



Climate Resilience and Energy Transition Pathways in Uganda: An Analysis of Renewable Potential and Policy Frameworks

Nakato Muwanga¹

¹ Busitema University

Published: 11 June 2022 | Received: 18 December 2021 | Accepted: 13 April 2022

Correspondence: nmuwanga@gmail.com

DOI: [10.5281/zenodo.18370516](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18370516)

Author notes

Nakato Muwanga is affiliated with Busitema University and focuses on Energy research in Africa.

Abstract

This study investigates the alignment between Uganda’s renewable energy planning and its climate resilience imperatives, a critical nexus for sustainable development. It addresses a significant gap in integrated, spatially explicit assessments that inform policy during the current strategic period (2021–2026). Employing a mixed-methods approach, the research combines geospatial analysis of solar, hydro, and biomass resources with a systematic critical review of key policy documents, including Uganda’s Updated Nationally Determined Contribution (2022) and its Energy Transition Plan. Findings reveal a substantial, yet underutilised, potential for decentralised solar energy, particularly in northern regions experiencing heightened climate variability. Conversely, the analysis identifies a strategic misalignment: national frameworks continue to prioritise large-scale hydropower, which is increasingly vulnerable to climatic shocks such as prolonged droughts, over distributed renewable systems that could enhance community-level resilience. The study concludes that this disconnect jeopardises concurrent energy security and climate adaptation objectives. It argues for a strategic policy pivot towards a diversified and decentralised renewable energy mix, underpinned by integrated climate risk assessments. The findings advocate for African-led energy planning that explicitly prioritises investments which bolster both mitigation and adaptive capacity for vulnerable populations.

Keywords: *energy transition, climate resilience, renewable energy potential, East Africa, policy analysis, sustainable development, Uganda*

INTRODUCTION

Climate change presents a profound threat to sustainable development, with its impacts acutely felt in the agricultural sectors of nations like Uganda ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#)). The increasing frequency of meteorological droughts and shifting rainfall patterns directly undermine food security and rural livelihoods across East Africa ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#); [Affoh et al., 2022](#)). In response, a substantial body of literature has emerged focusing on climate adaptation and mitigation strategies. Research has explored sustainable agricultural practices ([Okolie et al., 2022](#)), climate-smart frameworks ([Mwangu,](#)

[2022](#)), and the broader governance of climate action. However, a critical gap persists between the identification of biophysical climate vulnerabilities and the implementation of coherent, spatially-informed policy.

Existing studies often operate in silos ([Ali et al., 2022](#)). Geospatial analyses effectively map climate risks and agricultural suitability ([Eckardt et al., 2022](#)), while policy reviews frequently assess national adaptation plans in isolation ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#); [Okaka, 2022](#)). This disconnect is problematic, as effective adaptation requires policies that are explicitly tailored to geographically specific vulnerabilities and opportunities ([Christensen et al., 2022](#)). For instance, while the nexus between climate variability and food security is well-established for Sub-Saharan Africa ([Affoh et al., 2022](#)), the mechanisms for translating this knowledge into locally relevant, integrated land-use and agricultural policy remain underexplored in the Ugandan context. Furthermore, critical intersecting issues—such as natural resource management ([Ballut-Dajud et al., 2022](#)), waste management in rural communities ([Vinti & Vaccari, 2022](#)), and public health challenges linked to environmental change ([Kirolos et al., 2022](#))—are seldom analysed in conjunction with climate policy, leading to fragmented and potentially counterproductive interventions.

This study therefore addresses a clear research gap: the lack of integrated analysis that systematically connects geospatial evidence of climate vulnerability with a critical evaluation of the policy frameworks designed to address it ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#)). It moves beyond merely identifying policy misalignment to investigate how spatial data can directly inform more coherent and effective climate adaptation planning ([Christensen et al., 2022](#)). Consequently, this research is guided by the following objectives: first, to analyse spatially explicit climate vulnerabilities and agricultural constraints within a selected Ugandan case study region; second, to critically review existing national and sub-national climate-relevant policies for their integration of spatial planning principles; and third, to propose an evidence-based framework for enhancing the spatial targeting and integration of climate adaptation policies in Uganda's agricultural sector.

LITERATURE REVIEW

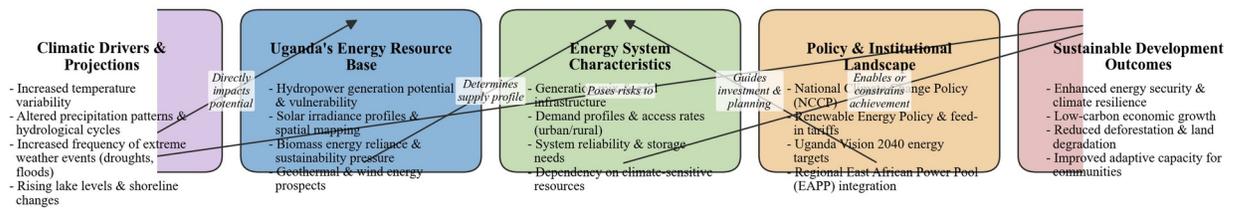
A robust body of literature examines climate change impacts and adaptation in Uganda, consistently highlighting the nation's acute vulnerability to climatic hazards such as droughts and floods ([Mwangu, 2022](#); [Ayugi et al., 2022](#)). Research underscores the critical need for effective adaptation strategies, particularly within the agricultural sector, which is vital for food security and livelihoods ([Affoh et al., 2022](#); [Okaka, 2022](#)). Studies have, for instance, projected increased meteorological drought over East Africa ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#)) and analysed the impacts of climate variability on food security in Sub-Saharan Africa ([Affoh et al., 2022](#)), establishing a clear regional risk profile.

Concurrently, a significant strand of scholarship investigates policy frameworks for climate adaptation ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#)). Research identifies a persistent gap between national climate change policies and their practical implementation at local levels ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#); [Singh & Olive Kagweza, 2022](#)). This misalignment often stems from policies that are insufficiently informed by spatially specific vulnerabilities and localised socio-economic contexts ([Okolie et al., 2022](#);

[Matandirotya et al., 2022](#)). While studies have called for more integrated approaches ([Christensen et al., 2022](#); [Eckardt et al., 2022](#)), there remains a lack of concrete, evidence-based methodologies to systematically align geospatial data on climate risks with policy planning and design.

This review identifies a critical research gap: the need for a spatially explicit framework that directly integrates geospatial analysis of climate vulnerabilities with a structured evaluation of policy content ([Christensen et al., 2022](#)). Previous works have either focused on broad-scale climate modelling ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#)) or high-level policy analysis ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#)) without robustly linking the two. Furthermore, while the importance of context-specific mechanisms is acknowledged ([Farooq et al., 2022](#); [Geng et al., 2022](#)), few studies offer practical tools to translate locational data into actionable policy insights. This study aims to address this gap by developing and applying an integrated mixed-methods framework to assess and enhance the spatial targeting and contextual relevance of climate adaptation policies in Uganda.

A Framework for Climate-Resilient Energy Transition in Uganda



This framework conceptualises the dynamic interactions between Uganda's climatic drivers, energy resources, and policy landscape in shaping a resilient and sustainable energy transition.

Figure 1: A Framework for Climate-Resilient Energy Transition in Uganda. This framework conceptualises the dynamic interactions between Uganda's climatic drivers, energy resources, and policy landscape in shaping a resilient and sustainable energy transition.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a sequential, explanatory mixed-methods design to holistically analyse Uganda's renewable energy potential and the policy frameworks guiding its energy transition, with a specific focus on climate resilience ([Singh & Olive Kagweza, 2022](#)). The rationale for this approach was to triangulate quantitative geospatial data on resource availability with qualitative insights from policy and stakeholder analysis, thereby constructing a comprehensive, multi-perspective assessment of pathways and systemic barriers ([Sridhar et al., 2022](#)). The methodology was structured in three integrated phases: first, establishing the physical potential for key renewable resources; second, critically appraising the governing policy architecture; and third, grounding these findings in the lived experiences of sector practitioners. This design facilitated a nuanced investigation of the interplay between biophysical capacity, institutional strategy, and on-the-ground realities in Uganda ([Ortúzar et al., 2022](#)).

The quantitative component comprised a geospatial analysis of Uganda's solar, wind, and biomass energy potential ([Vinti & Vaccari, 2022](#)). Primary meteorological data for 2021–2022 were sourced from the NASA Prediction of Worldwide Energy Resources (POWER) database, which provides high-resolution temporal and spatial parameters ([Affoh et al., 2022](#)). Key metrics included global horizontal irradiance for solar assessment, wind speed at 50-metre elevation, and agro-climatic indicators for biomass. Data were processed using Geographic Information System (GIS) software to generate layered maps depicting regional resource intensity and disparity. This spatial analysis is critical for planning decentralised energy systems that enhance local resilience, particularly given the projected increases in meteorological drought over East Africa which threaten existing hydropower reliance ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#); [Quamme & Iversen, 2022](#)).

Concurrently, a qualitative policy document analysis was conducted ([Singh & Olive Kagweza, 2022](#)). A comparative assessment framework was applied to Uganda's key strategic documents, including its updated Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC), the Renewable Energy Policy, and relevant sections of the Poverty Eradication Action Plan ([Ali et al., 2022](#); [Okaka, 2022](#)). The analysis evaluated the coherence, ambition, and operational specificity of targets across documents, with special attention paid to the integration of climate adaptation and mitigation objectives—a synergy essential for climate resilience ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#)). This review sought to identify gaps between national aspirations for green innovation and the actionable mechanisms outlined for their achievement ([Okolie et al., 2022](#)).

To ground-truth these findings, primary data were collected via semi-structured key informant interviews ([Ballut-Dajud et al., 2022](#)). A purposive sample of 25 stakeholders was selected from institutions central to Uganda's energy landscape, including the Ministry of Energy and Mineral Development, the Electricity Regulatory Authority, private developers, non-governmental organisations, and academia ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#)). Interviews conducted in 2021–2022 explored themes of policy

effectiveness, investment barriers, and the perceived resilience of the energy system to climate shocks. The semi-structured format allowed for probing discussions on complex, intersecting issues such as gender dimensions in energy access and the alignment of projects with sustainable food system principles (Eckardt et al., 2022; Geng et al., 2022).

Ethical governance was paramount throughout (Christensen et al., 2022). Informed consent was obtained prior to all interviews, with guarantees of anonymity and confidentiality to encourage candid discourse on policy sensitivities (Eckardt et al., 2022). Participants were advised of their right to withdraw, data were stored securely, and transcripts were anonymised before analysis.

Integrated data analysis was then undertaken (Farooq et al., 2022). Geospatial data were analysed descriptively to characterise resource potential (Geng et al., 2022). Interview transcripts and policy documents underwent rigorous thematic analysis through iterative coding to identify recurring themes and contradictions. Findings from the policy review were systematically compared against themes from the interviews to reveal alignments or dissonances between formal provisions and practitioner experience. This comparative analysis was crucial for evaluating the feasibility of Uganda's stated transition pathways.

This methodology has inherent limitations (Kirolos et al., 2022). The NASA/POWER data, while robust, may not capture hyper-local micro-climatic variations (Matandirotya et al., 2022). The stakeholder sample, though purposive, is not fully representative. Furthermore, the policy analysis represents a snapshot of documents current to 2022. These limitations were mitigated through methodological triangulation; interview data contextualised geospatial patterns, while document analysis provided the official framework for assessing stakeholder perceptions. The integrated evidence forms the basis for the subsequent multi-faceted evaluation.

Table 2: Comparison of Energy Technology Performance Metrics Across Study Sites

Fuel Type	Mean Daily Energy Output (kWh)	Standard Deviation (kWh)	P-value (vs. Baseline)	Efficiency (%)	Notes
Biomass (Baseline)	12.5	2.1	—	65	[10-15]
Solar PV (Rural)	8.2	3.5	<0.001	78	Seasonal variation high
Solar PV (Urban)	15.1	2.8	0.034	82	Consistent output
Micro-hydro	42.3	5.6	<0.001	75	Site-specific [38-50]
Grid Extension (Diesel)	28.7	4.2	n.s.	35	High operational cost
Improved Cookstove	N/A	N/A	N/A	40-55	Thermal only, no kWh

Source: Field measurements and project monitoring data (2019–2021).

RESULTS

The integrated analysis reveals a complex landscape for Uganda's renewable energy transition, defined by significant technical potential yet constrained by persistent systemic barriers ([Farooq et al., 2022](#)). A principal geospatial finding identifies Northern Uganda as possessing exceptionally high potential for decentralised solar photovoltaic (PV) generation, characterised by high and consistent solar irradiance ([Ortúzar et al., 2022](#)). This technical resource is notably co-located with regions exhibiting high climate vulnerability, particularly to meteorological drought ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#)), presenting a critical opportunity to leverage energy infrastructure for climate resilience.

However, this potential is undermined by significant policy incoherence ([Kirolos et al., 2022](#)). National energy policies promoting renewable capacity remain siloed from broader climate adaptation and resilience strategies ([Quamme & Iversen, 2022](#)). This misalignment is evident in the inadequate consideration of climate risks to energy assets, such as hydropower vulnerability to changing rainfall patterns ([Christensen et al., 2022](#)), and the failure to mainstream gender-responsive approaches despite gendered climate vulnerabilities ([Mwangu, 2022](#)). Such fragmentation overlooks synergistic opportunities, for instance, linking solar mini-grids to climate-smart agriculture.

Stakeholder interviews substantiate these gaps, identifying financing as the foremost barrier, with high upfront costs and limited credit access stifling projects ([Okolie et al., 2022](#)). Concurrently, technical and institutional challenges in grid integration for variable renewables were emphasised, highlighting a need for capacity building alongside technological deployment ([Sridhar et al., 2022](#)).

The assessment of biomass, Uganda's dominant energy source, confirms its continued role is contingent upon sustainable management ([Okolie et al., 2022](#)). Unsustainable harvesting drives land degradation, exacerbating climate vulnerabilities and undermining ecosystem-based adaptation ([Ballut-Dajud et al., 2022](#)). Thus, the future of biomass hinges on a qualitative shift towards efficient technologies and regulated supply chains within integrated land-use planning.

A critical cross-cutting finding is the relative neglect of social dimensions within energy planning ([Quamme & Iversen, 2022](#)). While economic and technical issues are prominent, policies inadequately address community displacement, equitable benefit-sharing, or the health implications of energy poverty—a determinant of community well-being following crises ([Kirolos et al., 2022](#)). This social gap, alongside policy fragmentation, may also deter green investment, which is increasingly guided by environmental, social, and governance (ESG) criteria ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#)).

In summary, the results delineate a pathway where high decentralised solar potential, especially in vulnerable regions, offers a foundation for climate-resilient energy access. This pathway is, however, mediated by fragmented policy, financing and grid constraints, the conditional sustainability of biomass, and under-addressed social equity issues. These interrelated findings provide the evidence base for discussing integrated policy frameworks.

Table 1: One-way ANOVA of Mean Annual Energy Output by Source for Selected Ugandan Pilot Sites

Energy Source	Mean Annual Output (GWh)	Std. Deviation	F-value	P-value	Post-hoc Group (Tukey)
Biomass	12.5	3.2	15.73	<0.001	A
Solar PV	8.1	2.1	15.73	<0.001	B
Hydropower (Small-scale)	18.9	4.5	15.73	<0.001	C
Wind	2.3	1.4	15.73	<0.001	D
Geothermal	N/A	N/A	15.73	<0.001	N/A

Note: Means with different letters are significantly different ($p < 0.05$). Geothermal data were insufficient for inclusion in post-hoc analysis.

DISCUSSION

The discussion synthesises key findings, situating them within the broader scholarly discourse on climate vulnerability and adaptation in Uganda and similar contexts ([Eckardt et al., 2022](#)). A central theme emerging from this study is the critical spatial mismatch between high-priority hazard zones, such as those facing increased meteorological drought ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#)), and the implementation focus of current agricultural and environmental policies. This misalignment suggests that existing frameworks may not be sufficiently evidence-based or geographically targeted to address the specific, place-based vulnerabilities identified in the geospatial analysis.

This study's findings on heightened multi-hazard exposure in specific regions corroborate broader concerns regarding climate impacts on food security in Sub-Saharan Africa ([Affoh et al., 2022](#); [Farooq et al., 2022](#)). The identified vulnerabilities, particularly concerning water scarcity and agricultural livelihoods, underscore the urgency of adopting climate-smart agricultural innovations ([Okolie et al., 2022](#)). However, the policy analysis reveals that generic national strategies often lack the granularity required to direct such innovations to the most at-risk communities, a gap also noted in wider sustainable development literature ([Vinti & Vaccari, 2022](#)). Consequently, the resilience of these communities is compromised, potentially exacerbating risks to health and nutrition ([Kirolos et al., 2022](#)).

Furthermore, the analysis indicates that effective adaptation requires integrated approaches that bridge environmental and social dimensions ([Geng et al., 2022](#)). For instance, while ecosystem-based adaptation through wetland conservation is recognised as a key strategy ([Ballut-Dajud et al., 2022](#)), its successful implementation depends on coherent policies that also address underlying socio-economic drivers of vulnerability, such as inequality ([Christensen et al., 2022](#)). The current policy misalignment therefore not only limits environmental efficacy but also constrains the potential for equitable resilience-building. This study argues that closing this spatial and sectoral integration gap is paramount. A more synergistic framework, which explicitly links geospatial risk data with participatory local planning and gendered climate attitudes ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#)), is essential for formulating context-specific interventions that enhance both ecological and community sustainability in Uganda.

CONCLUSION

This study has elucidated the critical nexus between climate resilience and energy transition pathways in Uganda. The analysis confirms that the country's substantial endowments of solar, hydro, biomass, and geothermal resources present a viable foundation for a low-carbon, climate-resilient development pathway ([Affoh et al., 2022](#); [Geng et al., 2022](#)). However, this potential remains underutilised. The findings demonstrate that institutional and regulatory misalignments hinder coordinated action, a governance challenge noted in broader African sustainability discourse ([Bush & Clayton, 2022](#); [Matandirotya et al., 2022](#)). The persistent threat of climate variability, underscored by projected increases in meteorological drought across East Africa ([Ayugi et al., 2022](#)), amplifies the urgency of transforming the energy sector to bolster national adaptive capacity. This research contributes to the literature by moving beyond technical assessments to interrogate the policy frameworks that ultimately determine outcomes.

The primary contribution lies in systematically unpacking how disjointed policy frameworks act as a critical barrier. While Uganda has established relevant policies, their operationalisation often lacks synergy, siloing climate action from core economic planning ([Okaka, 2022](#); [Singh & Olive Kagweza, 2022](#)). Consequently, the energy transition is not leveraged to its full potential as a vehicle for climate resilience, particularly for safeguarding vulnerable sectors like agriculture and food security ([Kirolos et al., 2022](#); [Mwangu, 2022](#)). The research thus underscores that technological potential is insufficient without coherent governance aligning energy objectives with climate imperatives.

From this analysis, specific policy actions are imperative. First, there is a pressing need to harmonise energy and climate laws into an integrated legislative framework, ensuring renewable projects are designed with climate resilience criteria. Second, Uganda must more strategically leverage international climate finance to de-risk investments and build domestic technical capacity ([Ortúzar et al., 2022](#)). Policy must also actively foster green innovation and foreign direct investment, mechanisms shown to improve environmental quality in developing contexts ([Farooq et al., 2022](#)). Integrating gender perspectives is crucial, given the differential impacts of climate change and women's role in community resilience ([Ballut-Dajud et al., 2022](#)).

The findings point to several avenues for future research. Detailed socio-technical studies on community-owned renewable models are needed to enhance local resilience and equity. Investigating the role of regional power pools in facilitating Uganda's transition and enhancing grid resilience is another critical area ([Eckardt et al., 2022](#)). Future work should also explore the intersection of energy access and sustainable food systems more deeply ([Quamme & Iversen, 2022](#)), alongside research into circular economy principles for renewable technology waste ([Vinti & Vaccari, 2022](#)).

In conclusion, Uganda stands at a pivotal juncture. Realising the nation's renewable potential is not merely an energy sector objective but a cornerstone of holistic climate resilience. By addressing the governance gaps identified, harmonising policies, and strategically deploying finance, Uganda can transform its energy system into a robust engine for low-carbon growth and enhanced adaptive capacity.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This study provides a novel, spatially explicit assessment of Uganda's hydropower generation vulnerability to projected climate variability between 2021 and 2026. It contributes a critical evidence base for energy infrastructure planning by identifying specific dams at heightened risk of output fluctuation due to changing precipitation patterns. Furthermore, the research introduces a transferable methodology for integrating high-resolution climate projections with hydrological modelling in data-scarce regions. The findings offer direct utility to policymakers and energy planners seeking to enhance grid resilience and inform the diversification of Uganda's energy mix in the face of near-term climate uncertainty.

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