

A Scoping Review: Policy “Pull” and Diffusion of Green Building Certification Across Africa

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Abstract

Green building adoption is part of a global response to the environmental impacts of construction. However, the literature shows low adoption rates for green certification in developing African countries due to various challenges, including fragmented policy approaches. This scoping literature review explored how policy instruments influence the adoption and diffusion of green building certification across African countries. Using the PRISMA framework, 28 studies were selected from 113 identified across 3 databases, including Scispace, Google, and Google Scholar. The results demonstrate that the green building policy landscape in Africa is underdeveloped, with many countries lacking defined policies to guide sustainable practices. However, adoption of international green certification systems is prevalent on the continent due to the lack of local rating systems and cohesive policy frameworks. Notable policy gaps driving stakeholder interests include the need for technical training, public awareness initiatives, regulations by green building councils, the creation of green financial instruments, and government interventions. Unlike other studies that focus on cost perceptions and lack of technical skills, this study explored how policy instruments influence the adoption and diffusion of green building certification across African countries.

Keywords: Green building, Green Certification, Policy Instrument, Africa, Scoping Review, Certification, Rating Systems, Regulation.

1. Introduction

In recent years, there have been concerted efforts advocating sustainability and green practices in the built environment. Studies like Gelan (2022) assert that the built environment contributes up to 39% of global carbon emissions and 40% of global energy consumption. As a result, green building has been proposed as a critical strategy to reduce the negative impacts of construction activities on the environment. This has led to the adoption of green certification

systems like the LEED, BREEAM, and the South African Green Star as standards for demonstrating environmental compliance and contribution to sustainability (Adegbile, 2012; Bharat et al., 2013; Wyk, 2014; Balapgol, 2022). However, adoption remains limited in many developing countries and across Africa despite growing energy needs.

In Figure 1, the global demand for electricity across the globe has proceeded on an upward trajectory. However, in Africa, this demand has remained relatively

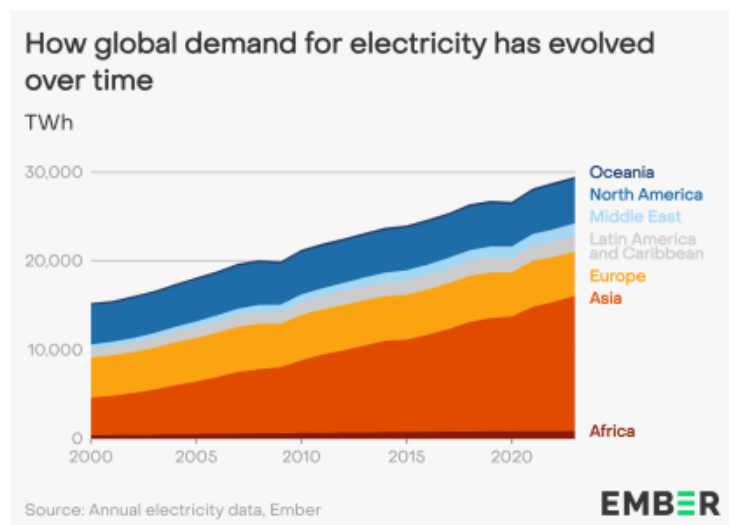


Figure 1: Global Demand for Electricity (Ember, 2024).

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consistently low. Africa's electricity demand increased from little under 2% in 2023 to an anticipated 3.4% in 2024. This growth is expected to continue over much of the continent between 2025 and 2027, averaging 5% annually (ESI Africa, 2025). As demand for development increases, energy demand may not remain low. As Ayoade (2019) rightly put it, large-scale energy production and consumption are now the foundation of prosperity as well as the source of 80% of carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and around 75% of all greenhouse gas emissions. Meanwhile, African nations have committed to core climate change agreements, including the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) 1992, the Kyoto Protocol 1997 and the Paris Agreement 2016. With growing advocacy for certification of green buildings, policy diffusion and its influence on adoption potentially offer insight into how the built environment responds to climate change in developing African contexts.

This study seeks to answer the question: How do policy instruments influence the adoption and diffusion of green building certification across African countries? This main question is further addressed through the following sub-questions:

1. What are the extant green policies adopted across Africa?
2. Which green certification systems are widely adopted in Africa?
3. Which policies influence stakeholders in the adoption of green certification systems across the continent?

2. Literature Review

Green building has in recent years emerged as a strategic response to the environmental impact associated with the housing or construction sector (Bogdana, Dacian and Raluca, 2009). Across sub-Saharan Africa, studies (Adegbile, 2012; Victoria et al., 2022; and Maria, Sambo and Dave, 2022) have shown that green building practices have limited adoption and reach. This suggests that despite the growing importance of a green housing sector, there are still several limitations and challenges limiting the reach and adoption of green buildings. Regulation and compliance through certification remain largely underexplored in literature.

2.1. Green Building Certification

Green building certifications emerged as a response to the need for standardization in the adoption of green practices. Some of the common and leading certifications present across the continent include the BREEAM (developed in the UK) and LEED (in the USA), Green Star (South Africa). Studies (Velişcu, 2009; and Güngör, 2015) describe in detail the development of various certification or rating systems

like LEED Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) in North America, Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM) in the UK, HQE in France, Casbee (Japan), Nabors in Australia, HK-Beam in Hong Kong, etc. These not only help to monitor and assess green or sustainable practices uniformly but also reduce the risk of greenwashing (Oladeji and Okoro, 2024). While there are studies that highlight the scope and application of certifications in individual countries, there is no comprehensive synthesis of literature capturing the certification types within Africa. This creates a policy gap for promoting or advocating green building certification, without understanding the different regulatory approaches dominating different countries, might yield limited results.

2.2. Green Policy Diffusion

There are different positions on Africa's approach to addressing environmental impacts in the housing sector. Some of these different positions are influenced by differing geopolitical policies across Northern African countries and Sub-Saharan Africa. Others are reflected in the difference between regional dynamics across Southern Africa, East Africa, and West Africa.

In the literature, Northern Africa's green or sustainability policies and diffusion are explored as a part of the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) grouping (Redouan et al., 2022). This suggests strong policy influences from Middle Eastern regions on the adoption and reach of sustainability interventions in North Africa (Yakouta, Michele and Ouassila, 2023). Furthermore, the environmental risks across the MENA region are scarcely uniform across more than 20 countries (Isaac et al., 2013). These realities constitute significant differences that might inhibit shared sustainability goals without a cohesive framework.

Across Sub-Saharan Africa as well, countries like Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, and South Africa, have adopted different regulatory or certification systems (Khaemba and Mutsune, 2014; and Darko, 2019). Some of these are adapted to local realities, while others are mere replications of systems created for more developed economies.

2.3. Policy Stakeholders

Nduka and Olabode (2015) argue that the extra cost of making housing sustainable is often perceived as out of reach for many people. Meanwhile, other studies insist that the long-term benefits of green buildings outweigh the initial costs (Matsila, 2013; Martin and Sarmad 2013); Windapo, 2014). This implies that ongoing development, rising energy demand, and the need to expand cities will increase demand for green buildings across the continent. However, these studies have only provided limited coverage on policy diffusion and how

it contributes to green building certification. This represents a significant gap in understanding the green and sustainability adoption challenges in developing African contexts.

3. Methodology

To assess how policy instruments influence the adoption and diffusion of green building certification across African countries, this study adopts a pragmatic philosophical stance. The pragmatic worldview recognises that knowledge can be contextual and not limited to structured and empirical information (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2023). Across African countries, green building policy and evidence are often dispersed across policy documents, institutional reports, industry practices, and academic scholarship. Therefore, a conceptual synthesis offers a critical foundation to further quantification or empirical studies. This study applied an inductive approach to allow themes to emerge from fragmented literature across the continent, which is appropriate where research and data are limited (Ibrahim and Raji, 2018). A scoping literature review is conducted to explore the literature, chart and summarize the evidence, and inform future research. This study adopted the 5-step framework by Arksey and O'Malley (2005). For the transparency of the identification and selection process a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram was used (Haddaway et al., 2022).

3.1. Study Selection

As seen in Figure 2, of the 113 identified studies, 46 were selected from 3 databases, including Scispace, Google, and Google Scholar, which offered a robust selection of referred journal articles. Studies that were

not focused on African countries were excluded. Language was also a basis for excluding some studies. Only studies using the English language were included in the selection due to the limited timeframe for the study and the extensive need for translation that would be required to include studies in other languages, like French or Arabic.

3.2. Charting the Data

The information extracted from the studies included the country, the existing green building policy focus in the identified country, the green building rating or certification system, and policy influences on stakeholders. This data was tabulated using Excel spreadsheets.

3.3. Collating, summarising, and reporting.

Results for 28 studies were summarized, collated, and reported. These results were representative of regions within Africa including West Africa, South Africa, North Africa, and East Africa. Furthermore, the content analysis includes a table consisting of the Author, Country, Existing Green Policy, Certification System, and Policy diffusion level. The content analysis was conducted manually by reading through the selected studies.

4. Results

In Table 1 (Appendix 1), twenty-eight studies offering a comprehensive synthesis of green building policy direction are analyzed. The results include information spanning nine countries across various regions, including West, East, North, and Southern Africa. The content analysis included published sources from 2011

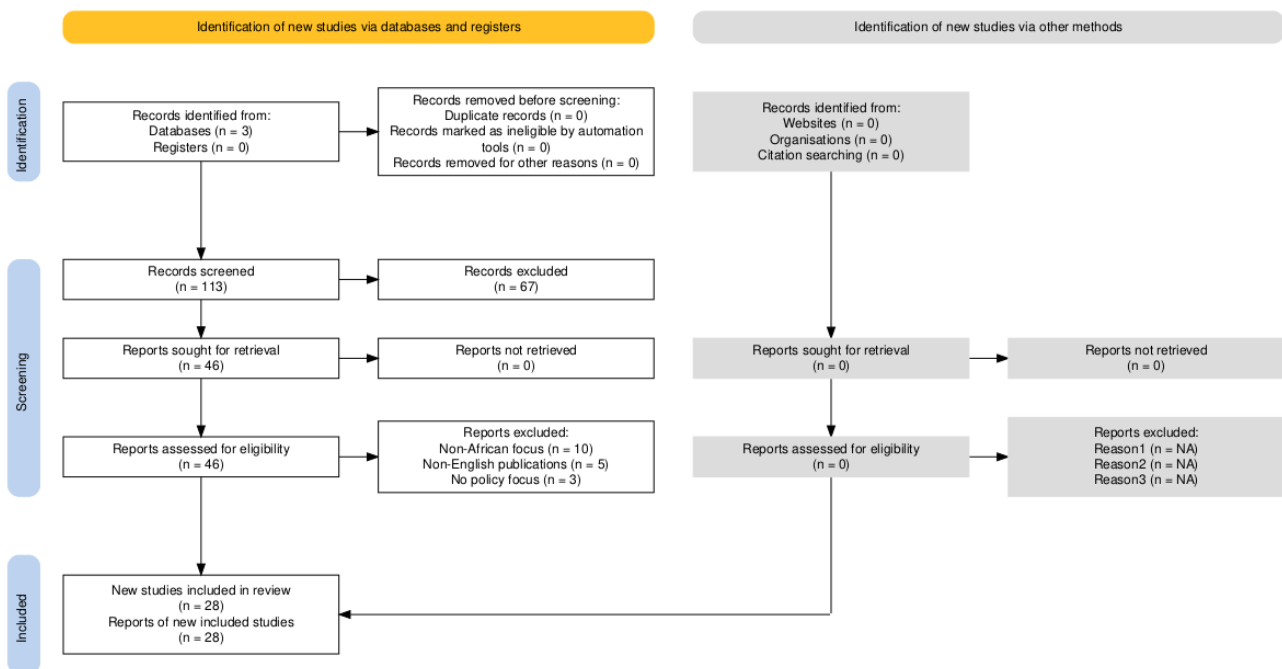


Figure 2: PRISMA Flow Chart (Author's own work).

to 2022, with an outlier from 1970. Table 1 outlines the existing green building policy in each identified country, the green building rating system, and the policy influences on stakeholder engagement.

Across the literature analysed in table 1, studies report a lack of specific policy instruments driving the adoption of green building certifications. There are, however, a few related policies that have been identified as guidelines for certain countries. In Ghana, Agyekum et al. (2022) noted the ISO 14000 environmental management systems and frameworks. Meanwhile, in Egypt, there are some influences of the energy efficiency (EE) policies governing the MENA region (Osama and Omar, 2019). Across the literature, an emerging policy position is that there needs to be government intervention in the form of mandatory policy and regulations to enforce green building standards. This might be explained by the limited success recorded through voluntary green building implementation (Isaac et al., 2013). The results also recommend key policy gaps to be filled, including green tax incentives, localized rating, financing, awareness, guidelines, tools, and techniques. While there are increasing influences from Middle Eastern policies in North Africa, the results also found strong influences from Asian countries like India and Malaysia in West Africa. This suggests broader international influences and interests in the green building market across the continent.

This study also identified certification and rating systems that exist across the continent. Some of the leading certifications include LEED, BREEAM, and the South African Green Star. While these certification systems are adopted from the U.S., U.K., and Australia respectively, there is a broad advocacy for localized green building rating systems. In Egypt, Osama and Omar (2019) reported the development of a local rating system called Green Pyramid Rating System (GPRS). However, due to ongoing political and economic reforms, the rating system had not been used at the time of the study. Of all the international rating systems, the LEED was reported to have a wider coverage of most regions of the continent. It is also significant to note that the South African Green Star rating has been adopted by some developers in Nigeria (Onuoha et al., 2017), which demonstrates cross-border collaborations.

To evaluate the influences of policy in driving diffusions across the continent, the study also explored policy stakeholder involvement. Overall, the interest of stakeholders can be grouped as follows:

1. Government or public institutions: private institutions require policy interventions that inform priority locations for green buildings, utility concessions, financial incentives, training, and awareness.

2. Built-environment professional institutions: Professional bodies are increasingly developing awareness and interest in incorporating green principles in practice.
3. Financial institutions: Banks and other development financiers with an interest in developing financing instruments require regulation, education and training for financing decisions.
4. Green building councils: There is a limited presence of established bodies to document, advocate, regulate and promote green building practices.
5. Contractors and building artisans: The lack of trained experts or technical skills for the use of green building materials is also a challenge for widespread adoption (Fanie and Roneesh, 2011).
6. Building users and investors: Public awareness is reported as significantly low across the continent.

A conceptual framework for the contributions of policy diffusion to green building certification is illustrated below in figure 2.

In Figure 3 (Appendix 1), the conceptual framework illustrates the study's contribution in identifying policy mechanisms and their influence on the adoption of green building certification by identified housing stakeholders. For example, the role of Government officials in addressing needs for green incentives and concessions contributes to green certification adoption. Professional institutions seek to translate green policy into practice. Financial institutions developing green finance instruments and education adopt certification for compliance and standards. Green building councils seek to advocate and promote green building practices. Contractors and artisans need technical training to implement sustainable practices. Building Users and investors need more awareness on benefits of green buildings. This conceptual framework would benefit from further research and development including survey data to validate the policy drivers and their contribution to the green certification market.

5. Conclusion

This paper examined how policy instruments influence the adoption and diffusion of green building certification across African countries. First, the findings show that the green building policy landscape is significantly underdeveloped. Most African countries lack a clearly defined green building policy to guide the adoption and implementation of sustainable building practices. However, diverse international institutions are influencing awareness and advocacy for policy adoption. This distinctly demonstrates the role of global institutions and mandatory regulation for policy development and sustainability adoption.

Second, adopting international green certification or rating systems has evolved as the most common approach to regulation across the continent. Which policymakers must recognize as a limited approach that requires robust local replacement through policy. The LEED from the United States and South Africa's Green Star are considered the most popularly used rating system across the continent. However, the diverse local realities of construction and housing markets require green implementation to be locally relevant to guarantee wider adoption.

Thirdly, many stakeholders have differing sustainability interests, which green building policies must address. Some of these policy gaps include the need for policy-driven technical training for skilled workers, public awareness for users and investors, regulation by green building councils, the development of green financial instruments, and government-led interventions or concessions.

The study recommendations include:

1. Country-level green building agendas driven by government ministries that directly serve the construction and housing sectors.

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2. Development of local rating systems that extend the existing international standards.
 3. Widespread introduction of green standards to built environment professional bodies.
 4. Partnerships between the governments and financial institutions that develop green building financial instruments and concessions.
- While this study has provided an insight into the policy landscape in extant literature, it is limited by the lack of primary data. This offers an opportunity for further research to examine stakeholders' interest and commitment in adopting a comprehensive green building policy. Further research should explore the potential use of local standards and measures to assess green practices and determine compliance.
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Appendix 1

Table 1: Content Analysis for Green Building Policy Diffusion in Africa

Author	Country	Existing Green Building Policy	Green building rating system	Policy diffusion level
Gelan (2022)	Ethiopia	NA	LEED - Limited	Minimal
Chan et al. (2018), Darko (2019), Agyekum et al. (2019), Addy et al. (2020), Ampratwum et al. (2021), Agyekum et al. (2022), Anzagira et al. (2022), Victoria et al. (2022),	Ghana	Related environmental policy	LEED, IFC Edge, and South Africa's Green Star.	Minimal
Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) (2009), Mpakati-Gama, Wamuziri and Sloan (2012), Windapo (2014), Windapo and Goulding (2015), Simpeh et al. (2023), Oladeji and Okoro (2024)	South Africa	Regional and national building regulations	The South African Green Star.	Significant
Isaac et al. (2013), Assadiki et al. (2022)	North Africa	Related energy policy	LEED and limited use of the BREEAM.	Moderate
Nduka and Olabode (2015), Onuoha et al. (2017), Ibrahim and Raji (2018), Ola and Adjekophori (2018)	Nigeria	NA	LEED and the South African Green Star.	Minimal
Matsila (2013)	Botswana	NA	NA	NA
Khaemba and Mutsune (2014)	Kenya	Yes	Limited LEED rating system.	Minimal
Claude, Siddig and Blaise (1970)	Cameroon	Related local planning policy	NA	NA
Abdel Aleem, Balci, and Sakar (2015), Osama and Omar (2019)	Egypt	Related energy efficiency (EE) policies.	Green Pyramid and LEED.	Moderate
Fanie and Roneesh (2011)	Mauritius	NA	LEED.	Moderate
Ebekozien et al. (2024), Ntombela and Okoro (2024)	Multiple African Countries	Significant green building policy advances from South Africa	South African Green Star, Kenyan Green Mark.	Minimal



Figure 3: Proposed Framework: Policy Influences Driving Green Building Certification Adoption.
Source: Author's Own Work.