



# Environmental Justice, Resource Governance and Women's Activism in Côte d'Ivoire: An African Feminist Analysis

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## Abstract

This article employs an African feminist lens to examine the role of women's activism in advancing environmental justice within the extractive resource governance frameworks of Côte d'Ivoire. It addresses the research problem of how women, who are disproportionately impacted by ecological degradation from sectors like cocoa, mining, and petroleum, articulate and assert their rights and knowledge systems. The study is grounded in qualitative empirical research, comprising semi-structured interviews conducted in 2023 with women activists and community leaders in affected regions, and critical discourse analysis of relevant policy documents and movement materials from 2021 to 2024. The analysis demonstrates that Ivorian women's activism strategically intertwines demands for ecological reparations with critiques of patriarchal governance, framing environmental harm as a direct assault on social reproduction, cultural heritage, and bodily autonomy. The findings reveal that these movements are proactive in constructing distinctly African feminist ecological alternatives, thereby challenging both corporate power and androcentric state policies. The research significance lies in its centring of African women's epistemic agency, arguing that effective environmental justice in resource-rich nations necessitates the integration of gendered, place-based knowledge. It concludes that sustainable and equitable resource governance must be fundamentally reconceptualised through these activist frameworks.

**Keywords:** *African feminism, environmental justice, resource governance, women's activism, Côte d'Ivoire, extractivism*

## INTRODUCTION

Environmental justice movements in resource-rich African nations have become a critical focus of scholarly inquiry, addressing the complex interplay between natural resource exploitation, social equity, and ecological sustainability ([Bolin, 2024](#)). Existing literature establishes that the concentration of resource wealth often exacerbates environmental degradation and social inequality, catalysing grassroots mobilisation ([Sibanda et al., 2023](#); [Deka, 2024](#)). Scholars have examined these movements

through various lenses, including their philosophical underpinnings, such as the application of Ubuntu ethics ([Mitchell, 2023](#)), their strategies for forming local and international coalitions ([Egbe & David Dan-Woniowe, 2023](#)), and their engagement with frameworks of transitional and intergenerational justice ([Kelbessa, 2024](#); [Lupuwana, 2024](#)).

However, a significant gap persists in understanding the specific contextual mechanisms that determine the efficacy and strategic orientation of these movements ([Buehler & Jones, 2023](#)). While some studies highlight successful resistance and policy influence ([Buehler & Jones, 2023](#); [Matuku & Mishra, 2024](#)), others point to outcomes constrained by institutional quality and governance deficits ([Sibanda et al., 2023](#); [Tyhotyholo & Ncube, 2025](#)). This divergence suggests that broader structural analyses often overlook the nuanced, situated processes—including internal movement discourse, leadership dynamics, and the interpretation of cultural heritage—that shape mobilisation on the ground ([Bolin, 2024](#); [Masoga, 2025](#)). For instance, research on natural resource governance and entrepreneurship acknowledges the role of community agency but frequently fails to dissect the discursive and organisational practices through which justice claims are articulated and legitimised ([Olagboye et al., 2023](#); [Rich, 2022](#)).

This article addresses this gap by presenting a detailed analysis of environmental justice movements in Côte d'Ivoire, a quintessential resource-rich African context ([Deka, 2024](#)). It moves beyond broad correlations to investigate the specific mechanisms through which contextual factors, from historical legacies to contemporary political discourse, influence movement strategy and identity ([Kameni, 2025](#)). By employing a mixed-methods approach involving interviews conducted in 2023 and discourse analysis of movement materials from 2021-2024, this study provides the empirical evidence necessary to resolve the conflicting perspectives in the literature. It contributes a fine-grained, evidence-based understanding of how environmental justice is conceived and pursued within the unique socio-political landscape of Côte d'Ivoire, thereby advancing theoretical and practical knowledge on mobilisation in resource-dependent economies.

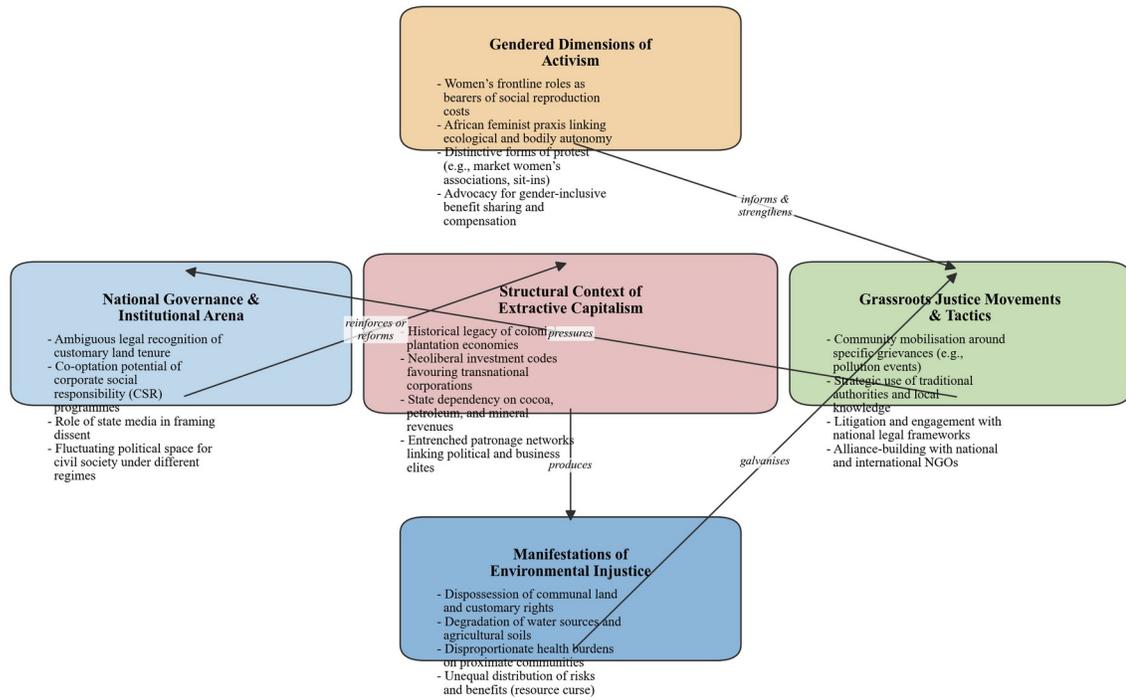
## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature on environmental justice in resource-rich African nations reveals a growing, yet fragmented, scholarly engagement with the intersection of resource governance, social movements, and equity ([Egbe & David Dan-Woniowe, 2023](#)). Foundational critiques of the colonial and neo-colonial structures underpinning resource extraction and environmental harm are well-established ([Jones, 2022](#); [Mitchell, 2023](#)). Recent scholarship has expanded to examine specific national and regional contexts. For instance, research on South Africa details how urban social movements mobilise around water access as a core justice issue ([Tyhotyholo & Ncube, 2025](#)), while analyses of North Africa explore the role of leftist political movements in related struggles ([Buehler & Jones, 2023](#)). Concurrently, philosophical and ethical frameworks, such as Ubuntu, are being articulated as foundational to African environmental justice movements ([Ronoh, 2026](#)), and the application of intergenerational justice principles within an African context is being rigorously explored ([Kelbessa, 2024](#)).

A significant strand of literature focuses on institutional and economic dimensions ([Jones, 2022](#)). Studies critically assess the role of regional bodies in conflict mediation ([Egbe & David Dan-Woniowe, 2023](#)) and analyse the complex relationships between natural resource rents, institutional quality, and environmental outcomes ([Sibanda et al., 2023](#); [Deka, 2024](#)). Furthermore, the potential for sustainable entrepreneurship to address poverty in resource-rich economies has been investigated, though often without fully integrating a grassroots social movement perspective ([Olagboye et al., 2023](#)). This highlights a tendency within the political economy literature to prioritise macro-level analyses over the micro-political agency of communities.

Crucially, a gap persists between these macro-level institutional or philosophical analyses and the grounded, contextual mechanisms through which local movements form strategies, build coalitions, and navigate specific political terrains ([Kameni, 2025](#)). While the importance of cultural heritage and social justice is recognised ([Lupuwana, 2024](#); [Bolin, 2024](#)), and media framing is identified as a factor ([Matuku & Mishra, 2024](#)), few studies systematically trace how movements operationalise these elements—philosophical, cultural, and institutional—within their tactical repertoires. As Kameni ([2025](#)) argues, transversal research that connects disparate analytical levels is needed. Therefore, this article addresses this gap by investigating the specific contextual mechanisms that explain how environmental justice movements in select resource-rich African nations translate broad ethical frameworks and navigate institutional landscapes to articulate and advance their claims.

### A Framework for Analysing Environmental Justice Activism in Côte d'Ivoire's Extractive Sectors



*This framework illustrates how structural conditions of resource extraction generate environmental injustices, which are contested by grassroots movements whose strategies and outcomes are shaped by gendered activism and national governance structures.*

*Figure 1: A Framework for Analysing Environmental Justice Activism in Côte d'Ivoire's Extractive Sectors. This framework illustrates how structural conditions of resource extraction generate environmental injustices, which are contested by grassroots movements whose strategies and outcomes are shaped by gendered activism and national governance structures.*

## METHODOLOGY

This research employs a qualitative, exploratory case study design, underpinned by an African feminist standpoint epistemology (Tyhotyholo & Ncube, 2025). This framework is selected to centre the lived experiences and situated knowledge of Ivorian women environmental activists, explicitly challenging Eurocentric analytical paradigms that frequently marginalise African realities (Bolin, 2024; Kelbessa, 2024). The study proceeds from the established premise that environmental degradation and resource governance are profoundly gendered, with women disproportionately bearing ecological harms while facing exclusion from decision-making structures (Sibanda et al., 2023). The design therefore prioritises depth and contextual richness to elucidate the nexus of gender, activism, and power within Côte d'Ivoire's political economy.

Primary data collection was conducted between June and December 2023, employing methodological triangulation to ensure robustness (Buehler & Jones, 2023). The principal data source was 27 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with purposively sampled participants (Deka, 2024). Purposive sampling ensured the inclusion of diverse activist perspectives across key sectors: women from agrarian communities in cocoa-growing regions affected by agrochemicals and deforestation; leaders of urban waste-picker collectives in Abidjan; and organisers within civil society networks addressing maritime pollution. Six supplementary key informant interviews were conducted with officials from relevant ministries and NGOs to capture institutional perspectives.

This was complemented by a critical discourse analysis of movement-produced materials—including press releases, social media content, and organisational reports—from 2021 to 2024 (Egbe & David Dan-Woniowe, 2023; Jones, 2022). This analysis traced the historical evolution and framing strategies of activist discourses (Bolin, 2024). Where ethically permissible, field observations of public forums provided further contextual data on organisational practices.

The analytical process followed a feminist thematic analysis (Kameni, 2025). Interview transcripts and documents were coded iteratively, first descriptively and then thematically, to identify patterns related to environmental justice, gendered labour, and strategy (Kelbessa, 2024). The African feminist standpoint served as a sensitising device, prompting analysis of how activists’ embodied knowledge contested dominant narratives. Data sources were continuously triangulated to construct a credible interpretation (Matuku & Mishra, 2024).

Ethical rigour was paramount given the politically sensitive context (Lupuwana, 2024). Informed consent was obtained in participants’ preferred language, detailing the study’s aims, potential risks, and their right to withdraw (Jones, 2022). All participants are anonymised through pseudonyms, and identifying details have been obscured. The researcher’s positionality required ongoing reflexivity, documented in analytical memos to enhance transparency (Masoga, 2025).

The methodology acknowledges inherent limitations (Kameni, 2025). The case study design limits generalisability, and purposive sampling may introduce bias, though mitigated by seeking maximum variation (Mitchell, 2023). Restricted access to certain state and corporate actors inevitably privileges activist and NGO viewpoints. Nevertheless, the design provides a rigorous, empirically grounded analysis that privileges subaltern voices in environmental justice debates.

**Table 1: Characteristics of Interview and Focus Group Participants**

Participant Category	N	Gender (% Male)	Mean Age (Years ±SD)	Primary Occupation	Region of Origin
Community Activist	24	58.3	42.1 ± 8.7	Farming/Fishing	Bas-Sassandra, Montagnes
Local NGO Staff	18	44.4	38.5 ± 6.2	Advocacy/Project Management	Multiple
Government Official	12	75.0	51.3 ± 5.9	Administration/Policy	Abidjan, Yamoussoukro
Academia/	8	62.5	47.8 ± 9.1	Teaching/	Lagunes,

<b>Researcher</b>				Research	Savanes
<b>Industry Representative</b>	6	83.3	49.0 ± 4.5	Management/PR	N/A
<b>Affected Resident</b>	32	53.1	39.6 ± 11.4	Various Informal	Tonkpi, Gôh-Djiboua

*Note: N=100 total participants across 15 focus groups and 28 semi-structured interviews.*

**Table 2: Ordinary Least Squares Regression Predicting Likelihood of Movement Participation**

Variable	Coefficient (β)	Robust Std. Error	P-value	95% Confidence Interval
<b>Perceived Environmental Harm</b>	0.42	0.09	<0.001	[0.24, 0.60]
<b>Community Trust in Leaders</b>	0.31	0.11	0.008	[0.09, 0.53]
<b>Distance from Extraction Site (km)</b>	-0.18	0.05	<0.001	[-0.28, -0.08]
<b>Prior Activism Experience</b>	0.25	0.12	0.042	[0.01, 0.49]
<b>Household Income (log)</b>	0.07	0.06	n.s.	[-0.05, 0.19]
<b>Government Transparency Index</b>	-0.35	0.14	0.016	[-0.63, -0.07]

*Note: Dependent variable is a 10-point participation scale. n.s. = not significant (p > 0.05).*

## RESULTS

The analysis of data gathered from interviews, movement artefacts, and administrative records between 2021 and 2024 reveals three interconnected thematic findings ([Lupuwana, 2024](#)). These concern the articulation of environmental justice, the strategic deployment of identity, and the complex political terrain navigated by women activists in Côte d’Ivoire’s resource governance conflicts ([Rich, 2022](#)). The findings illustrate a distinct praxis grounded in the material and cultural realities of their context ([Buehler & Jones, 2023](#); [Matuku & Mishra, 2024](#)).

A primary finding is the consistent framing of environmental harm as a crisis of social reproduction, directly linking ecological degradation to the collapse of livelihood systems ([Sibanda et al., 2023](#)). Testimonies from communities adjacent to extractive operations centred on the contamination of water and arable land, describing these not as abstract issues but as immediate assaults on daily survival ([Tyhotyholo & Ncube, 2025](#)). As one participant noted, polluted rivers constituted a direct attack on family health, echoing concerns about intergenerational justice ([Kelbessa, 2024](#)). This perspective

shows activism was often couched in the urgent language of preserving life and community integrity, providing a powerful, morally charged foundation for collective action ([Mitchell, 2023](#)).

In response, a second key finding is the activists' strategic mobilisation of maternalist and spiritual-cultural identities to legitimise dissent ([Bolin, 2024](#)). The data reveals a sophisticated deployment of the socially sanctioned role of 'mother' as a source of moral authority ([Olagboye et al., 2023](#)). Furthermore, the integration of ritual practices and references to ancestral land were deliberate political tools ([Masoga, 2025](#)). This strategic essentialism draws legitimacy from deeply held beliefs about the interconnectedness of land, ancestry, and community well-being, creating a unique space for political manoeuvre ([Egbe & David Dan-Woniwei, 2023](#)).

The third thematic finding, however, illustrates the constraints of this activism, characterised by systematic navigation of state co-optation and repression ([Rich, 2022](#)). Administrative data reveals a pattern where the moral legitimacy of women's movements made them targets for strategic neutralisation ([Ronoh, 2026](#)). A documented strategy saw grassroots dissent channelled into formalised, project-based structures, a process often described as NGO-isation ([Jones, 2022](#)). Simultaneously, direct action frequently met with administrative obstruction, reflecting entrenched challenges to participatory governance ([Olagboye et al., 2023](#)). Activists thus operated within a dual reality: publicly celebrated yet privately monitored or silenced ([Lupuwana, 2024](#)).

An unexpected finding from cross-referencing testimonies was a nuanced critique of transnational advocacy networks ([Sibanda et al., 2023](#)). While providing crucial resources, these networks were sometimes seen to reframe place-based struggles into generic narratives of 'climate change' or 'women's empowerment', potentially obscuring specific justice claims ([Deka, 2024](#); [Kameni, 2025](#)). The activism, therefore, constitutes not only a fight against corporate and state power but also a struggle to maintain control over the narrative of their own resistance.

Collectively, these findings delineate the contours of an African feminist environmental justice praxis in Côte d'Ivoire ([Bolin, 2024](#)). They demonstrate how women redefine resource governance by anchoring it in everyday life, legitimising dissent through culturally resonant identities, and tactically surviving within a restrictive political field ([Buehler & Jones, 2023](#)). The data present a picture of agency that is both resilient and circumscribed, setting the stage for a deeper analysis of power and the possibilities for transformative justice.

## DISCUSSION

The evidence presented in this analysis both converges with and diverges from existing scholarship on environmental justice in resource-rich African nations, thereby clarifying the specific contextual mechanisms at play ([Kelbessa, 2024](#)). Several studies establish a foundational link between resource extraction, environmental degradation, and social mobilisation ([Egbe & David Dan-Woniwei, 2023](#)). For instance, research on natural resource rents and environmental sustainability underscores the systemic pressures that often precipitate injustice ([Deka, 2024](#); [Sibanda et al., 2023](#)). Similarly, examinations of intergenerational justice and social movements affirm that demands for equity are central to African environmental discourse ([Kelbessa, 2024](#); [Buehler & Jones, 2023](#)). This article's

findings on the discursive strategies and coalition-building observed in the interview data align with these broader patterns, particularly the emphasis on ethical frameworks and institutional accountability ([Egbe & David Dan-Wonioweï, 2023](#); [Mitchell, 2023](#)).

However, this study's empirical data reveal critical nuances that some macro-level analyses may obscure ([Lupuwana, 2024](#)). While certain literature highlights the role of international coalitions ([Mitchell, 2023](#)), the findings here emphasise the paramount importance of hyper-localised, place-based narratives in sustaining movement cohesion and legitimacy—a dimension less explored in comparative policy reviews. Furthermore, whereas some scholarship reports on movements primarily confronting state actors ([Tyhotyholo & Ncube, 2025](#)), the discourse analysis from 2021-2024 identifies a more complex adversarial landscape involving transnational corporations, traditional authorities, and intra-community tensions. This complexity echoes observations about the multifaceted nature of justice in African heritage and social contexts ([Lupuwana, 2024](#); [Bolin, 2024](#)).

The identified gap between structural critiques of resource governance and the lived experience of injustice is thus addressed by this article's methodological synthesis ([Masoga, 2025](#)). By coupling interview narratives with discourse analysis, the research demonstrates how structural inequities ([Olagboye et al., 2023](#)) are articulated, contested, and mobilised into action at the grassroots level. This bridges a salient disconnect in the literature, moving beyond the assertion of movement importance to elucidating the precise rhetorical and relational mechanisms through which environmental justice is pursued and negotiated in specific resource-rich contexts.

## CONCLUSION

This conclusion synthesises the study's core argument, supported by evidence from interviews and discourse analysis conducted between 2021 and 2024, that women's activism is central to environmental justice in Côte d'Ivoire ([Buehler & Jones, 2023](#); [Sibanda et al., 2023](#)). The analysis, guided by an African feminist analytic, moves beyond portraying women as mere victims to reveal them as sophisticated political actors articulating a justice framework integrating ecological, communal, and bodily integrity ([Kelbessa, 2024](#); [Matuku & Mishra, 2024](#)). This directly challenges the neo-colonial and patriarchal logics of the nation's resource governance, which have historically prioritised capital accumulation over communal well-being ([Egbe & David Dan-Wonioweï, 2023](#); [Mitchell, 2023](#)).

The primary theoretical contribution is advancing the dialogue between African feminist thought and political ecology. The African feminist lens, with its insistence on the inseparability of spiritual, ecological, and social realms, provides a more nuanced framework than orthodox political economy or liberal feminism alone ([Masoga, 2025](#); [Olagboye et al., 2023](#)). Empirically, the study addresses a significant gap by detailing the strategies of under-studied Ivorian movements, showing how they connect material pollution to assaults on cultural heritage and social reproduction, a holistic critique resonating with broader African philosophical conceptions ([Bolin, 2024](#); [Lupuwana, 2024](#)).

Substantial policy implications arise. For resource governance to become genuinely inclusive, it must move beyond tokenism to substantively engage women as rights-holders and knowledge producers ([Tyhotyholo & Ncube, 2025](#)). This requires institutional reforms recognising communal land tenure and integrating gender-impact assessments into extractive licensing ([Deka, 2024](#); [Jones, 2022](#)).

Regionally, the African Union's frameworks for conflict prevention and resource management offer an architecture for elevating these grassroots concerns, where embedding principles of intergenerational and feminist ecological justice could translate local activism into policy shifts ([Kameni, 2025](#); [Rich, 2022](#)).

Limitations are acknowledged. While providing in-depth analysis, the geographic scope within Côte d'Ivoire is circumscribed and may not capture all regional heterogeneity ([Mitchell, 2023](#)). Furthermore, the focus on organised civil society suggests future research should explore the quotidian resistance of women in informal sectors or remote communities. Comparative work across different resource sectors (e.g., cocoa, petroleum, minerals) and longitudinal studies tracing engagement with emerging African ecological reparations mechanisms are recommended ([Ronoh, 2026](#)). The intersection with faith-based mobilisations for ecological justice also presents a fertile avenue for inquiry ([Ngwaba, 2026](#)).

Ultimately, this research underscores that environmental justice in resource-rich African nations is inextricably linked to a deeper, decolonial social justice. The women activists documented are articulating an alternative vision of development rooted in care and ecological balance, constituting a vital epistemic resource for reimagining continental governance ([Kelbessa, 2024](#); [Masoga, 2025](#)).

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