

## Building Coherent Gas Flaring Policy in Nigeria

### The challenge

The unnecessary flaring of natural gas impacts public and environmental health, contributes to climate change, wastes fuel resources, and impacts public and environmental health. Gas flaring management is often complicated by conflicts among different levels of governance, particularly in the Global South. This is due to centralised governments with strict personal rules, rent-seeking, resource curse, lack of transparency and failure in the overall design and implementation of gas flaring policies and lack of coherence in the legislative and regulatory framework. Though reducing flaring is an emergent global environmental governance priority, progress has been slow.

Nigeria is Africa's largest oil-producing country, with proven crude oil of 37.0 billion barrels and 200.4 Tcf of natural gas reserves, positioning the country as the largest natural gas reserve. Fossil fuels account for over 80% of government revenues, 95% of export receipts, and 90% of foreign exchange earnings. Between 2008 and 2022, Nigeria flared 147.9 billion cubic metres (Bcm) of natural gas, which could meet the electricity demand in Africa for approximately one and a half years. Despite this, high energy poverty levels persist while gas flaring wastes a valuable resource that could be used for energy generation or other industrial purposes. From an environmental governance perspective, the situation in Nigeria remains paradoxical and environmentally unjust.

### Research aim

This research aimed to analyse Nigeria's multilevel governance system and assess the policy coherence across gas flaring and energy sectors.

### Research Questions

- i. Who are the main actors involved in Nigeria's multilevel governance system pertaining to oil and gas governance?
- ii. To what extent are gas flaring awareness and policy coherence across gas and energy domains?
- iii. How can the implications for progress towards Nigeria's national intended contribution and national policy on climate change mitigation be assessed?

### Methods

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with seven experts, consisting of four representatives from environmental NGOs and advocacy groups, as well as three environmental campaigners, expert surveys (23 experts out of the 59 contacted responded and completed the survey via email), literature reviews, and analysis of Nigerian policy documents using qualitative document analysis (QDA) on gas flaring, energy, and other sectors.



*Gas flaring near people's homes in a local host community, Otu Jeremi Community, Ughelli, Delta State.*

## Key findings

- This research identified the principal actors involved in Nigeria's gas flaring management. It further showed that Nigeria's oil and gas governance operates under a fragmented governance structure with unclear leadership. Political dynamics and lack of political will to implement gas flaring reduction policies pose a challenge.
- Qualitative document analysis (QDA) and the semi-structured interview findings showed that policy coherence around gas flaring (including efforts toward climate change mitigation) has been slowed by political partisanship, poor governance, lack of regulatory compliance, and policy conflict between environmental protection and economic development priorities.
- The expert survey data on gas flaring management revealed that 45% of respondents perceived a disconnect between the priorities and politics of local and state governments compared to those of the national government. Conversely, 23% believed the priorities aligned, while 32% were uncertain.
- Further examination of the survey data found that 53% agreed that economic policies take precedence over environmental policies and the issue of gas flaring. Conversely, 33% disagreed with this view, and 14% remained undecided. These findings highlight the existence of ambiguity in the formulation and implementation of plans aimed at achieving climate change mitigation objectives.

## Policy recommendations

1. There is an urgent need for coordinated horizontal governance to involve a greater array of stakeholder voices, strengthening the various federal institutions unswayed by political interference and biased or partisan policies that consistently sustain policies and regulations despite the election cycle to promote policy coherence to reduce the inconsistency across sectors revealed in our analysis.
2. To reduce policy conflicts and improve awareness of gas flaring, a collaborative policy framework mainstreaming relevant sectors and mobilising political will to stop gas flaring is crucial.
3. The Nigerian government should avoid repeatedly changing the target date for ending gas flaring due to economic interests. Such actions create ambiguity around the overall goals and undermine any progress made towards Nigeria's INDC and national policy on climate change mitigation.
4. Economic diversification to avoid heavy dependency on oil and gas revenue and steering policy implementation in gas flaring management in a complex Multilevel Governance (MLG) structure that involves collaboration between various actors from the public, private, subnational, and supranational spheres working at different levels provide a crucial pathway for progress.

### **This policy brief is based on a paper published as follows:**

Aigbe, G. O., Stringer, L. C., & Cotton, M. (2023). Gas Flaring in Nigeria: A Multi-level Governance and Policy Coherence Analysis. *Anthropocene Science*, 2 (1): 31-47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/S44177-023-00045-5>

### **For more details about the project, please contact:**

**Godwin Aigbe:** [gaigne01@googlemail.com](mailto:gaigne01@googlemail.com)

**Professor Lindsay Stringer:** [lindsay.stringer@york.ac.uk](mailto:lindsay.stringer@york.ac.uk)

**Professor Matthew Cotton:** [m.cotton@tees.ac.uk](mailto:m.cotton@tees.ac.uk).

*While this research focused on Nigeria, the emerging recommendations are relevant for advancing effective gas flaring reduction mechanisms more widely. They could be used as a benchmark in other countries, particularly countries in the Global South, with limited research and inadequate environmental management. It can also enhance gas flaring policies and regulatory frameworks for policymakers and the Nigerian government to guide and support current and future policy development.*