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Abstract

This perspective piece critically examines the intersection of gender, oil governance, and emerging climate politics in South Sudan from 2021 to 2024. It posits that the political economy of oil extraction, a cornerstone of state revenue, systematically marginalises women from decision-making processes, thereby intensifying the gendered impacts of both resource exploitation and climate vulnerability. Employing a feminist political ecology lens, the analysis draws on recent policy documents, civil society reports, and emerging scholarship to map women's formal and informal participation in environmental governance. It demonstrates how the prevailing petro-centric governance model, compounded by the Revitalised Peace Agreement's insufficient provisions for women in substantive roles, creates a dual exclusion. Women remain largely absent from high-level oil revenue management whilst disproportionately bearing the socio-ecological burdens of pollution and climate-induced disruptions to agriculture. The argument underscores that nascent climate adaptation initiatives, while entering policy discourse, risk perpetuating these inequalities if they fail to confront the core structures of resource control. The significance of the work lies in its advocacy for a transformative African feminist approach. This approach centres the agency and knowledge of South Sudanese women, contending that genuine environmental resilience is inseparable from gendered economic justice and inclusive political participation in natural resource governance.

Keywords: *Gendered political economy, Resource governance, Climate politics, Women's political participation, South Sudan, Extractivism, Environmental justice*

INTRODUCTION

The existing literature on gender, politics, and environmental governance in South Sudan establishes a critical foundation, yet reveals persistent gaps regarding contextual specificity and causal mechanisms ([Berglund & Bailey, 2022](#)). Research on the political economy of natural resources and oil politics underscores how these sectors are profoundly gendered, often marginalising women from

decision-making and exacerbating inequitable policy impacts ([Kibe et al., 2023](#); [Deshayes, 2023](#)). Similarly, studies on women's political participation highlight systemic barriers within formal and informal institutions, a pattern observed in broader comparative scholarship ([Yadav, 2023](#); [Muiu, 2023](#)). However, as Ubink & Almeida ([2023](#)) demonstrate in their study of local governance and tenure, outcomes can diverge significantly based on localised power structures, indicating that broader models require careful contextualisation.

This need for contextual precision is further illustrated by analyses of South Sudan's political landscape ([Deshayes, 2023](#)). Examinations of the militarised political economy and the climate of fear reveal how these forces uniquely constrain gendered political agency ([Kindersley, 2022](#); [Thiong, 2021](#)). While comparative studies from other regions offer insights into political institutions and movements ([Berglund & Bailey, 2022](#); [Stadler, 2022](#)), their conclusions cannot be directly transposed to South Sudan's post-conflict reality. Consequently, a clear lacuna exists: there is insufficient integrated analysis that connects the gendered dynamics of natural resource governance—particularly oil and climate politics—with the specific mechanisms of women's political participation in South Sudan. This article addresses that gap by investigating how the intertwined political economy of resources and environmental change shapes the possibilities for, and impacts of, women's political engagement.

CURRENT LANDSCAPE

The existing literature on gender, politics, and environmental governance in South Sudan provides a critical foundation, yet reveals significant gaps in explaining the specific contextual mechanisms at play ([Kariuki & Msuya, 2022](#)). Research on the political economy of natural resources and oil politics demonstrates how these sectors are central to state-building and conflict, often marginalising meaningful public participation ([Kibe et al., 2023](#); [Large, 2024](#)). While studies note the particular exclusion of women from these governance structures, they frequently fail to analyse how gendered power dynamics are constitutive of the resource-political nexus itself ([Deshayes, 2023](#); [Kariuki & Msuya, 2022](#)). Similarly, scholarship on women's political participation highlights the limitations of formal quotas and representation in the face of entrenched patriarchal norms and insecurity ([Helen, 2021](#); [Kenya, 2024](#)). However, as Ubink & Almeida ([2023](#)) illustrate in their study of local governance, outcomes can diverge significantly, suggesting that national-level analyses often overlook the complex, gendered realities of tenure and authority in everyday practice.

This partial picture is echoed in emerging work on climate change politics, where the gendered impacts of environmental stress are documented but seldom connected to the broader political settlement and oil-dependent economy ([Muiu, 2023](#); [Dut Chol Riak, 2024](#)). Consequently, a fragmented understanding persists ([Kindersley, 2022](#)). Comparative studies, such as those on political quotas ([Yadav, 2023](#)) or nationalist movements ([VAN ZYL SLABBERT, 2023](#)), offer complementary theoretical insights but lack grounding in the South Sudanese context. In contrast, other analyses present divergent outcomes, underscoring the need for a more integrated framework ([Plessing, 2023](#); [Smooth, 2021](#)). Therefore, while the current landscape establishes the importance of gender, resources, and politics, it leaves unresolved the critical question of how their intersection produces

specific forms of exclusion and resilience within South Sudan's unique political economy. This article addresses that gap.

ANALYSIS AND ARGUMENTATION

A significant body of evidence concerning gender, politics, and environmental governance in South Sudan consistently highlights the interconnectedness of these domains, particularly within the political economy of oil and climate change ([Deshayes, 2023](#); [Kibe et al., 2023](#)). For instance, research on citizen participation in oil governance underscores how resource politics directly shapes and constrains opportunities for women's political engagement and influences gendered policy impacts ([Kibe et al., 2023](#)). Similarly, analyses of the political economy in South Sudan identify how militarised livelihoods and a politics of fear reinforce patriarchal structures, further marginalising women from meaningful political participation and environmental decision-making ([Kindersley, 2022](#); [Thiong, 2021](#)). This pattern of intertwined gendered, economic, and environmental exclusion finds complementary support in studies on political institutions and quota systems elsewhere, which demonstrate that formal mechanisms alone are insufficient without addressing underlying power structures ([Muiu, 2023](#); [Yadav, 2023](#)).

However, a critical gap remains in fully explaining the specific contextual mechanisms that link these issues in South Sudan ([Olaitan, 2024](#)). While existing work establishes broad correlations, it often leaves open the precise pathways through which, for example, oil revenue flows affect local gendered tenure relations or how climate vulnerabilities are politicised to reinforce exclusion ([Patel, 2021](#)). A study on local self-governance and gendered tenure in South Sudan indeed reports divergent outcomes, suggesting that national-level analyses can obscure significant localised divergence and complexity ([Ubink & Almeida, 2023](#)). This indicates that the generalised findings on women's political participation from other contexts, such as Nepal or Malawi, may not adequately account for South Sudan's unique post-conflict and highly localised political economy ([Patel, 2021](#); [Yadav, 2023](#)). Consequently, while the literature confirms the critical importance of a gendered analysis of South Sudan's politics and environmental governance, it does not fully resolve the operative contextual mechanisms—a gap this article seeks to address by integrating these disparate threads into a coherent analytical framework.

IMPLICATIONS AND OUTLOOK

The trajectory of South Sudan's political economy, inextricably tied to oil and increasingly destabilised by climate change, presents a critical juncture ([Kenyi, 2024](#)). The systematic exclusion of women from meaningful roles in resource governance is not merely an equity deficit; it is a core driver of conflict, environmental degradation, and human insecurity ([Kibe et al., 2023](#)). This dynamic fundamentally undermines the prospects for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, particularly those pertaining to gender equality (SDG 5) and climate action (SDG 13) ([Helen, 2021](#)). The prevailing militarised, patriarchal system centralises oil revenues, marginalising alternative livelihoods and silencing those most affected by pollution and climate volatility ([Large, 2024](#)). A failure to

transform this system risks cementing a future where governance serves elite accumulation rather than public welfare, and where climate adaptation remains fragmented and ineffective.

The implications of this status quo are severe and multidimensional ([Kindersley, 2022](#)). The nexus between oil pollution, environmental health, and social reproduction—a burden disproportionately borne by women—creates a vicious cycle of vulnerability ([Deshayes, 2023](#)). Research indicates a growing public health crisis in oil-producing regions, directly impacting women’s lives and community resilience ([Dut Chol Riak, 2024](#)). When compounded by climate-induced shocks such as flooding, which disrupts agriculture and displaces populations, community coping mechanisms are stretched to breaking point. This compounded vulnerability is a direct threat to national stability, as the political economy is sustained by military livelihoods and control of resources, fuelling localised conflict over dwindling productive land and water ([Berglund & Bailey, 2022](#)). The exclusion of women from governance ensures that peacebuilding and climate adaptation strategies lack the holistic, community-grounded perspectives necessary for sustainable resolution ([Ubink & Almeida, 2023](#)).

Conversely, integrating women into the core institutions of resource governance offers a tangible pathway towards more equitable and effective management ([Muiu, 2023](#)). South Sudanese women’s coalitions have long advocated for formal representation in oil revenue oversight bodies and environmental impact assessment processes ([Olaitan, 2024](#)). Their inclusion in revenue oversight could challenge the opacity that facilitates elite capture, directing resources towards public services that alleviate women’s burdens, such as healthcare ([Kariuki & Msuya, 2022](#)). Participation in environmental monitoring would ensure the localised impacts of extraction are authoritatively documented and addressed, moving beyond state or corporate narratives ([Yadav, 2023](#)). This is not merely about adding women but about transforming the epistemic foundations of governance to value lived experience and communal welfare over militarised profit ([Smooth, 2021](#)).

Regional frameworks provide instructive models for such transformation ([Yadav, 2023](#)). The African Union’s African Mining Vision explicitly advocates for gender-sensitive policies in natural resource governance ([Plessing, 2023](#)). Its principles could inform a national oil governance policy mandating gender quotas on oversight boards, funding gender-responsive environmental remediation, and supporting women’s cooperatives in climate-resilient livelihoods ([Patel, 2021](#)). Learning from comparative political studies, substantive representation requires not only numerical presence but also supportive alliances and institutional reforms to overcome entrenched patriarchal norms ([VAN ZYL SLABBERT, 2023](#)).

The outlook for South Sudan therefore hinges on institutional reform and scholarly reorientation ([Deshayes, 2023](#)). Future research must centre South Sudanese women’s agency through participatory action research focused on resource justice ([Stadler, 2022](#)). Such collaborative inquiry can generate context-specific evidence on how gendered governance improves revenue allocation and climate adaptation. Furthermore, analysing the political economy through a critical feminist lens is essential to interrogate whose knowledge systems define ‘development’ and ‘environmental risk’ ([Thiong, 2021](#)). Ultimately, the interplay between gendered exclusion, oil dependence, and climate vulnerability constitutes a core syndrome of fragility ([Muiu, 2023](#)). Breaking the patriarchal-militarised control of resources is a prerequisite for stability, requiring a fundamental reimagining of citizenship where women’s full participation in resource governance becomes a non-negotiable pillar of state-building

([Ubink & Almeida, 2023](#)). Without this shift, efforts towards peace and development will remain superficial, trapping the country in a cycle where resource wealth exacerbates human suffering.

CONCLUSION

This perspective has argued that the governance of South Sudan's oil resources and the politics of climate adaptation are profoundly gendered arenas ([Helen, 2021](#)). Within these arenas, entrenched power structures systematically marginalise women's participation, knowledge, and wellbeing ([VAN ZYL SLABBERT, 2023](#)). The analysis demonstrates that gendered resource governance is central to the nation's prospects for stability, sustainable development, and ecological survival, rather than a peripheral social concern ([Yadav, 2023](#)). The prevailing political economy, characterised by militarised patronage networks and a rentier state logic, entrenches a form of petro-masculinity that excludes meaningful citizen participation and specifically disenfranchises women ([Large, 2024](#); [Muiu, 2023](#)). Consequently, as [Kenyi \(2024\)](#) starkly illustrates, the devastating environmental and health externalities of oil extraction disproportionately impact women's bodies and their care labour, while their voices are absent from the corporate and governmental boards where extraction is sanctioned. This failure to integrate a gender lens into natural resource governance perpetuates a cycle of ecological degradation and social injustice that undermines the very foundations of peace ([Plessing, 2023](#)).

The central contribution of this analysis is its application of a feminist political ecology lens to the interconnected crises of oil dependence and climate vulnerability in South Sudan ([Kenyi, 2024](#)). It moves beyond documenting women's exclusion to critically examining how the political institutions governing resources are themselves gendered, designed to consolidate elite male power and resist transformative change ([Ubink & Almeida, 2023](#); [Stadler, 2022](#)). Evidence from South Sudan and comparative African contexts reveals that nominal commitments to gender equity, such as quota systems, are routinely subverted by patriarchal party machineries and alliance politics that privilege loyalty over competence or representative legitimacy ([Kariuki & Msuya, 2022](#); [Smooth, 2021](#)). This is not a uniquely South Sudanese phenomenon but a recurrent feature of post-conflict political economies across the continent, where the window for institutional reform is often captured by existing power brokers ([Olaitan, 2024](#); [Thiong, 2021](#)). Thus, transforming oil politics necessitates dismantling these petro-masculine structures and fundamentally revaluing women's knowledge and labour, recognising them as essential agents of climate adaptation and community resilience ([Helen, 2021](#); [Deshayes, 2023](#)).

The practical implications of this research are urgent ([Kindersley, 2022](#)). Policy interventions must move beyond technocratic solutions and engage with the political economy of energy resources at its roots ([Berglund & Bailey, 2022](#)). This requires supporting civil society and grassroots movements that advocate for transparent and accountable resource governance, as the limited spaces for citizen participation highlighted by [Kibe et al. \(2023\)](#) remain crucial, albeit contested, arenas for advocacy. International partners and national policymakers must tie support for climate adaptation finance directly to verifiable improvements in women's substantive participation in environmental decision-making bodies ([Dut Chol Riak, 2024](#)). Furthermore, legal and regulatory frameworks for the oil sector must explicitly mandate gender impact assessments and the inclusion of women's groups in monitoring

environmental compliance, directly addressing the health crises documented by Kenyi (2024). As Berglund & Bailey (2022) argue, systemic change requires challenging the power relations that define the system itself; in South Sudan, this means confronting the gendered nature of resource control.

Future research must build upon these foundations to explore several key avenues (Muiu, 2023). First, more nuanced, ethnographic studies are needed to document and theorise the specific strategies South Sudanese women employ to navigate and resist petro-masculine governance in their daily lives, particularly in climate-affected rural communities (Olaitan, 2024). Second, comparative work across other resource-dependent African states could illuminate whether the South Sudanese case represents an extreme manifestation of a broader syndrome, informing regional policy responses (Patel, 2021). Third, research should critically examine the evolving role of women within the military livelihoods and patronage networks described by Kindersley (2022), as their participation—whether coerced or strategic—complicates simplistic narratives of exclusion and agency. Finally, scholars must investigate the potential and pitfalls of transnational feminist solidarities in supporting local movements for gender-just resource governance in contexts of extreme fragility like South Sudan.

In conclusion, this perspective posits that sustainable peace in South Sudan is inseparable from gender-just resource management (Patel, 2021). The nation's dual crises—of a political economy addicted to oil rents and escalating climate disruptions—are two sides of the same coin, minted in the furnace of gendered power imbalances (Plessing, 2023). The evidence from policy failures and grassroots resilience points unequivocally to the need for a feminist political ecology framework to be central, not ancillary, to African resource governance debates. As the country grapples with protracted instability and ecological precarity, the path forward must recognise that women's meaningful inclusion in deciding how resources are extracted, utilised, and protected is not merely a matter of equity but a fundamental precondition for national survival.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This perspective makes a novel contribution by analysing the interconnected governance of gender, oil, and the environment in South Sudan. It moves beyond siloed approaches to demonstrate how the political economy of oil extraction directly shapes both women's political marginalisation and national climate vulnerability. The analysis provides a critical, gendered framework for understanding policy impacts in a fragile petro-state, offering scholars and practitioners a more integrated lens for the 2021-2026 period. Consequently, it argues that meaningful progress in any one of these areas is contingent upon addressing their structural linkages.

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