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Climate, capital and control: Josephine Adebayo calls for feminist reboot of Nigeriaâ??s Blue Economy

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In an exclusive AgroSpectrum interview, Josephine Oluseyi Adebayo, Lecturer in Fish Nutrition and Health Management, lays bare the gendered inequities shaping Nigeriaâ??s blue economy. She explains how structural barriers â?? from patriarchal norms to skewed financing systems â?? confine women to low-margin post-harvest roles despite their centrality to coastal livelihoods.

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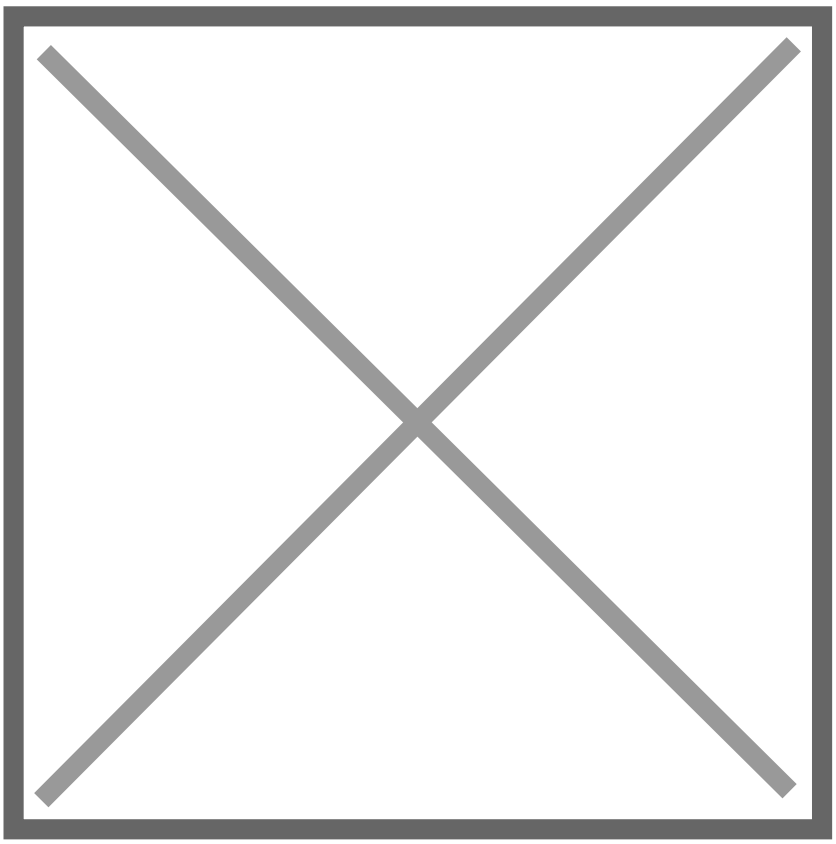
Josephine argues that climate adaptation funding, aquaculture innovation, and trade policy must be redesigned with women not just as beneficiaries but as decision-makers and enterprise leaders. She highlights the transformative potential of cluster farming, insect-protein feed systems, digital branding, and gender-intelligent finance to unlock women-led growth at scale. Looking ahead to 2040, she envisions a blue economy where Nigerian women are owners, innovators, and catalysts of

economic resilience â?? provided the country acts boldly today.

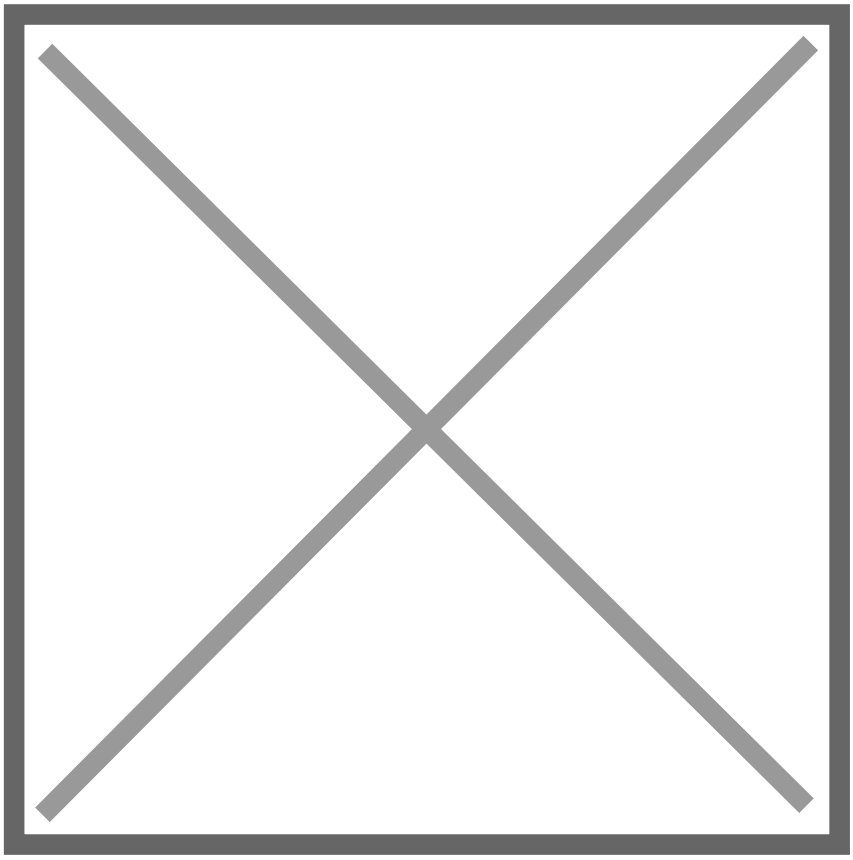
Nigeriaâ??s blue economy could unlock billions in value â?? yet most women remain confined to low-margin post-harvest roles. What structural failures are stopping women from capturing value upstream?



Nigeria's blue economy is incredibly promising, but women's participation is largely a function of societal and cultural dynamics rather than clear policy constraints. Normative gender expectations and patriarchal order historically relegated women to downstream roles as processors and traders, while men monopolized the more financially lucrative and capital-intensive fields of fishing and logistics.

In several coastal settlements, women remain oblivious to upstream prospects, or if they do exist, they lack the resources to systematically pursue them. Transforming this situation necessitates more than just policy design. It requires a robust mix of responsiveness, training, gender aware investment and policy inclusion aimed at empowering women to navigate beyond traditional roles and occupy an equitable place throughout the entire value chain.

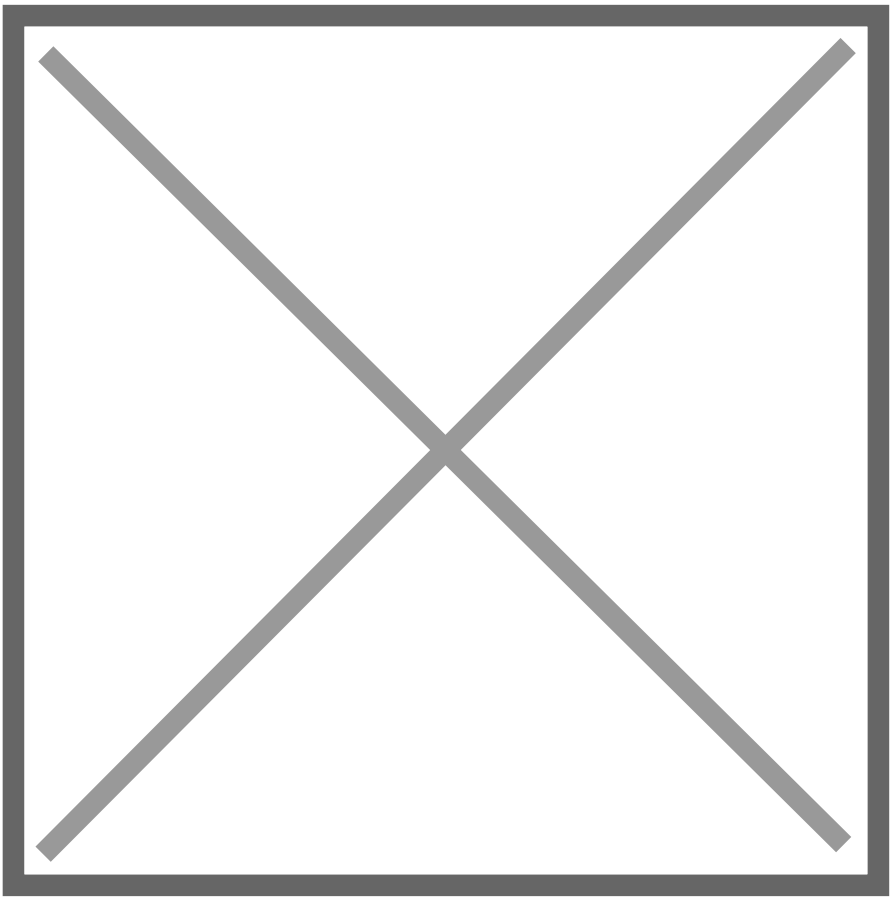
Climate justice meets gender justice on Nigeriaâ??s coastlines â?? women face salinity intrusion, fish stock collapse, and unsafe processing conditions first. How should climate adaptation funding be redesigned so women are not just recipients but decision-makers?



Climate finance should be inclusive and gender responsive. While Nigeria is progressing through the National Climate Investment Platform, womenâ??s participation in the decision-making processes continues to be minimal. Failure to adequately address the gender dimension on programs is too common as funding committees are often comprised solely of men.

Women living and working in the coastal zone have the experience to know best the areas climate impacts hurt most and therefore should be the ones designing, supervising, and allocating climate adaptation funding. Their inclusion in leadership and technical decision-making is crucial to ensure justice is served in the effectiveness of adaptation.

Feed cost, disease, and poor logistics keep small-scale aquaculture uncompetitive. Which innovations could enable profitable women-led aquaculture at scale?



Feed remains the highest cost in aquaculture, but new innovations are emerging. Research into insect protein, especially in black soldier fly and cricket larvae, combined with aquaponics and circular aquaculture, is lowering costs and reducing environmental impacts related to feed. The University of Ibadan's INCiTiS-Food is leading the way in adopting these innovations.

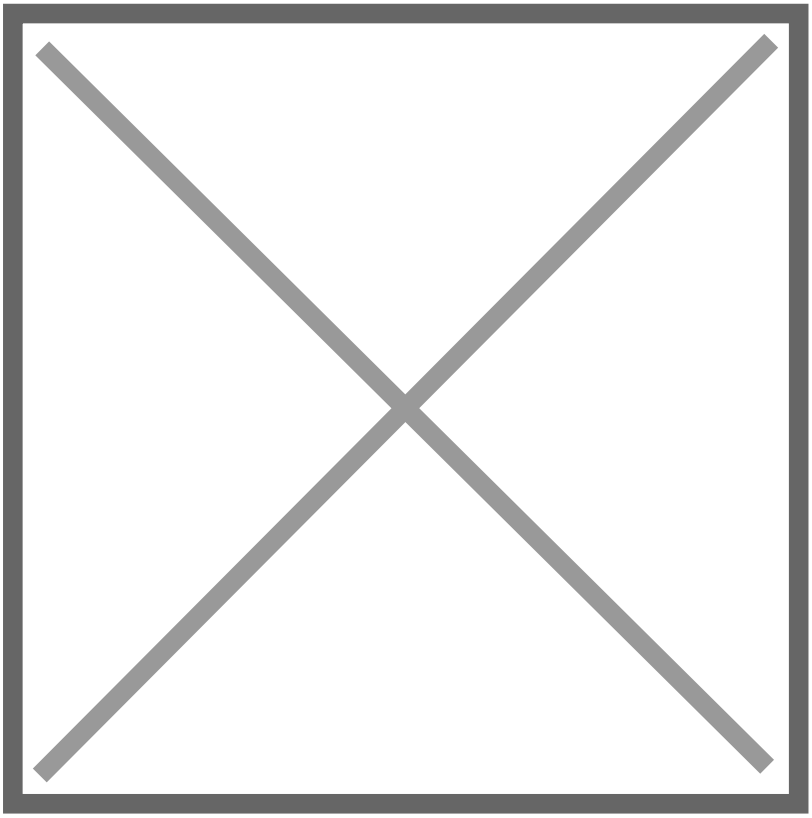
Cluster farming models, like the Eriwe Fish Farmersâ?? Village in Ogun State and CGE Africaâ??s Empowered Coastal Fishing Women project, also help women access resources and recover from shocks more quickly. These efforts, along with the training and leadership of Women in Fisheries Fellowship (FUWOLIFF), are not only modernizing aquaculture in Nigeria but also establishing it as a space for women entrepreneurship.

Nigeria still imports fish despite being Africaâ??s top catfish producer. What trade and branding strategies could help women-owned enterprises scale from survival to export?

Women-owned enterprises can expand their exports through targeted financing, training, and digital branding. Access to export credit, flexible loans, and mentorship will help women increase their production sustainably. Training in quality standards, certification, and international trade logistics is crucial for meeting global demand.

Equally important is that digital literacy, e-commerce platforms, and storytelling help connect women entrepreneurs to regional and international buyers. A gender-sensitive export ecosystem must combine finance, quality assurance, and branding support so that Nigerian womenâ??s aquaculture products can compete globally.

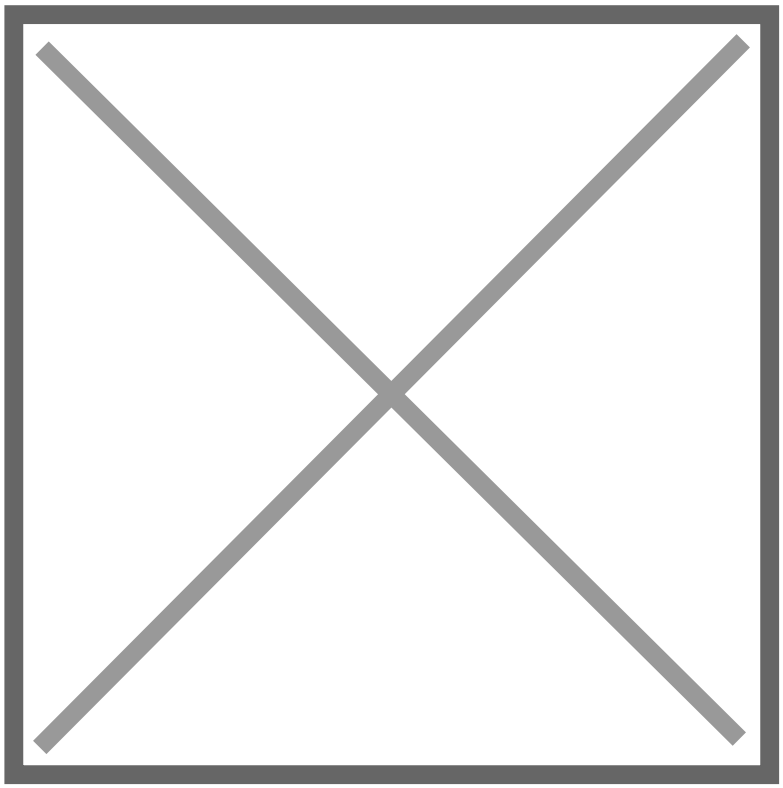
Access to capital remains exclusionary â?? collateral and risk scoring are biased against women. What would a gender-intelligent financing architecture for the blue economy look like?



Attention must be given to the fact that a gender-sensitive financing framework must reconfigure financial systems to accommodate the needs of women. This requires crafting products in consideration of womenâ??s needs: adaptive collateral policies, algorithmic risk assessment, and micro-to-meso level lending. This also necessitates including women as leaders in financial institutions, allowing women to influence the creation of products designed for them.

Such change requires collaboration between the public and private sectors; women may take the lead, but both must support it. In the end, gender-sensitive finance promotes blue economy growth by harnessing womenâ??s productivity and ingenuity.

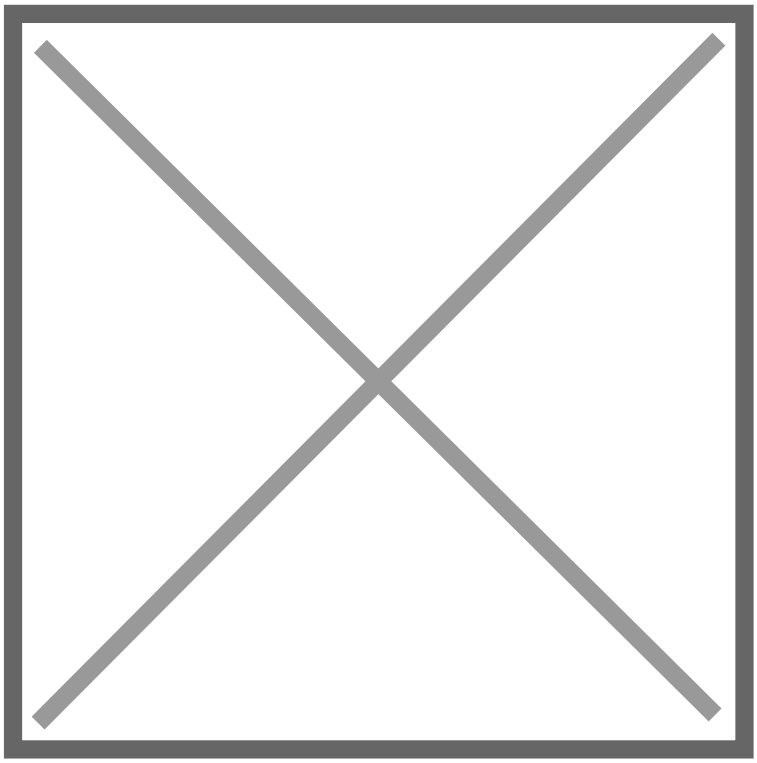
Data invisibility distorts policymaking â?? womenâ??s contribution to fisheries GDP remains undervalued. How can Nigeria institutionalize gender-disaggregated data?



For Nigeria to integrate gender responsive policies, effective policy, subsidy reforms and investment rely on accurate, reliable and gender disaggregated data. There is a need to involve the National Bureau of Statistics, the ministries of finance and the sector agencies in Nigeria to mainstream integrating gender data within all the economic statistics.

There is a need to incorporate gender-responsive reporting within all sector institutions to help identify where women are present, underfunded, and experiencing exclusion. Such data is useful for making subsidy reforms, developing equitable investment incentives, and establishing skill programs to address gender inequalities in fisheries and aquaculture. Once we accurately quantify women's contributions, we will be better able to recognize and scale their impact.

When you imagine Nigeriaâ??s blue economy in 2040, what must change now so women become owners and innovators, not passengers?



By 2040, Nigerian women must shift from participation to ownership and leadership. This involves creating and managing businesses in emerging areas, such as seaweed farming, fish waste recycling, aquaculture technology, and blue finance.

Women should pursue new economic opportunities through innovation, investment, and mentoring others. The bold change begins now with policies that remove barriers, funding that trusts women, and a mindset that sees women not just as beneficiaries but as drivers of Nigeriaâ??s blue prosperity.

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