such as prudence, responsibility and ecological stewardship. This paper takes that suggestion seriously and argues, in the section on Nigeria's governance failures below, that a virtue-ethics lens illuminates something Gardiner's structural framework misses: that the ethical deficit in Nigeria's climate governance is not primarily a problem of theoretical inadequacy but of character, will and deliberate choice by identifiable actors.

Moral Corruption

Gardiner explores the concept of moral corruption in climate ethics, highlighting its role in the systemic failure to address climate change. He defines corruption not simply as the exploitation of power or trust for personal gain, but as a more subtle 'perfectionist' concept in which we fail to meet appropriate standards (*A Perfect Moral Storm* 38). Gardiner distinguishes between different forms of corruption, noting that the corruption of institutions, individuals and moral discourse can intersect in complex ways (*A Perfect Moral Storm* 45–46). Moral corruption is particularly insidious because it “involves the subversion of our own moral commitments” (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 301), distorts ethical discourse, and makes it difficult to recognise wrongdoing by “creating attractive but ultimately deceptive or self-deceptive ways of continuing business as usual” (Gardiner, *A Perfect Moral Storm* 307).

Gardiner identifies political corruption in climate policy, where nations, industries and corporations manipulate climate policies to serve short-term economic interests,

sometimes through unethical means. He warns that climate policy discussions are often hijacked by powerful actors who use their influence to frame the debate in ways that benefit them, leaving the less privileged on the sidelines. As presented:

Some nations, industries, corporations, and unions will try to use climate policy as a tool through which to advance their own (typically short-term economic) agenda at the expense of others, and sometimes they will employ corrupt means for doing so. Moreover, the perfect moral storm can explain how such direct corruption can be extended to include global, intergenerational, and other forms of exploitation. Some social, political, and economic elites will try to capture the framing of climate policy in various fora at the expense of the less well-funded and well-connected. (Gardiner et al., *Climate Ethics*. 305)

Moral corruption, Gardiner explains, works subtly by shaping the way individuals and institutions think about ethical problems. He identifies strategies such as distraction, complacency, selective attention and hypocrisy that distort moral reasoning and create an illusion of ethical legitimacy:

Many forms of moral corruption are subtle and indirect, and some are systematic. Under such circumstances, it can, from the external perspective, be difficult to find anyone to blame in the usual way. After all, those who offer bad arguments or mistaken values may act in good faith, as might many of those who accept their positions. And generally, we hold people less morally liable (if liable at all) for such apparently (and 'merely') cognitive failures.... Part of the genius of some methods of moral corruption, and one reason for their enduring effectiveness and popularity, is precisely their ability to obscure abuse. If one can twist or pervert otherwise plausible moral claims to a corrupt end, then one can both hoodwink some into thinking that they do right when they do wrong, and also provide moral cover for the more discerning. (*Climate Ethics*. 307)

This corruption, he argues, infects political and social systems like a virus, undermining commitments to moral norms and weakening the resolve to tackle climate change effectively. The most vulnerable, the poor, future generations and nature are least able to resist these forces. This is buttressed as follows:

One might see the threat posed by the perfect moral storm as a 'virus' that infects social and political systems, weakening their commitments to explicit and implicit moral norms. In the perfect moral storm, the threat is acute, even potentially fatal, because of the severe nature of some of the asymmetries of power and because those who are damaged by them – the poor, future generations, animals, and the rest of nature – are poorly placed to defend themselves against it. (*Climate Ethics*. 304)

A key challenge of moral corruption is its ability to obfuscate blame. Those who promote misleading arguments or flawed ethical justifications may act in good faith, making it difficult to assign responsibility. Gardiner argues that this elusiveness fosters a form of false morality in which moral discourse is manipulated for self-serving ends. As a result, even well-intentioned individuals may be complicit in perpetuating inaction, thereby reinforcing systemic inertia.

To counter this, Gardiner suggests recognising paradigmatic cases of moral corruption in history, literature and philosophy as a way of identifying similar patterns in climate ethics. He insists that climate change is fundamentally a moral issue and that ethical principles should guide policy responses. While awaiting an ideal theory of climate justice, he advocates an ethics of transition that emphasises precaution, responsibility for past emissions, and the moral duty of developed countries to bear a greater burden.

Gardiner's argument parallels Dale Jamieson's call for a new moral system to address climate ethics. Both scholars stress that overcoming moral corruption requires more than technological or political adjustments – it requires a fundamental shift in ethical consciousness. Individual and collective action, ethical discourse and civic engagement are essential to breaking the cycle of deferred responsibility. Without such a shift, moral corruption in climate action threatens to undermine broader ethical commitments, weakening society's ability to address not only climate change but other global challenges.

Nigeria's climate policies, like those of many developing countries, reflect the ethical tensions identified by Gardiner, as political and economic interests often take precedence over long-term sustainability. Understanding Nigeria's climate impacts and responses provides a concrete illustration of these ethical dilemmas.

Gardiner's account of moral corruption is illuminating but remains somewhat abstract. The following sections ground it concretely in Nigeria's climate governance, arguing that the patterns he identifies are not merely structural tendencies but identifiable practices enacted by specific institutional actors. Naming these patterns as moral failures, rather than purely technical or political ones, is the first step towards demanding accountability for them.

An Insight into Climate Change Impact in Nigeria

Understanding the scale of Nigeria's climate vulnerability is not merely background context – it is itself an ethical argument. The severity of what is at stake, and the degree to which existing policies fall short of addressing it, establishes the empirical basis for the claim that Nigeria's climate governance represents an ethical deficit rather than a mere policy gap.

Climate change poses significant challenges to Nigeria, affecting agriculture, ecosystems and overall socio-economic development. In response, the Nigerian government has developed a number of policies aimed at mitigating the effects of climate change while promoting sustainable development. A thorough understanding of these policies and their implementation is essential for assessing Nigeria's preparedness and response to escalating climate challenges.

The severity and scale of climate impacts across Nigeria highlight the urgency of effective policy responses. Nigeria is experiencing a range of climate change impacts, including rising temperatures, increased rainfall variability, droughts, desertification, and floods. These changes threaten food security, biodiversity, and human livelihoods at the national level (*Climate Change Vulnerability Index*, 2016). In northern Nigeria, drought and desertification have disrupted rain-fed agriculture, forcing nomadic herders southwards, increasing competition for scarce resources, and contributing to the spread of zoonotic diseases (Elelu et al. 36). Meanwhile, in coastal regions, rising

sea levels and saltwater intrusion have further reduced crop yields and damaged infrastructure, leading to higher food prices and economic strain (Wiebe et al, 5–21). With agriculture employing over 70% of the population and contributing nearly 23% of GDP, these disruptions pose a significant threat to national economic stability. However, adaptation efforts remain inadequate, with only 1% of farmland under irrigation (FAO 2002). Without effective climate adaptation, Nigeria could face economic losses of between \$100 billion and \$460 billion by 2050 (Federal Ministry of Environment, 2021). Recognising these risks, the country ratified the Paris Agreement in 2017, committing to a 20% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, with a more ambitious 45% reduction contingent on international support (PwC, *Nigeria Climate Change Act 2022*).

In response to these growing challenges, Nigeria has developed a comprehensive policy framework in line with international climate change commitments. As a signatory to the global climate conventions, the country has enacted several domestic policies to address climate change. These include the Climate Change Act of 2021, the National Environmental Standards and Regulations Enforcement Agency Act of 2007, and the National Climate Change Policy (Federal Ministry of Environment). Together, these policies provide an interlinked framework that addresses both mitigation and adaptation needs. In addition, Nigeria has adopted the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (2015–2030), which aims to reduce disaster risks, reduce mortality rates and increase resilience through improved governance and early warning systems (Wahlström 32).

At the heart of Nigeria's climate policy architecture is the Climate Change Act, which was signed into law in November 2021. This legislation establishes a comprehensive framework for climate action at the national level and positions Nigeria as a leader in climate governance within West Africa. Central to the Act is the establishment of the National Climate Council, which will be tasked with coordinating national efforts to combat climate change and managing the newly created Climate Change Fund (PwC 3–5). The Act's transformative potential lies in its comprehensive and structured approach to climate governance, which not only sets ambitious targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions but also outlines mechanisms for achieving net-zero emissions by 2050 to 2070. Among its key provisions, the Act mandates the development of a carbon budget and requires regular updates of the National Climate Change Action Plan every five years, ensuring ongoing policy refinement and adaptation (Ladan, “A Review of Nigeria's 2021 Climate Change Act”).

Building on this legislative foundation, the National Climate Change Policy (NCCP) for 2021–2030 serves as a roadmap for implementation. The policy aims to create a resilient socio-economic environment while reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Divided into seven sections, the NCCP addresses various aspects of climate change management, including vulnerability assessments, adaptation strategies, and implementation mechanisms (National Climate Change Policy). By integrating climate considerations into all sectors of the economy, the NCCP aims to create a holistic approach to climate resilience.

To translate political commitments into concrete actions, Nigeria launched the Energy Transition Plan (ETP) in August 2022. The plan focuses on transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources across several key sectors: power generation,

cooking, transport and industry (PwC, *Nigeria Climate Change Act*). The ETP sets clear targets, including increasing the share of renewable energy in power generation to 30% by 2030 and promoting clean cooking solutions, while driving electrification of the transport sector by 2060.

While mitigation strategies are crucial, Nigeria's high vulnerability to climate impacts requires equally robust adaptation measures. The government has initiated several programmes aimed at building resilience to climate-related disasters. These include the Great Green Wall project, designed to combat desertification and promote reforestation, particularly in the northern regions most affected by land degradation (National Climate Change Policy). In addition, urban planning policies are being revised to incorporate climate risk assessments to reduce vulnerabilities associated with rapid urbanisation and increasing flood risks. Despite this comprehensive policy framework and related initiatives, Nigeria faces significant challenges in implementing its climate change strategies. Among the most pressing issues are limited financial resources, inadequate infrastructure, and institutional capacity constraints, all of which hinder effective action against the impacts of climate change. In addition, there is a need for increased public awareness and stakeholder engagement to promote community participation in climate change initiatives and ensure that policies translate into tangible improvements on the ground.

Success in tackling climate change will ultimately depend on Nigeria's ability to bridge the gap between policy formulation and implementation. However, as Gardiner argues, climate change presents a 'perfect moral storm' in which short-term economic and political interests often undermine long-term environmental responsibility (*A Perfect Moral Storm* 7–10). Nigeria's delayed climate policies, inadequate adaptation strategies and marginalisation of vulnerable communities reflect this ethical challenge as policymakers prioritise immediate gains over sustainable action. Without a strong ethical framework to guide climate governance, these structural weaknesses will persist, deepening environmental risks and widening socio-economic disparities. On paper, this is a substantial policy architecture. The ethical question, however, is not whether Nigeria has policies but whether those policies are honoured and if not, why not, and who bears moral responsibility for the failure. The gap between legislative ambition and implementation reality is not a neutral administrative fact; it is a moral datum. Gardiner's framework on short-termism helps explain part of this, but it alone cannot account for why Nigeria's implementation gap is so persistent and so severe, to this end, it is necessary to examine the domestic governance choices that reproduce it.

Ethical Deficit in Nigeria's Climate Governance: A Gardinerian Perspective

Gardiner's ethical framework on climate change provides a valuable but insufficient lens through which to assess Nigeria's climate policy. His concept of the 'perfect moral storm' – which highlights the global, intergenerational and theoretical dimensions of climate inaction – captures key ethical and structural barriers to effective climate governance. However, Gardiner's approach tends to emphasise systemic failures over individual agency, potentially downplaying the role of domestic political will, local accountability structures and public engagement in shaping climate outcomes. While global inequalities and intergenerational injustices are significant, an overemphasis on these factors risks absolving national and local actors of responsibility. By applying and critically extending Gardiner's framework, this section demonstrates that Nigeria's ethical deficit has both a structural and a domestic dimensions. The domestic

dimension, while harder to name under Gardiner's model, is in many respects the more tractable one.

From Gardiner's perspective, these governance failures illustrate the first dimension of the perfect moral storm: the global challenge. Developing countries like Nigeria bear a disproportionate burden of climate change, despite their minimal contribution to global emissions. However, their limited financial and technological resources force them to rely on international support, which remains inadequate. The slow disbursement of climate finance and the stringent conditions attached to international aid hamper Nigeria's ability to implement meaningful mitigation and adaptation measures. This imbalance reflects a wider inequity in global climate governance, as the failure of developed countries to meet their climate commitments exacerbates this challenge. But while this critique is valid, it runs the risk of portraying Nigeria as a passive victim of global structures. The Nigerian government has received substantial international climate finance and the question of where those funds have gone deserves scrutiny. Transparency International's governance indicators consistently rank Nigeria among countries with high perceived corruption, and civil society organisations have repeatedly documented the misallocation of environmental funds to non-environmental purposes. The ethical failure here is not only that the international community has under-resourced Nigeria's climate response; it is also that resources that have been provided have been inadequately deployed. Gardiner's global storm does not account for this because it sees the problem as one of insufficient international transfer, not of domestic misappropriation.

The second dimension of the perfect moral storm, intergenerational ethics, is also evident in Nigeria's climate strategy. Short-term political and economic priorities often override long-term sustainability. Nigeria's dependence on oil revenues presents a direct contradiction: while the government commits to emissions reduction targets, fossil fuel investments continue to shape national economic planning. Despite political rhetoric on renewable energy and climate adaptation, financial allocations remain inadequate and incentives for green energy development are weak. Gardiner's critique of policy myopia is particularly relevant here: Nigerian policymakers, like those in many resource-dependent economies, often prioritise immediate economic gains over the environmental well-being of future generations, perpetuating a cycle of inadequate climate action. More revealing still is the continued licensing of new oil exploration blocks in the Niger Delta and offshore, approved by the same administration that signed the Climate Change Act. This is not policy myopia in the abstract sense Gardiner describes – it is a documented, publicly visible decision by named officials to prioritise fossil fuel revenues over legally binding climate commitments. Future generations in Nigeria will inherit not only a worsening climate but a governance system that chose extraction over transition even after the legal and ethical case for transition had been formally acknowledged. Yet Gardiner's analysis of intergenerational ethics tends to emphasise state-level decision-makers, neglecting the role of individuals and communities. Climate change is shaped not only by national policies, but also by local consumption patterns, business practices and grassroots initiatives. The lack of public pressure on governments and corporations to adopt sustainable policies reflects an ethical failure that extends beyond the political elite.

In addition to these institutional and economic barriers, Nigeria's climate policy also faces an ethical deficit, which corresponds to Gardiner's third dimension: the

theoretical challenge. Ethical considerations are often sidelined in climate governance as decisions are primarily driven by political and economic interests rather than moral responsibility. Corruption and weak accountability mechanisms further hamper the implementation of climate policies. A concrete example is the management of the Climate Change Fund established under the 2021 Act. As of 2024, the Fund's governance mechanisms remain opaque: there is no publicly accessible register of disbursements, no independent audit trail, and no civil society representation on the oversight body. This is not a theoretical inadequacy of the kind Gardiner describes – it is an institutional design choice that serves the interests of those who control the Fund while insulating them from accountability. Similarly, the National Council on Climate Change, which is chaired by the President, lacks the independence necessary to generate credible oversight. When the body responsible for holding the executive accountable to climate commitments is chaired by the executive, the structural conditions for Gardiner's 'moral corruption' are not merely present – they are institutionalised. Without a strong ethical commitment to sustainability, climate policies risk being reduced to symbolic gestures rather than effective interventions.

This is precisely where the virtue-ethics supplement to Gardiner's framework becomes most useful. If the problem were primarily one of structural incentives, the solution would be primarily one of institutional redesign. But the evidence from Nigeria suggests that the problem also has a character dimension: the officials who approved new oil licences, the finance ministry that diverted environmental funds, the legislators who created an oversight body chaired by the very actor it is meant to oversee – these are not merely caught in a structural trap. They are making choices, and those choices are subject to moral evaluation. Virtue ethics, with its focus on the dispositions and habits of actual decision-makers, provides a language for that evaluation that Gardiner's structural account lacks. Demanding ecological stewardship, prudence and integrity from public officials is not a naive appeal – it is a necessary supplement to institutional reform, because institutions can always be circumvented by those who lack the character to honour them.

Despite these challenges, some progress has been made. The establishment of the National Climate Change Council and the Climate Change Fund represent efforts to institutionalise climate governance. These initiatives signal a growing recognition of climate issues, but their success depends on sustained political will, stronger enforcement mechanisms and increased stakeholder engagement. In addition, the integration of climate ethics into the policy discourse could help fill existing gaps by promoting a long-term perspective in decision-making and encouraging more responsible governance. However, ethics cannot remain an abstract ideal; it must be operationalised through clear accountability measures, public engagement and institutional reforms that incentivise long-term planning over short-term gains. Civil society organisations in Nigeria have increasingly demanded climate accountability – the Environmental Rights Action/Friends of the Earth Nigeria and the Centre for Climate Justice Nigeria have both produced detailed critical analyses of the Climate Change Act's implementation – but their capacity to hold the state accountable is constrained by weak freedom of information laws, limited access to government data and, in some cases, legal intimidation. Addressing Nigeria's ethical deficit therefore requires not only institutional reform at the top but a deliberate effort to strengthen the civic infrastructure of environmental accountability from below.

What would a governance model that combines Gardiner's systemic critique with genuine local accountability look like in practice? At minimum, it would require three things. First, independent climate finance oversight: an audit body with statutory powers, civil society representation and a public reporting mandate, insulated from executive control. Second, climate-proofed budgeting: a requirement that all major capital expenditure decisions – including energy sector licensing – be assessed against the country's NDC commitments before approval, with the assessment published. Third, civic accountability infrastructure: strengthened freedom of information provisions specifically covering climate-related government data, combined with dedicated public interest litigation mechanisms that give civil society standing to challenge non-compliance with the Climate Change Act. These are not utopian demands – they are mechanisms that have been implemented in comparable jurisdictions, including Kenya and South Africa, and they represent the institutional translation of the ethical obligations that Gardiner's framework identifies but does not operationalise.

In sum, while Gardiner's “perfect moral storm” provides a useful framework for analysing Nigeria's climate challenges, it does not fully account for the role of individual and domestic agency in climate action. By focusing primarily on structural and systemic barriers, Gardiner risks downplaying the responsibility of national actors to address governance failures, corruption and policy inertia. Nigeria's climate crisis is not only the result of global injustices, but also of domestic policy choices, elite interests and insufficient public mobilisation. Addressing these challenges requires not only better international cooperation, but also greater domestic accountability, institutional reform and a shift towards a more engaged and ethically aware citizenry.

Conclusion

This paper has used Gardiner's 'perfect moral storm' framework to examine Nigeria's climate governance, while arguing that the framework requires critical extension. Gardiner's account of the global, intergenerational and theoretical dimensions of climate inaction is powerful and largely correct as far as it goes: Nigeria is genuinely victimised by global emissions it did not cause, genuinely constrained by inadequate international climate finance, and genuinely ill-served by political institutions designed for short-term electoral horizons rather than long-term environmental stewardship. These are real ethical failures, and they deserve the systemic critique Gardiner provides.

But the paper has also argued that Gardiner's framework, applied without supplementation, risks producing a form of structural determinism that inadvertently relieves domestic actors of moral responsibility. The evidence from Nigeria – the misallocation of climate funds, the continued licensing of fossil fuel exploration after the signing of the Climate Change Act, the design of oversight mechanisms that protect rather than constrain executive power – suggests that Nigeria's ethical deficit is not only the product of global injustice. It is also the product of choices made by identifiable actors who could have chosen otherwise and did not. These choices are morally evaluable, and evaluating them is not merely a theoretical exercise – it is a precondition for demanding accountability.

The concept of 'ethical deficit' developed in this paper is intended to hold both dimensions together. It names both the structural failure – the gap between what

global justice requires of wealthy nations and what they deliver – and the domestic failure – the gap between what Nigeria's own laws and commitments require of its government and what its government delivers. Closing this deficit requires action on both fronts: sustained international pressure for genuine climate finance reform, and sustained domestic pressure for the institutional accountability mechanisms outlined above.

The supplement this paper proposes to Gardiner's framework – drawing on virtue ethics to evaluate the character of decision-makers, and on civic accountability theory to specify the institutional conditions under which moral responsibility can be enforced – is not a rejection of his analysis but a completion of it. A perfect moral storm, properly understood, does not excuse inaction; it describes the conditions under which moral courage is most urgently required. Nigeria has the legislative architecture for meaningful climate governance. What remains is the political will, the institutional integrity and the civic pressure to make it real.

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