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Reframing climate finance through community perception: evidence from muzarabani's semi-arid landscape in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

Although international climate finance remains a fundamental pillar of global adaptation strategies, its success is frequently gauged using top-down macroeconomic metrics that ignore the granular realities of grassroots beneficiaries. This research challenges traditional paradigms by reconceptualising climate finance as a socially mediated resource, investigating how community-level interpretations influence developmental efficacy within the Muzarabani District of Zimbabwe. This semi-arid region, situated in the Dande Valley, serves as a critical case study due to its extreme vulnerability to cyclical climatic shocks.

Employing a sequential exploratory methodology, the study synthesizes ethnographic narratives, perception indexing, and systems-based modelling to move beyond reductive econometric analyses. Instead, it prioritises the roles of human cognition, lived experience, and institutional integrity in the climate discourse. Empirical evidence indicates that while financial interventions bolster localised infrastructural resilience—notably in hydraulic systems, artisanal irrigation schemes, and climate-hardened transport networks—their impact is contingent upon high levels of perceived accessibility and transparency.

The analysis delineates three pivotal transmission mechanisms: perception-anchored trust, communal agency, and the co-production of ecological knowledge. Findings suggest that when these socio-cognitive pathways are obstructed, even substantial financial inflows fail to yield sustainable adaptive outcomes. The study also demonstrated that the community perception can contribute meaningfully to priorities tabled to climate finance to ensure community base decision making in climate change financing issues. By proposing a Perception-Centered Climate Finance Framework, this work argues that the utility of development capital is governed less by its sheer volume and more by its social legitimacy and alignment with indigenous priorities. Ultimately, these results provide a blueprint for crafting more equitable and context-sensitive financing mechanisms across the Global South.

Keywords: Adaptive Capacity, climate Finance, Community Perception, Muzarabani, Semi-Arid Development, Social Legitimacy, Zimbabwe