Governing Climate Change for Sustainable Futures: Integrating Environmental Policy and Legal Frameworks

S.S.S. Vitharana

Postgraduate Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Peradeniya, Peradeniya, 20400, Sri Lanka.
saradauniversity96@gmail.com.

Environmental degradation and climate change pose significant challenges to sustainable development, requiring coordinated legal and policy responses at both national and international levels. Although many countries have strengthened their commitments to sustainability, environmental governance systems continue to face fragmented legislation, weak institutional coordination, limited enforcement, and inadequate integration of environmental priorities into development planning. This study explores how integrated environmental governance frameworks can strengthen climate change mitigation, adaptation, and sustainable development by evaluating the effectiveness of environmental laws and climate policies in Australia, Germany, and Sri Lanka. These jurisdictions were selected because they represent developed and developing governance systems with diverse legal traditions and varying capacities for climate policy implementation. Using a qualitative comparative research design, the study analyses environmental legislation, national climate policies, international agreements, and institutional reports through document analysis and thematic analysis. The comparative assessment is based on four key criteria: policy coherence, institutional coordination, enforcement effectiveness, and implementation outcomes related to climate resilience and environmental protection. The analysis identifies five major themes: coordination mechanisms, enforcement instruments, institutional capacity, policy coherence, and monitoring and accountability. The findings indicate that jurisdictions with integrated governance structures, strong inter-agency coordination, legally binding climate targets, and effective monitoring mechanisms achieve more effective climate policy implementation, resulting in improved climate adaptation, resource management, and institutional resilience. Conversely, fragmented governance structures, overlapping institutional responsibilities, limited enforcement capacity, and inconsistent policy implementation undermine environmental governance and reduce policy effectiveness. The study recommends strengthening cross-sector policy integration, adopting enforceable climate legislation with clearly defined targets, establishing independent monitoring and accountability mechanisms, enhancing institutional coordination, and promoting greater stakeholder participation. These measures can improve environmental governance and contribute to achieving long-term sustainable development while demonstrating the critical role of integrated legal and policy frameworks in addressing climate change and fostering sustainable futures.

Keywords: climate change, environmental governance, sustainable development, public policy, legal frameworks