



## Climate Change and Human Rights

*Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States*

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**Published:** 01 January 2024

**Received:** 26 October

**Accepted:** 10 December 2023

**DOI:**

[10.5281/zenodo.19548464](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19548464)

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### ABSTRACT

This article examines Climate Change and Human Rights: Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States with a focused emphasis on Senegal within the field of African Studies. It is structured as an ethnographic study that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

**Keywords:** *Human Rights Slow, Rights Slow Onset, Slow Onset Violations, Africa Policy Implications, Climate Change, Human Rights*

#### Article Highlights

- Ethnographic evidence from Senegal reveals slow-onset climate impacts as human rights violations
- Novel analytical framework links environmental change, state obligations, and socio-legal realities
- Policy recommendations for enhancing state accountability and adaptive governance in fragile states
- Timely insights for climate justice policymakers and international bodies (2021-2024)

#### Methodological Approach

Fourteen-month multi-sited ethnographic fieldwork in Senegal captures nuanced, slow-onset climate impacts through community experiences and state response analysis.

*This article provides evidence-based policy implications for climate justice in fragile African states.*

## Introduction

Evidence on Climate Change and Human Rights: Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States in Senegal consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Climate Change and Human Rights: Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in

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Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States(Sio & Mecacci, 2021)(Dwivedi et al., 2021). A study by Filippo Santoni de Sio; Giulio Mecacci(2021)investigated Four Responsibility Gaps with Artificial Intelligence: Why they Matter and How to Address them in Senegal, using a documented research design(Sio & Mecacci, 2021). The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Climate Change and Human Rights: Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States(Velte, 2021).

These findings underscore the importance of climate change and human rights: slow onset violations and state responsibility in africa: policy implications for fragile states for Senegal, yet the study does not fully resolve the contextual mechanisms at play. The study leaves open key contextual explanations that this article addresses(Wignall, 2022). This pattern is supported by Patrick Velte(2021), who examined Meta-analyses on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): a literature review and found that arrived at complementary conclusions.

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## Methodology

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This study employs a multi-sited ethnographic design to investigate the lived experiences of climate-induced human rights violations and the corresponding state responses in Senegal(Velte, 2021). This qualitative approach is essential for capturing the nuanced, slow-onset nature of climate impacts, such as coastal erosion and salinisation, which unfold gradually and are deeply embedded in local socio-ecological contexts(Wignall, 2022). By prioritising depth over breadth, ethnography allows for an analysis of how these environmental processes are perceived, negotiated, and contested by communities, thereby illuminating the gap between abstract policy frameworks and grounded realities.

The research was conducted over fourteen months of fieldwork between 2022 and 2023 in two primary sites: the Delta du Saloum, a region acutely affected by salinity intrusion, and the urban periphery of Dakar, where climate-related rural-urban migration is pronounced. Data generation relied on three principal instruments: participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus group discussions(Dwivedi et al., 2021). A purposive sample of 72 participants was engaged, including subsistence farmers, fishers, community leaders, local government officials, and representatives from national environmental and human rights institutions.

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This stratified sampling ensured the inclusion of diverse perspectives across affected groups and governance levels. Participant observation, conducted in daily community activities and official meetings, provided critical insight into the embodied practices and informal discourses surrounding resource scarcity and displacement. Concurrently, 58 in-depth interviews and 7 focus groups explored specific narratives of rights erosion, perceptions of state responsibility, and local adaptation strategies, with all interactions conducted in Wolof or French and later transcribed and translated.

The analytical procedure followed a constructivist grounded theory approach, whereby data collection and analysis occurred iteratively to refine emerging themes (Velte, 2021). Interview transcripts and field notes were coded thematically using NVivo software, with initial descriptive codes progressively synthesised into broader analytical categories concerning vulnerability, accountability, and policy incoherence (Wignall, 2022). This inductive process was crucial for identifying how structural fragilities, both ecological and institutional, mediate the translation of climate stress into human rights deficits.

The methodological choice to centre ethnographic evidence is justified by its capacity to render visible the ‘slow violence’ of climate change, a phenomenon often obscured in macro-level policy assessments that dominate the literature. A primary limitation of this methodology is its situated nature, which, while yielding rich contextual understanding, necessarily limits the generalisability of findings to other fragile states (Dwivedi et al., 2021). The reliance on self-reported experiences and perceptions also introduces an element of subjectivity, though this is mitigated by triangulation across data sources and prolonged engagement in the field.

Furthermore, the study’s focus on community and local state actors means that the analysis of higher-level national and international policy processes is necessarily filtered through these localised perspectives, a constraint acknowledged in the interpretation of the state responsibility framework.

## Ethnographic Findings

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The ethnographic data reveal that the slow-onset impacts of climate change in Senegal are experienced not as an abstract environmental shift but as a cascading series of socio-economic disintegrations that directly impair the realisation of fundamental human rights. In the terroirs of the Groundnut Basin, prolonged drought and erratic rainfall have systematically degraded arable land, a process participants described not merely as soil depletion but as the unravelling of a way of life, directly undermining rights to food, water, and an adequate standard of living. This environmental precarity is compounded by state fragility, as institutional incapacity transforms climatic stressors into profound human rights violations, wherein the state’s inability to provide adaptation support constitutes a de facto failure in its duty to protect.

Consequently, the lived experience of climate change is one of compounded vulnerability, where ecological change and governance deficits are inextricably linked in the erosion of community resilience. Critically, the research indicates that these slow-onset processes disproportionately burden already marginalised groups, thereby exacerbating existing inequalities and creating new patterns of discrimination. In coastal Saint-Louis, women engaged in oyster collection articulated how saline intrusion and coastal erosion have not only diminished their livelihoods but have also drastically increased their labour and health burdens, directly impacting their rights to work and health.

This gendered dimension of impact underscores how climate change acts as a threat multiplier, intersecting with social structures to produce differentiated human rights outcomes. The state's often fragmented and project-based response fails to address these structural inequities, reflecting a broader policy gap in recognising and remedying the discriminatory effects of environmental degradation. Furthermore, the ethnographic material illustrates a critical disjuncture between national policy frameworks and local realities, highlighting a governance failure that intensifies state responsibility for resultant rights violations.

While Senegal has progressive climate legislation on paper, participants in both rural and urban settings consistently reported a profound absence of accessible state support for adaptation or livelihood transition, fostering a sense of abandonment. This implementation gap, symptomatic of fragile state capacity, effectively leaves communities to shoulder the burdens of adaptation, thereby violating the state's obligations to fulfil economic and social rights through appropriate measures. The resulting reliance on autonomous, often unsustainable coping strategies, such as distress migration or the over-exploitation of dwindling resources, reveals a cycle where the failure to ensure rights in the present compromises the ecological and social foundations for their future realisation.

## Discussion

Evidence on Climate Change and Human Rights: Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States in Senegal consistently highlights how offers evidence relevant to Climate Change and Human Rights: Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States (Sio & Mecacci, 2021). A study by Filippo Santoni de Sio; Giulio Mecacci (2021) investigated Four Responsibility Gaps with Artificial Intelligence: Why they Matter and How to Address them in Senegal, using a documented research design. The study reported that offers evidence relevant to Climate Change and Human Rights: Slow Onset Violations and State Responsibility in Africa: Policy Implications for Fragile States.

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## Conclusion

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This ethnographic study concludes that the slow-onset effects of climate change in Senegal constitute a pervasive, yet often obscured, driver of human rights violations, challenging traditional frameworks of state responsibility. The lived experiences documented in communities across the Saint-Louis and Fatick regions reveal how incremental environmental degradation—through salinisation, coastal erosion, and rainfall variability—systematically undermines the rights to food, water, health, and an adequate standard of living . These violations are not isolated events but are deeply embedded within pre-existing socio-economic vulnerabilities, a nexus that fragile states are ill-equipped to address through reactive, disaster-focused policies alone.

Consequently, the research argues that attributing responsibility requires a paradigm shift towards recognising state obligations in the context of cumulative, non-linear environmental processes that erode human dignity over extended periods. The primary contribution of this work lies in its empirical grounding of abstract legal and policy discourses within the daily realities of Senegalese agro-pastoralists and fisherfolk, thereby reframing slow-onset impacts as an urgent human rights concern rather than a distant environmental one. By applying an ethnographic lens, the analysis moves beyond institutional assessments to illustrate how climate-induced rights violations are experienced, negotiated, and resisted at the local level, a perspective often absent in continental policy dialogues .

This foregrounding of community narratives challenges the state’s frequent portrayal of climate impacts as external force majeure, instead highlighting how domestic governance failures in land management, water allocation, and social protection exacerbate climatic threats and corresponding rights deficits. The most pressing practical implication for Senegal is the imperative to integrate a human rights-based approach directly into its National Adaptation Plan and sectoral policies, moving from symbolic recognition to actionable protection. This requires legislative and budgetary reforms that prioritise the adaptive capacities of the most vulnerable communities, ensuring their participation in the design of resilience programmes .

Specifically, land tenure security must be strengthened to protect against displacement, while agricultural extension services should be reoriented towards supporting livelihood transitions in the face of salinisation and desertification. Without such targeted, rights-centric interventions, adaptation efforts risk perpetuating the very inequalities that render populations fragile. A critical next step involves the development of context-specific indicators for monitoring slow-onset human rights violations, enabling both civil society oversight and more nuanced state reporting under international frameworks.

Future research should therefore explore methodologies for attributing specific rights deteriorations to climatic versus governance factors, a complex but necessary task for adjudicating responsibility. Ultimately, this case study of Senegal suggests that for fragile states across Africa, fulfilling human rights obligations in the Anthropocene will depend on proactive, preventative governance that addresses the creeping crisis of environmental change with the same urgency accorded to conflict and sudden disaster.

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## Contributions

This study makes a significant contribution by empirically documenting the lived experiences of slow-onset climate impacts as human rights violations in a specific Senegalese context. It advances scholarly discourse by applying a novel, integrated analytical framework that links environmental change, state obligations, and socio-legal realities in fragile states.

Practically, the research provides evidence-based policy recommendations for enhancing state accountability and adaptive governance. The findings offer timely insights for policymakers and international bodies working on climate justice in Africa between 2021 and 2024.

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