

The Participation Ceiling: Institutional Capture and Gender-Responsive Adaptation in the Lake Chad Basin

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Abstract

Despite global commitments to gender-responsive climate adaptation, meaningful participation remains limited in conflict-affected settings. This article examines the participation ceiling in the Lake Chad Basin, where 65% of respondents considered government action on climate and gender very important, yet only 43% had participated in any gender-related programme. Drawing on mixed-methods data from 400 households, 20 in-depth interviews, and policy document analysis, the study shows how institutional capture and securitized governance constrain transformative participation. Women's visibility in humanitarian systems through registration, beneficiary targeting, and programme attendance often masks their exclusion from agenda-setting and resource control. Fragmented interventions, short project cycles, and militarized humanitarian spaces collectively reproduce a participation ceiling that limits empowerment. The article argues that gender inclusion frequently functions as a governance tool rather than a redistributive process and calls for Community Resilience Boards, participatory budgeting, and the de-securitization of adaptation governance to promote substantive gender-responsive decision-making.

Keywords

Participation ceiling,
Gender-responsive
adaptation,
Institutional capture,
Securitized
governance,
Lake Chad Basin.

1. Introduction

The Lake Chad Basin constitutes one of the world's most pressing climate-security emergencies. The lake has lost approximately 90 per cent of its surface area since the 1960s, displacing over 3.5 million people and devastating agricultural and fishing livelihoods across Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Cameroon (UNDP, 2022; FAO, 2021). The region has simultaneously become a theatre of protracted insurgency: Boko Haram and affiliated groups have systematically exploited ecological degradation and state fragility to expand operations, generating a mutually reinforcing cycle of environmental collapse and political violence (International Crisis Group, 2021). This convergence of crises has produced unprecedented international attention and intervention, with gender-responsive adaptation emerging as a central policy imperative within humanitarian and development architectures.

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International frameworks from the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Gender Action Plan to the Lake Chad Basin Commission's Regional Stabilization actors have invested substantially in women's economic empowerment, leadership capacity-building, and participatory planning across the basin. Yet the transformative potential of these interventions remains deeply contested. Feminist scholars have extensively documented how 'gender-responsive' programming can operate as a technology of governance: rendering women visible as beneficiaries while simultaneously obscuring their exclusion from decision-making structures and resource control (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Li, 2007; True, 2012). In conflict-affected contexts, this dynamic is compounded by the securitization of humanitarian space, where biometric surveillance, military coordination imperatives, and counter-terrorism frameworks fundamentally reshape the possibilities for civic agency (Duffield, 2012; Enloe, 2019).

This article examines the policy-practice divide in gender-responsive adaptation through sustained empirical analysis of the Nigerian Lake Chad sub-region. Our central analytical puzzle is both statistical and structural: 65 per cent of survey respondents rated governmental action on climate and gender as 'very important', yet only 43 per cent of this group reported ever participating in any gender-related initiative. This 'participation ceiling' where high normative demand meets systematically constrained engagement signals not a simple implementation deficit but a structural feature of climate-security governance. We ask: through what institutional mechanisms is gender inclusion transformed from a redistributive project into a technical exercise? And how does the securitization of humanitarian space constrain the possibilities for transformative participation?

This article makes three distinct contributions to development studies. First, we provide one of the first systematic mixed-methods assessments of gender-responsive adaptation governance in the Lake Chad Basin, combining quantitative participation data with qualitative institutional ethnography to address a critical empirical gap in evidence on how global gender mainstreaming commitments translate into practice in fragile, conflict-affected states.

Second, we develop a theoretical synthesis of governmentality studies, securitization theory, and feminist institutionalism to explain how 'gender

Strategy now routinely mandate gender mainstreaming in climate and security programming. Development

mainstreaming' operates as a depoliticizing technology within aid architectures. This contributes to ongoing debates on aid effectiveness by demonstrating how institutional capture the transformation of redistributive agendas into governance technologies undermines local ownership and sustainable capacity-building (Pritchett et al., 2010; Andrews et al., 2017).

Our concept of 'securitized technicalization' extends critiques of 'isomorphic mimicry' in institutional reform to the gender-climate nexus, showing how securitization enables the suspension of normal political procedures while governmentality provides the administrative apparatus for managing populations without substantively empowering them.

Third, we propose concrete mechanisms for de-securitizing participation Community Resilience Boards with genuine veto power, participatory budgeting quotas, and public accountability metrics that move beyond 'best practice' checklists toward structural transformation. These recommendations address the institutional reform agenda in fragile states by targeting the informal rules and power relations that reproduce exclusion, rather than merely improving formal compliance with gender mainstreaming standards. The article proceeds as follows: Section 2 reviews theoretical debates, developing our analytical framework; Section 3 describes research methods and context; Section 4 presents findings on three modes of institutional capture; Section 5 discusses theoretical and practical implications; and Section 6 concludes with policy alternatives.

2. Theorizing governmentality, securitization, and the technicalization of gender

2.1 Rendering Technical: the Depoliticization of Development

Tania Li's (2007) concept of 'rendering technical' provides the foundational analytical entry point for understanding how governance depoliticizes inherently political problems. Li argues that development interventions systematically translate complex social relations inequality, exclusion, structural violence into technical problems

amenable to expert intervention. This translation involves three constitutive moves: establishing authoritative knowledge that defines the problem in manageable terms; simplifying structural complexity into governable categories; and proposing technical solutions that preclude structural transformation (Li, 2007: 7-11).

Gender mainstreaming has proven particularly susceptible to such technicalization. 'Gender' is routinely operationalized as a countable variable: women's participation rate, female beneficiary counts, gender-disaggregated indicators inserted into project log-frames without disturbing underlying power structures (Cornwall and Brock, 2005; Moser and Moser, 2005; True, 2012). The result is what Cornwall and Brock (2005) term 'buzzword fuzziness': concepts that signal progressive intent while permitting business-as-usual practice. 'Empowerment' becomes training workshops; 'participation' becomes consultation meetings; 'gender equality' becomes counting women in attendance registers.

In climate adaptation specifically, this technicalization manifests through what Resurrección and Elmhirst (2021) call the 'resilience imperative' the framing of climate vulnerability as a technical problem of risk management rather than a political problem of distributive justice. Women's adaptive labour is rendered visible through metrics of coping and livelihood diversification, while the structural barriers that necessitate such labour remain systematically unaddressed. The policy-practice divide is thus not a failure of implementation but a constitutive feature of governance that manages inequality without transforming it.

2.2 Securitization and the Militarization of Aid

The Copenhagen School's securitization theory offers complementary analytical tools for understanding how climate change is framed as an existential threat requiring exceptional measures (Buzan et al., 1998). Securitization involves the discursive construction of an issue as posing an existential threat to a valued referent object, thereby justifying the suspension of normal political procedures. In the Lake Chad context, climate change has been securitized through its systematic linkage to insurgency, forced migration, and state collapse what Trombetta (2011) terms the 'securitization of the environment'.

This framing carries significant implications for gender-responsive governance. As climate adaptation becomes subsumed within security-stabilization frameworks, humanitarian space is increasingly reshaped by counter-terrorism imperatives, biometric surveillance, and military coordination (Duffield, 2012; Howell and Lind, 2009). Women's participation is encouraged insofar as it contributes to stability metrics visible beneficiaries, peaceful communities, resilient households but is actively discouraged when it challenges authority structures or demands accountability. The result is what Enloe (2019) terms 'governance without citizenship': populations rendered administratively visible but politically marginal.

Securitization also distorts the temporal logic of intervention. Short-term stabilization projects displace long-term structural engagement; rapid, visible results are systematically prioritized over sustainable transformation. This 'projectized temporality' (Mosse, 2005) is particularly ill-suited to gender equity, which requires sustained contestation of entrenched norms, interests, and authority structures.

2.3 Feminist Institutionalism: The Informal Rules of Exclusion

Feminist institutionalism highlights how apparently gender-neutral formal rules can reproduce masculine dominance through informal practices (Mackay and Waylen, 2021). Even when policies formally mandate inclusion, implementation is shaped by 'hidden' institutional rules: who chairs decision-making meetings, who controls disbursement mechanisms, whose knowledge claims count as legitimate expertise. In climate governance, these informal rules systematically privilege technical expertise over lived experience, administrative efficiency over redistributive equity, and state security over human security.

The intersection of these three theoretical frameworks governmentality, securitization, and feminist institutionalism suggests that the policy-practice divide in gender-responsive adaptation is systematically produced rather than incidentally occurring. Rendering gender technical makes it governable; securitization justifies exceptional measures that constrain autonomous participation; informal institutional rules ensure that visible inclusion does not translate into substantive power. Together, these mechanisms constitute

what we term 'institutional capture': the transformation of redistributive agendas into technologies of governance that stabilize rather than transform existing hierarchies.

2.4 The Participation Ceiling: Conceptual Contribution

Our central conceptual contribution the 'participation ceiling' requires explicit differentiation from established frameworks. Table 1 situates this concept within the existing participation literature.

Table 1. The Participation Ceiling in Context: Conceptual Differentiation

Framework	Core Concept	Structural Focus	Application to Securitized Contexts
Arnstein (1969)	Ladder of citizen participation	Degrees of power in decision-making	Assumes open political space; limited attention to security constraints
Cornwall (2004)	Invited vs. claimed spaces	Spatial typology of participation venues	Focuses on space creation, not demand–supply dynamics
Gaventa (2006)	Closed, invited, claimed spaces	Power domains and visibility	Emphasizes power analysis; does not theorize institutional blockages
Cleaver (2004)	Bureaucratic vs. socially embedded institutions	Institutional hybridity	Focuses on bricolage; does not address securitization effects
Participation Ceiling (This article)	Structural constraint on participation despite high demand	Mismatch between demand for and supply of meaningful engagement	Specifically theorizes securitization and projectized temporality as producing artificial ceilings in conflict-affected humanitarian contexts

Source: Authors' own elaboration, drawing on Arnstein (1969), Cornwall (2004), Gaventa (2006), and Cleaver (2004).

The participation ceiling advances existing frameworks in three analytically distinct ways. First, while Arnstein's ladder assumes that citizens can progressively ascend toward greater power, the ceiling metaphor captures structural constraints that prevent upward mobility regardless of individual or collective agency. Second, whereas Cornwall and Gaventa focus primarily on the spatial properties of participation venues, the ceiling concept foregrounds the quality and cumulative impact of engagement how repeated, shallow participation without decision-making authority produces institutional disillusionment rather than empowerment. Third, and most distinctively, the participation ceiling specifically theorizes the mechanisms through which securitization and aid architecture biometric surveillance, compressed project cycles, institutional fragmentation produce this constraint as a systemic feature of humanitarian governance rather than a local implementation failure.

The ceiling operates at three analytically distinct levels: attendance (physical presence in programmes), agenda-setting (influence over priorities and project design), and resource control

(authority over budget allocation and implementation). Our empirical analysis demonstrates that women in the Lake Chad Basin frequently achieve attendance, rarely breach the ceiling into agenda-setting, and almost never attain resource control a pattern that existing spatial typologies cannot adequately theorize.

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3. Research Context and Methodology

3.1 Study Context: The Nigerian Lake Chad Sub-Region

Fieldwork was conducted in three Local Government Areas (LGAs) on the Nigerian side of the Lake Chad Basin: Monguno, Marte, and Kukawa/Baga. These sites were purposively selected to capture ecologically and conflict-dynamically diverse settings (Table 2). Monguno is characterized by fishing and recession farming economies disrupted by repeated insurgent attacks and movement restrictions. Marte features flood-recession agriculture and cross-border raiding, with severe livelihood collapse. Kukawa/Baga centres on fishing, fish-smoking, and border trade, simultaneously affected by lake shrinkage, insurgent taxation, and naval checkpoints.

Table 2. Study Area Characteristics

LGA	2022 Projected Population	Core Livelihoods	Key Insecurity Drivers
Monguno	160,900	Fishing, recession farming, trade	Repeated Boko Haram attacks; military movement restrictions
Marte	189,900	Flood-recession agriculture, cattle herding	Agricultural and fishing collapse; cross-border raids
Kukawa (Baga)	297,900	Fishing, fish-smoking, border trade	Lake shrinkage; insurgent taxation; naval checkpoints

Source: NPC 2006 census, projected at 3.5% annual growth; validated against UN-OCHA 2022 settlement data.

The region has experienced profound demographic disruption. Over three-quarters of households in our sample had experienced displacement: 44 per cent resided in internally displaced persons (IDP) camps, 32 per cent were returnees, and only 24 per cent had never been displaced. Women constituted 74.5 per cent of respondents, reflecting the de facto feminization of static populations as men migrate for livelihood security or face elevated conscription risks.

3.2 Research Design and Methods

The study employed a convergent mixed-methods design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018), combining quantitative survey data with qualitative institutional ethnography. This design enables both statistical generalization across the study population and contextual interpretation of governance mechanisms and their lived effects.

3.2.1 Quantitative Component

A total of 400 structured questionnaires were administered via Open Data Kit (ODK) across the three LGAs, proportionally allocated by projected population: Monguno (n = 99), Marte (n = 117), and Kukawa/Baga (n = 184). The instrument captured participation in gender-responsive initiatives, perceptions of governmental and institutional action, and relevant demographic and livelihood characteristics.

Following our three-level theoretical framework, participation was operationalized at three distinct levels:

- (i) attendance participation, measured as a binary indicator for participation in any gender-related programme (training, workshop, community meeting) in the preceding twelve months;
- (ii) agenda-setting participation, measured through self-reported influence over programme design; and
- (iii) resource control, measured through reported decision-making authority over allocated resources and disbursements.

Binary logistic regression was used to model predictors of attendance participation, with

perceived government importance, gender, education, displacement status, age, livelihood category, and camp versus returnee location as independent variables. A note on endogeneity: perceived government importance may be partially influenced by prior participation experience. Results are accordingly interpreted as associative rather than strictly causal.

3.2.2 Qualitative Component

Twenty in-depth interviews (IDIs) were conducted with purposively selected participants: 13 men and 7 women. The gender composition of the IDI sample reflects the empirical reality that men disproportionately occupy formal leadership positions community gatekeepers, LGA officers, NGO programme coordinators through which institutional decisions flow. Women interviewees were selected to represent diverse positionalities within gendered governance structures, including women's cooperative members, displaced persons, and returnee community leaders. Interviews explored experiences with humanitarian programmes, perceptions of institutional coordination, and the micropolitics of participation.

3.2.2 Policy Document Analysis

Critical discourse analysis was conducted on key policy texts: the Lake Chad Basin Commission Regional Stabilization Strategy (2019-2023), Nigeria's National Adaptation Plan (2021), UN Women programme documents, and major NGO strategy papers. Analysis focused on the discursive construction of 'gender', 'participation', and 'resilience'; the accountability mechanisms proposed; and the ways in which security imperatives framed intervention logics and programmatic choices.

3.2.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the university research ethics committee. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with particular attention to power dynamics in conflict-affected settings. Anonymity was maintained through code identifiers; all interview quotations employ pseudonyms.

4. Results

4.1 Three Modes of Institutional Capture

Our findings reveal three interconnected mechanisms through which gender-responsive adaptation is captured by governance logics that systematically reproduce exclusion: (i) the metrics of visibility; (ii) institutional fragmentation and projectized temporality; and (iii) securitized space. Together, these mechanisms produce the participation ceiling high normative demand for intervention met by constrained, instrumentalized engagement.

4.1.1 The Metrics of Visibility: Counting Women, Governing Women

Humanitarian governance in the Lake Chad Basin operates through intensive metrication. Biometric registration systems, beneficiary databases, attendance sheets, and workshop evaluation forms produce detailed administrative knowledge of affected populations. Women are particularly

visible within these systems constituting the majority of registered beneficiaries, participants in vocational training, and attendees at community meetings. Yet this administrative visibility functions as a mode of governance rather than as empowerment.

Survey data reveal a striking structural pattern. While 65 per cent of respondents rated governmental action on climate and gender as 'very important', only 35 per cent could identify any ongoing inter-agency coordination between government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations on gender-responsive adaptation, and only 17 per cent of those aware rated such coordination as 'very effective' (Table 3). Critically, displacement status significantly shaped these perceptions: returnees were nearly twice as likely as IDP camp residents to rate coordination as effective (40.6 per cent vs. 23.9 per cent, $\chi^2 = 7.6$, $p = 0.023$), supporting our argument that securitized, militarized camp governance systematically degrades participatory possibilities.

Table 3. Perceived Institutional Collaboration and Participation

Indicator	Response Category	n	%	χ^2/p -value
Awareness of institutional collaboration	Yes	140	35.0	-
	No	260	65.0	-
Perceived effectiveness (among aware; n = 140)	Very effective	24	17.1	-
	Somewhat effective	57	40.7	-
	Ineffective	59	42.1	-
Funding adequacy for gender-sensitive adaptation	Adequate	44	11.0	-
	Moderate	72	18.0	-
	Insufficient	284	71.0	-
Coordination effectiveness by displacement status	Returnee communities	52/128	40.6	$\chi^2 = 7.6$, $p = 0.023$
	IDP camps	42/176	23.9	-

Source: Field survey, March–May 2024. χ^2 -tests conducted for categorical comparisons.

Binary logistic regression confirms that perceived government importance significantly predicts participation (OR = 2.89, $p < 0.001$; Table 4). Notably, however, even among those who most strongly endorse state responsibility, fewer than half have participated. Female gender exerts a smaller but statistically significant effect (OR = 1.48, $p = 0.038$), suggesting that women's overrepresentation in programme rosters reflects

administrative targeting rather than substantive empowerment. Displacement status demonstrates strong effects: IDP camp residents are significantly less likely to participate meaningfully compared to returnees (OR = 0.62, $p = 0.021$), supporting our argument that securitized space structurally constrains participation

Table 4. Binary Logistic Regression: Predictors of Participation in Gender-Responsive Initiatives (n = 400)

Variable	B	SE	Wald	df	p	OR	95% CI
Perceived government importance (very important)	1.061	0.214	24.523	1	<0.001	2.889	1.899–4.396
Female gender	0.392	0.189	4.301	1	0.038	1.480	1.022–2.143
Education (secondary or above)	0.378	0.201	3.542	1	0.060	1.459	0.984–2.164
Age (years)	0.012	0.008	2.250	1	0.134	1.012	0.996–1.028
Displacement status (IDP camp)	−0.478	0.207	5.323	1	0.021	0.620	0.413–0.931
Returnee (vs. never displaced)	0.156	0.198	0.621	1	0.431	1.169	0.793–1.723
Livelihood (fishing vs. farming)	−0.234	0.176	1.763	1	0.184	0.791	0.561–1.116
Constant	−1.892	0.456	17.234	1	<0.001	0.151	-

Model $\chi^2 = 47.832$, $df = 7$, $p < 0.001$; Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.142$. Results are associative; endogeneity between perceived importance and prior participation is acknowledged.

Qualitative data illuminate how these metrics operate as technologies of administrative control. A 31-year-old displaced teacher in Marte, articulated the performative nature of participation where she said that:

"They call it a 'women's project', yet all decisions are already made by the time they invite us. We sign attendance sheets while the men sign the cheques. They take photographs for their reports, but our suggestions go into a file that no one opens."

This pattern visibility without voice was consistent across research sites. A 29-year-old displaced widow in Kukawa, observed:

"We hear about government programmes on the radio, but they never reach us here. Only those who know somebody in the office get help."

The biometric and documentary apparatus of humanitarian governance produces what Foucault (1991) termed 'disciplinary power': detailed knowledge of populations that enables their administration without their political agency. Women's bodies are counted, photographed, and registered, but their perspectives are not incorporated into programme design or evaluation. The 'gender-responsive' label thus

signifies not a redistribution of power but its technical management.

4.1.2 Fragmentation and the Project Cycle: The Communiqué That Never Commenced

The institutional landscape of gender-responsive adaptation in the Lake Chad Basin is characterized by extreme fragmentation. Multiple NGOs, government agencies, and international organizations operate parallel programmes with limited horizontal coordination, competing for donor visibility rather than pursuing collective transformative impact.

Survey respondents consistently reported weak institutional coordination: only 35 per cent could identify any ongoing inter-agency collaboration, and 71 per cent rated funding for gender-sensitive adaptation as 'insufficient'. The temporal logic of project cycles exacerbates this fragmentation. Humanitarian programming typically operates on 6–12-month cycles, with strong institutional pressure for rapid results and visible outputs. This 'projectized temporality' (Mosse, 2005) is structurally ill-suited to the slow, contested work of gender norm transformation.

A local government officer in Monguno articulated the coordination problem with precision:

"There are too many partners with too many short projects. We attend meeting after meeting with no cumulative action. Each NGO has its own indicators, its own reporting systems, its own beneficiary lists. They duplicate efforts and leave structural gaps."

Also, a 50-year-old community gatekeeper (male) in Marte, traced the spatial leakage of resources:

"Funds arrive in Maiduguri but evaporate before they reach the lake. We hear of millions allocated; we see only thousands arrive and those thousands purchase uniforms for coordination meetings, not seeds for fields."

Another woman, 33-year-old displaced youth representative in Monguno, captured the symbolic dimension of this governance failure:

"Coordination meetings happen in hotels we have never entered. The communiqués are signed, photographs are taken, but the groundwater level keeps falling and the women keep queuing for water."

This 'communiqué that never commenced' the formally signed agreement without substantive implementation emerges as a signature feature of governance in the basin. Institutional capture operates through what Li (2007) terms 'the will to improve': the continuous production of plans, assessments, and coordination mechanisms that demonstrate institutional intent while avoiding accountability for outcomes. Gender-responsive adaptation becomes a perpetual pilot - each project cycle generating new consultations, new beneficiary lists, and new photographic documentation, without cumulative structural transformation.

4.1.3 Securitized Space: Camp Governance and the Militarization of Participation

The third mode of institutional capture operates through the securitization of humanitarian space. The Lake Chad Basin has been discursively constructed as a zone of exception in which normal political procedures are suspended in favour of security-stabilization imperatives.

Climate adaptation is framed not as a rights-based project of distributive justice but as a counter-insurgency instrument for preventing radicalization and restoring state authority.

This securitization fundamentally reshapes the possibilities for participation. IDP camps the primary sites of humanitarian intervention are governed through military coordination, biometric surveillance, and restricted mobility. Women's participation is actively encouraged within these contained spaces: vocational training, savings groups, health education. It is actively discouraged, however, when it challenges camp authority structures or demands accountability from state actors.

The contrast between IDP camp residents and returnee communities is analytically instructive. Returnees, despite greater material deprivation, reported more effective institutional coordination and greater practical leverage in bargaining with programme implementers. Distance from Maiduguri the humanitarian capital necessitates local negotiation and creates informal spaces for female veto over seed variety selection, well siting, and project priorities. Proximity to humanitarian hubs, conversely, intensifies administrative oversight and constrains autonomous organizing.

27-year-old woman who was a returnee mother in Kukawa, articulated the double bind that securitization produces:

"Different NGOs come and go. They ask us to register but never tell us what happens after. We do not see them working together everyone does their own small thing and leaves. But when we ask questions, they say we are being difficult, that we do not understand security constraints."

The militarization of aid space thus produces a constitutive paradox: women are hyper-visible as beneficiaries of humanitarian governance but rendered invisible as political subjects with legitimate claims to accountability. The participation ceiling is not an accident of poor programme design but a structural feature of securitized governance that manages populations without empowering them.

4.1.4 Negative Cases: Breaching the Ceiling

To strengthen causal interpretation and avoid analytical overgeneralization, we examined instances in which women achieved substantive agenda-setting or resource control. These negative cases were concentrated among returnee women in Marte and Kukawa, particularly those organized through pre-existing livelihood cooperatives with established historical autonomy from humanitarian programming structures.

Another female respondent, a 45-year-old returnee fisherwoman in Kukawa, described how organizational distance from Maiduguri enabled collective bargaining:

"When the first NGO arrived, we learned their procedural language. By the third one, we knew to demand written agreements before clearing any land or providing any labour. We are far from the city, so they must negotiate with us directly. We have refused two projects that did not include women in the budgeting process."

This case illustrates that the participation ceiling is conditional on securitization intensity and aid architecture density, not structurally inevitable. Where military oversight is lighter and humanitarian programme density lower, women can leverage organizational history and collective memory to achieve substantive participation. Such cases, however, represented fewer than 15 per cent of our qualitative sample, confirming the ceiling as the empirically dominant pattern.

5. Discussion

5.1 From Technical Inclusion to Transformative Governance

Our findings demonstrate that the policy-practice divide in gender-responsive adaptation is not an accidental implementation failure but a systematically produced structural feature of climate-security governance in the Lake Chad Basin. Three interconnected mechanisms operate in concert: metrics of visibility render women administratively knowable while excluding their perspectives from decision-making; institutional fragmentation and projectized temporality prevent cumulative engagement; and the securitization of humanitarian space constrains autonomous

organizing while enrolling women as indicators of stabilization success.

5.1.1 Securitized Technicalization and Aid Effectiveness

Our analysis contributes to feminist political ecology by demonstrating how environmental governance operates through gendered technologies of visibility and administrative control. The participation ceiling we identify extends Resurrección and Elmhirst's (2021) critique of the 'resilience imperative' by showing how gender mainstreaming specifically is captured by governance logics that depoliticize structural inequality. Women's adaptive labour is rendered visible through metrics of coping and diversification, while the authority gaps that persist alongside and indeed because of that labour remain systematically obscured.

The synthesis of governmentality and securitization theory offers novel analytical tools for understanding climate governance in conflict-affected contexts. Securitization enables the suspension of normal political procedures; governmentality provides the technical apparatus for managing populations. The result is 'securitized technicalization': a mode of governance that combines exceptional measures with detailed administrative management to produce managed inclusion without redistribution.

This framework illuminates' connections to established aid effectiveness debates. Our findings resonate with Pritchett et al.'s (2010) analysis of 'capability traps' situations where external intervention produces institutional forms that mimic modern governance without functional substance. Gender-responsive adaptation in the Lake Chad Basin exemplifies such traps: the forms of participation are present (attendance, consultation), but the function is absent (substantive authority, accountability). Our critique of projectized temporality similarly aligns with Andrews et al.'s (2017) 'problem-driven iterative adaptation' approach, which emphasizes locally led, politically informed reform over imported best practices with predetermined technical solutions.

5.1.2 Intersectionality and Differentiated Ceiling Effects

While our primary analytical frame foregrounds gender, disaggregated analysis reveals differentiated ceiling effects across intersecting social categories. Displacement status produces the most powerful differentiation: IDP camp residents face structurally stricter ceilings than returnees due to militarized governance architectures (OR = 0.62, $p = 0.021$). Age generates a marginal but directionally consistent effect: older women (45+) reported somewhat higher agenda-setting influence, likely attributable to accumulated social capital, though this did not reach statistical significance ($p = 0.134$). Livelihood positioning also matters fishing-dependent women showed lower participation rates than their farming counterparts, possibly reflecting greater spatial dispersion and the strong NGO orientation toward agricultural rather than aquatic livelihood interventions.

These patterns suggest the ceiling operates through intersecting structures of constraint rather than uniform gender discrimination. Future research should systematically examine how class, marital status, and ethnic identity compound or mediate these ceiling effects across different humanitarian contexts.

5.1.3 Alternatives Policy: De-Securitizing Participation

Overcoming institutional capture requires structural transformation of adaptation governance architecture, not merely improved implementation of existing frameworks. We propose three concrete mechanisms for de-securitizing participation.

Community Resilience Boards (CRBs). Establish participatory governance platforms at the LGA level with mandated 50 per cent female membership, substantive veto authority over project design, and publicly accessible minutes uploaded to open-access dashboards. CRBs would shift accountability from upward (to donors) to downward (to communities), creating effective mechanisms for community oversight of institutional performance. This directly addresses the fragmentation problem by mandating single-

platform coordination across all adaptation funding streams.

Participatory Budget Quotas. Mandate that a minimum of 30 per cent of local climate adaptation budgets be co-designed through women's cooperatives and community organizations, with no disbursement authorized without female co-signature. This mechanism would transform participation from mere consultation to substantive negotiation, ensuring that women's presence in planning translates into meaningful control over resources. It directly targets the metrics-of-visibility problem by linking countable presence to substantive authority.

Authority Gap Index (AGI). Publish quarterly metrics on the gap between women's responsibilities and their decision-making authority, disaggregated by LGA and programme. Public reporting would transform hidden exclusion into visible accountability, creating reputational incentives for institutional reform. The AGI operationalizes the participation ceiling as a measurable governance indicator, enabling progress tracking beyond simple attendance metrics.

These mechanisms differ fundamentally from standard gender mainstreaming recommendations by targeting the informal rules and power relations that reproduce exclusion. They require not better implementation of existing frameworks but transformation of the governance architectures that structure participation.

6. Conclusion

The policy-practice divide in gender-responsive adaptation in the Lake Chad Basin is not a gap to be filled by improved programme design but a technology of governance to be critically dismantled. Our analysis reveals how institutional capture operates through the mutually reinforcing mechanisms of administrative visibility, institutional fragmentation, and securitization to produce managed inclusion without empowerment. The participation ceiling where high normative demand for intervention meets constrained engagement is a structural feature of

climate-security governance, not an incidental implementation failure.

This finding has fundamental implications for feminist climate security research and practice. It challenges the assumption that 'including women' in adaptation programmes automatically advances gender equality, demonstrating instead how inclusion can operate as a sophisticated mode of administrative control. It demands analytical attention to the governance mechanisms technical, temporal, territorial that transform redistributive agendas into stabilizing technologies. And it argues that de-securitization, not further incorporation into security architectures, is the necessary precondition for transformative adaptation.

The Lake Chad Basin is routinely framed as a laboratory for climate-security intervention: a space where international actors can test innovative approaches to environmental peacebuilding. Our findings suggest this laboratory is producing not resilience but 'maladaptive stability' (Berkes and Ross, 2013) systems that absorb immediate shocks while systematically reproducing the structural inequalities that generate long-term vulnerability. Genuine transformation requires not more sophisticated metrics or better-coordinated projects but the repoliticization of adaptation as a site of structural struggle over authority, resources, and recognition.

For development practice, our analysis indicates that institutional reform in fragile states must move decisively beyond formal compliance with gender mainstreaming standards toward restructuring the aid architectures that produce capability traps. The participation ceiling is not unique to the Lake Chad Basin; it likely characterizes gender-responsive governance across securitized humanitarian contexts globally. Addressing it requires confronting the temporal, spatial, and political-economic constraints that transform empowerment rhetoric into governance technology and committing to the politically difficult work of redistributing authority to the communities these interventions claim to serve.

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