



HARNESSING RENEWABLE ENERGY WITH MACHINE LEARNING: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RENEWABLE ENERGY APPROACHES IN THE USA AND SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

Anya Adebayo Anya

Department of Political Science, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.

Email: adeanya@summalogix.com

Cite this article:

Anya Adebayo Anya (2025), Harnessing Renewable Energy with Machine Learning: A Comparative Study of Renewable Energy Approaches in the USA and Sub-Saharan Africa. Journal of Advanced Research and Multidisciplinary Studies 5(1), 21-29. DOI: 10.52589/JARMS-BDANFY2B

Manuscript History

Received: 17 Oct 2024

Accepted: 21 Dec 2024

Published: 10 Jan 2025

Copyright © 2025 The Author(s).

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0), which permits anyone to share, use, reproduce and redistribute in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

ABSTRACT: *The integration of machine learning (ML) in renewable energy systems has emerged as a pivotal strategy for enhancing energy efficiency, forecasting energy demand, and improving the stability of power grids. This study presents a comparative analysis of the adoption and application of ML in renewable energy between the United States and sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). The United States has made significant advancements in utilizing ML technologies, leveraging them for optimizing grid operations, energy consumption forecasting, and waste management. Conversely, sub-Saharan Africa, despite its vast renewable energy potential, faces substantial barriers such as inadequate infrastructure, limited data availability, and insufficient technological capacity, hindering the widespread application of ML in renewable energy. Through a critical review of existing literature, this study identifies the technological, economic, and policy-related challenges that both regions face in integrating ML into renewable energy systems. While the United States benefits from a strong technological infrastructure and investment in research and development, SSA is still in the early stages of adopting ML, with considerable room for growth. The findings suggest that while the USA has been successful in applying ML to improve energy efficiency and integrate renewable resources, sub-Saharan Africa's adoption of ML is limited by structural constraints, a lack of skilled personnel, and financial challenges. This paper offers policy recommendations for sub-Saharan African countries to foster greater integration of ML in renewable energy, including improving data infrastructure, investing in educational and technological capacity, and enhancing cross-border collaborations. Additionally, the United States can play a key role in supporting African nations through technology transfer, joint research ventures, and strategic investments to overcome the barriers to ML adoption in the renewable energy sector. In conclusion, the integration of ML with renewable energy systems presents a transformative opportunity for both regions. Addressing the technological and infrastructural challenges in sub-Saharan Africa, while leveraging the advancements in the United States, will be crucial for achieving sustainable and efficient global energy systems. This study underscores the importance of international cooperation and tailored policy frameworks in advancing ML applications for renewable energy in both developed and developing regions.*

KEYWORDS: Renewable energy; Machine learning; sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).



INTRODUCTION

The global transition toward renewable energy has become an essential step in combating climate change, ensuring energy security, and promoting sustainable development (Ghosn et al., 2024). Renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, hydro, and geothermal, are critical in diversifying energy generation and reducing reliance on fossil fuels. However, the effective integration and optimization of these resources remain a significant challenge, especially given their intermittent nature and varying availability. This is where emerging technologies such as machine learning (ML) play a transformative role. Machine learning, a subset of artificial intelligence (AI), enables systems to learn from data and make predictions or decisions without explicit programming. When applied to renewable energy, machine learning models can enhance grid management, forecast energy demand, optimize generation, and ensure more efficient energy distribution.

In recent years, machine learning has gained prominence in the renewable energy sector, particularly in countries with advanced energy infrastructures like the United States (Yao et al, 2022, Ajibade et al, 2023). The USA, with its well-established renewable energy market, has increasingly adopted machine learning techniques to optimize energy production and consumption. These advancements have enabled the country to efficiently manage a diverse energy mix, integrate renewable energy into the grid, and meet growing energy demands with reduced environmental impact. The use of predictive analytics, real-time monitoring, and automated decision-making has significantly improved both the economic and environmental efficiency of renewable energy systems in the USA.

On the other hand, sub-Saharan Africa, a region rich in renewable energy potential, has continued to face unique challenges that hinder the widespread adoption of machine learning for energy optimization. Despite its vast solar, wind, and geothermal resources, Sub-Saharan Africa's renewable energy sector is constrained by infrastructure gaps, inadequate data collection, limited technological access, and financial constraints. Nevertheless, machine learning presents an opportunity to overcome these barriers, offering innovative solutions to address the region's energy challenges. From improving energy access in remote areas to optimizing grid performance in growing urban centers, the application of machine learning in renewable energy systems could unlock transformative potential for the region.

Statement of Problem

The transition to renewable energy sources is integral to addressing the global challenges of climate change, energy security, and sustainability. However, the optimization of renewable energy systems, particularly those dependent on intermittent resources such as solar and wind, presents significant operational and technological difficulties. These challenges include issues related to grid stability, energy storage, demand forecasting, and resource allocation. As renewable energy generation continues to expand, the need for innovative solutions to optimize its integration into existing energy infrastructure becomes increasingly urgent. One promising avenue for addressing these challenges is the application of machine learning (ML) technologies, which have demonstrated the potential to improve efficiency, predict energy consumption patterns, and enhance grid management.

In the United States, machine learning has been widely adopted in renewable energy systems to streamline operations, enhance grid resilience, and optimize energy dispatch. While substantial progress has been made, the integration of machine learning in the U.S. renewable



energy sector still faces challenges related to policy inconsistencies, technological scalability, and the adaptability of ML models to diverse energy systems.

Conversely, sub-Saharan Africa, a region endowed with abundant renewable energy resources, has yet to fully capitalize on the potential of machine learning for optimizing its energy systems. The region grapples with substantial barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, limited access to data, financial constraints, and a lack of technical expertise. These challenges hinder the deployment and effective use of machine learning to enhance renewable energy systems and meet the growing energy needs of its rapidly expanding population.

The comparative study of machine learning applications in renewable energy between the USA and sub-Saharan Africa is critical for identifying opportunities, challenges, and policy recommendations that can enhance the adoption of ML technologies in sub-Saharan Africa. While the USA offers valuable insights from its advanced renewable energy infrastructure, sub-Saharan Africa's unique context demands tailored strategies to harness the potential of machine learning for energy optimization. This paper seeks to address these gaps by examining the role of machine learning in renewable energy optimization in both regions, identifying common challenges, and proposing recommendations for cross-regional learning and collaboration.

Renewable Energy Landscape

The USA's Renewable Energy Sector

The United States has made significant progress in expanding its renewable energy portfolio, driven largely by state-level Renewable Portfolio Standards (RPS). These policies have accounted for approximately half of the growth in renewable electricity generation and capacity since 2000 (Barbose, 2021; Barbose, 2023). As of 2022, 29 states and the District of Columbia have implemented RPS policies, with 16 states setting targets of at least 50% and 17 states aiming for 100% clean electricity (Barbose, 2023). The renewable energy landscape in the U.S. includes wind, solar, and hydroelectric power, with wind energy playing a particularly important role in meeting these ambitious goals (Schmalensee, 2009).

Machine learning (ML) has emerged as a critical enabler in optimizing renewable energy integration and grid management in the United States. ML techniques are being leveraged to enhance energy efficiency, integrate green energy sources, analyze smart grid data, forecast energy consumption, and strengthen power system security (Muralidharan et al., 2024). A wide range of ML methodologies, including supervised, unsupervised, and reinforcement learning, are employed to address key challenges in renewable energy systems (Liao et al., 2024). These methodologies facilitate accurate prediction of energy generation, anomaly detection, and the optimization of control strategies, enabling more efficient use of renewable resources. The application of ML extends across various domains, including solar and wind energy as well as electric distribution and storage systems, underscoring its transformative potential in advancing the renewable energy sector (Mohammadi & Mohammadi, 2023).



The Renewable Energy Landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa

Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) is endowed with vast renewable energy resources, including solar, wind, hydropower, geothermal, and biomass, making it a region with significant potential for renewable energy development (Sambo, 2016; Bello, 2015). However, this potential remains largely untapped due to a combination of challenges, including inadequate technical expertise, limited financial capacity, weak regulatory frameworks, and sociopolitical barriers (Bishoge et al., 2020). These challenges are further compounded by the fact that over 70% of the region's population lacks reliable access to electricity and modern cooking fuels, a situation that stifles socio-economic development and exacerbates energy poverty (Bello, 2015).

The emergence of machine learning (ML) offers a promising pathway to overcoming these barriers and advancing renewable energy adoption in SSA. ML techniques are being increasingly applied in smart grids and energy systems to enhance energy efficiency, integrate renewable sources, analyze large datasets, forecast energy consumption patterns, and improve power system security (Muralidharan et al., 2024). In the solar energy sector, ML facilitates more accurate irradiance predictions and improves the performance of photovoltaic systems, while in wind energy, it enhances wind speed forecasts and optimizes turbine efficiency (Le et al., 2024). Additionally, ML techniques are proving valuable in optimizing biofuel production and biomass energy processes. Across energy harvesting, storage, conversion, and management, ML plays a transformative role at the materials, devices, and systems levels, accelerating advancements that could revolutionize renewable energy systems in the region (Yao et al., 2022).

Machine Learning in the USA's Renewable Energy

Machine learning (ML) is playing an increasingly crucial role in advancing renewable energy systems, particularly in the United States. Research in this field has expanded significantly, particularly between 2012 and 2021, with the USA's National Renewable Energy Laboratory being a key contributor to ML innovation in renewable energy (Ajibade et al., 2023). ML applications span various renewable energy sectors, including solar, wind, biofuel, and biomass, where they enhance prediction accuracy, system efficiency, and operational stability (Le et al., 2024).

In smart grids, ML has been instrumental in optimizing energy distribution, improving efficiency, and bolstering system security (Muralidharan et al., 2024). Predictive maintenance and energy forecasting are notable ML applications that ensure operational reliability and system longevity. The integration of ML with Big Data analytics has further enabled the development of electricity generation forecasting systems in the U.S., achieving prediction accuracies as high as 99% compared to actual energy usage (Rahman et al., 2016; Rituraj et al., 2024).

Machine Learning in Sub-Saharan Africa

Machine learning (ML) is gradually emerging as a significant driver of innovation and development in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA), particularly within renewable energy systems and economic development initiatives. A review of ML research conducted between 2010 and 2021 highlights its potential for transformative impacts in the region, often referred to as "ML for Development" (ML4D). According to Biljon (2022), the application of ML in SSA has begun



addressing systemic challenges in energy access, healthcare, and agriculture, but its adoption remains in its nascent stages compared to other regions globally.

One notable example is Ghana, where ML models have been employed to predict redundant energy in solar photovoltaic (PV) mini-grids. This approach not only optimizes energy usage in off-grid communities but also underscores the critical role of ML in addressing energy inefficiencies in resource-constrained environments (Opoku et al., 2023). These findings suggest that ML-based solutions could significantly enhance the efficiency of decentralized renewable energy systems, a key requirement for achieving sustainable energy access in SSA.

Despite these promising developments, the region continues to grapple with several challenges that hinder the broader application of ML technologies. Data availability and quality are among the most pressing issues, as inadequate or unreliable datasets compromise the predictive accuracy and reliability of ML models (Ebulue et al., 2024; Combrink et al., 2023). For instance, Combrink et al. (2023) observed that inconsistencies in energy data collection across SSA reduce the feasibility of deploying ML solutions for grid optimization. Similarly, Ebulue et al. (2024) emphasize that the fragmented nature of data sources in SSA complicates efforts to create robust ML frameworks.

Technological and infrastructural barriers further compound these challenges. Muparutsa (2024) highlights that limited access to advanced computing infrastructure inhibits the scalability of ML-based interventions, while Fomunyam (2020) argues that insufficient investment in digital infrastructure across the region restricts the practical implementation of ML solutions. These barriers suggest that achieving the full potential of ML in SSA will require significant infrastructural improvements alongside technical advancements.

Moreover, the skill gap remains a critical bottleneck to progress. As Muparutsa (2024) points out, there is a scarcity of professionals with the specialized expertise required to develop, deploy, and maintain ML systems. This lack of capacity is particularly pronounced in the energy sector, where domain-specific knowledge and ML proficiency are both essential for meaningful impact. Addressing this gap will necessitate targeted educational and training programs to build local capacity and reduce reliance on external expertise.

While ML offers considerable promise for renewable energy and broader developmental challenges in SSA, its widespread adoption is contingent on overcoming systemic barriers. This includes improving data quality, addressing technological and infrastructural deficits, and investing in capacity-building initiatives. Future research and policy efforts should prioritize these areas to enable SSA to fully harness the transformative potential of ML technologies.

Comparative Analysis

Technological Advancements and Adoption

Machine learning (ML) has become a transformative force in renewable energy, offering innovative solutions for optimizing energy production, distribution, and consumption. While advanced nations like the United States have made significant strides in leveraging ML to enhance renewable energy systems, Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) continues to face persistent challenges. This analysis provides a comparative perspective on the advancements, barriers, and opportunities in ML adoption for renewable energy in these two regions, shedding light on their unique trajectories and potential areas for cross-regional learning.



Technological Innovation and Integration

In the United States, ML has been a key driver of efficiency and sustainability in renewable energy systems. Advanced AI technologies are being utilized for tasks such as waste management optimization, predictive maintenance, and grid stability, which significantly enhance the effectiveness of renewable energy infrastructures (Nwokediegwu et al., 2024). For example, the USA's National Renewable Energy Laboratory has pioneered research efforts to develop ML models for accurate energy forecasting and optimization, achieving prediction accuracies of up to 99% (Rahman et al., 2016). The integration of ML with Big Data analytics has further revolutionized the energy sector, enabling real-time decision-making and resource allocation.

Conversely, the sub-Saharan African region has continued to lag behind in adopting such sophisticated technologies, largely due to systemic barriers such as inadequate digital infrastructure, funding deficits, and limited human capital (Biljon, 2022). While SSA has shown potential in harnessing ML for renewable energy systems, such as using predictive models for solar photovoltaic (PV) mini-grid optimization in Ghana (Opoku et al., 2023), these efforts remain isolated. Additionally, research and development in ML for Development (ML4D) is still in its infancy across the region, reflecting a need for increased investment and policy support tailored to the unique challenges of SSA (Biljon, 2022).

Barriers to Renewable Energy Adoption

While the USA benefits from strong institutional and regulatory frameworks that promote renewable energy and technological innovation, SSA faces significant challenges. These include weak institutional capacities, ineffective policies, and insufficient funding, which undermine the region's ability to scale renewable energy solutions (Mungai et al., 2021; Adelaja, 2020). Despite having an abundance of renewable energy resources, including substantial potential for hydroelectric power, the pace of adoption in SSA remains sluggish. This is evident in the region's low per capita electricity consumption and limited energy access (Olanrele & Fuinhas, 2022).

Interestingly, while SSA's mobile cellular subscription rates have increased, paradoxically, they have been linked to hindrances in clean energy adoption, as competing technological priorities divert resources and focus (Ofori et al., 2023). However, there are bright spots: studies indicate that machinery imports and the adoption of renewable energy technologies have contributed to reducing CO₂ emissions in SSA, suggesting room for strategic improvements (Edziah et al., 2022).

Financial and Infrastructural Constraints

In the USA, robust financial markets and mechanisms like tax credits and subsidies have facilitated investments in renewable energy and ML technologies. SSA, however, faces financial bottlenecks, with foreign direct investment (FDI) and financial development making only marginal contributions to renewable energy adoption (Olanrele & Fuinhas, 2022). This financial gap exacerbates existing challenges in building the infrastructure necessary to support large-scale renewable energy projects and ML applications.



CONCLUSION

The integration of machine learning (ML) into renewable energy systems presents an unparalleled opportunity for addressing global sustainability and energy efficiency challenges. While sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) possesses immense renewable energy potential, the region faces significant hurdles, including limited technical capacity, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient funding. To overcome these barriers and unlock ML's transformative potential, actionable policy interventions and international collaborations are essential.

Sub-Saharan African countries must prioritize capacity building by investing in education and technical training programs focused on ML applications in renewable energy. Developing a skilled workforce capable of implementing and managing ML-driven technologies is critical to fostering innovation in the sector. Governments should also work toward enhancing data infrastructure by creating mechanisms for robust data collection, sharing, and analysis. Open energy data platforms can stimulate research and attract private sector involvement, accelerating progress. Furthermore, regulatory frameworks need to be strengthened to incentivize investments in renewable energy projects while integrating ML solutions. Simplifying approval processes and providing tax incentives for technology imports are crucial steps in this regard. To address funding challenges, partnerships with international development agencies and increased access to foreign direct investments can provide the financial support required for large-scale renewable energy initiatives.

The United States, as a global actor in renewable energy technology, has an important role to play in supporting SSA's journey toward integrating ML into its energy systems. Facilitating technology transfer, such as providing access to advanced ML software and tools, can empower African nations to optimize renewable energy production and distribution. Capacity-building programs, including technical workshops and training initiatives, can help bridge the skill gap in SSA's workforce. Additionally, collaborative research between U.S. institutions, such as the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, and African universities can yield solutions tailored to the unique challenges of the region. Infrastructure development support, channeled through development aid and investments, can further enhance the adoption of ML technologies in SSA's renewable energy sector.

The long-term benefits of integrating machine learning into renewable energy systems cannot be overstated. For SSA, this integration promises to enhance energy efficiency, expand access to clean energy, and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, driving both economic growth and environmental sustainability. For advanced economies like the United States, supporting SSA's development aligns with shared global goals of equity and climate resilience. By fostering partnerships and bridging the technological gap between advanced and developing regions, the global community can collectively address pressing energy challenges, combat climate change, and build a sustainable future for all.



REFERENCES

- Adelaja, A.O. (2020). Barriers to national renewable energy policy adoption: Insights from a case study of Nigeria. *Energy Strategy Reviews*, 30, 100519.
- Ajibade, S.M., Flores, D.D., Ayaz, M., Dodo, Y.A., Areche, F.O., Adediran, A.O., Oyeboode, O.J., & Dayupay, J.P. (2023). Application of Machine Learning In Renewable Energy: A Bibliometric Analysis of a Decade. *2023 IEEE International Conference on Automatic Control and Intelligent Systems (I2CACIS)*, 173-179.
- Barbose, G. (2021). U.S. Renewables Portfolio Standards 2021 Status Update: Early Release.
- Barbose, G. (2023). U.S. State Renewables Portfolio & Clean Electricity Standards: 2023 Status Update [Slides].
- Bello, M. (2015). Renewable Energy for Sustainable Socio-Economic Development in Developing Countries: A Case Study of Sub-Saharan Africa. *Advanced Materials Research*, 1116, 33 - 44.
- Biljon, J.A. (2022). Machine Learning in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Critical Review of Selected Research Publications, 2010-2021. *Information and Communication Technologies for Development*.
- Bishoge, O.K., Kombe, G.G., & Mvile, B.N. (2020). Renewable energy for sustainable development in sub-Saharan African countries: Challenges and way forward. *Journal of Renewable and Sustainable Energy*.
- Combrink, H.M., Marivate, V., & Masikisiki, B. (2023). Technology-Enhanced Learning, Data Sharing, and Machine Learning Challenges in South African Education. *Education Sciences*.
- Ebulue, C.C., Ekkeh, O.V., Ebulue, O.R., & Ekesiobi, C.S. (2024). Machine learning insights into HIV outbreak predictions in Sub-Saharan Africa. *International Medical Science Research Journal*.
- Edziah, B.K., Sun, H., Adom, P.K., Wang, F., & Agyemang, A.O. (2022). The role of exogenous technological factors and renewable energy in carbon dioxide emission reduction in sub-Saharan African. *Renewable Energy*.
- Le, T.T., Paramasivam, P., Adril, E., Nguyen, V.Q., Le, M.X., Duong, M.T., Le, H.C., & Nguyen, A.Q. (2024). Unlocking renewable energy potential: Harnessing machine learning and intelligent algorithms. *International Journal of Renewable Energy Development*.
- Fomunyan, K.G. (2020). Theorising Machine Learning as an Alternative Pathway for Higher Education in Africa. *International Journal of Education and Practice*.
- Ghosn, F., Zreik, M., Awad, G., & Karaouni, G. (2024). Energy transition and sustainable development in Malaysia: Steering towards a greener future. *International Journal of Renewable Energy Development*.
- Liao, Z., Kally, J., & Ru, S. (2024). Probabilistic modeling of renewable energy sources in smart grids: A stochastic optimization perspective. *Sustainable Cities and Society*.
- Mungai, E.M., Ndiritu, S.W., & da Silva, I. (2021). Unlocking climate finance potential and policy barriers—A case of renewable energy and energy efficiency in Sub-Saharan Africa. *Resources, Environment and Sustainability*.
- Muparutsa, T.W. (2024). Demystifying Machine Learning: Applications in African Environmental Science and Engineering. *European Journal of Theoretical and Applied Sciences*.



- Muralidharan, P., Subramani, K., Habelalmateen, M.I., Pant, R., Mishra, A., & Ikhara, S. (2024). Improving Renewable Energy Operations in Smart Grids through Machine Learning. *E3S Web of Conferences*.
- Nwokediegwu, Z.Q., Ugwuanyi, E.D., Dada, M.A., Majemite, M.T., & Obaigbena, A. (2024). AI-DRIVEN WASTE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: A COMPARATIVE REVIEW OF INNOVATIONS IN THE USA AND AFRICA. *Engineering Science & Technology Journal*.
- Ofori, E.K., Ozturk, I., Bekun, F.V., Alhassan, A., & Gimba, O.J. (2023). Synthesizing the role of technological innovation on sustainable development and climate action: Does governance play a role in sub-Saharan Africa? *Environmental Development*.
- Olanrele, I.A., & Fuinhas, J.A. (2022). Assessment of renewable electricity adoption in sub-Saharan Africa. *Energy & Environment*, 35, 848 - 873.
- Opoku, R., Mensah, G., Adjei, E.A., Bosco Dramani, J., Kornyo, O., Nijjhar, R., Addai, M., Marfo, D., Davis, F., & Obeng, G.Y. (2023). Machine learning of redundant energy of a solar PV Mini-grid system for cooking applications. *Solar Energy*.
- Rahman, M.N., Esmailpour, A., & Zhao, J. (2016). Machine Learning with Big Data An Efficient Electricity Generation Forecasting System. *Big Data Res.*, 5, 9-15.
- Rituraj, R., Várkonyi, D.T., Mosavi, A., Pap, J., Várkonyi-Kóczy, A.R., & Mako, C. (2024). Machine Learning in Smart Grids. *Pro Publico Bono – Magyar Közigazgatás*.
- Sambo, A.S. (2016). ENHANCING RENEWABLE ENERGY ACCESS FOR SUSTAINABLE SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA.
- Schmalensee, R. (2009). Renewable Electricity Generation in the United States.
- Yao, Z., Lum, Y., Johnston, A.K., Mejia-Mendoza, L.M., Zhou, X., Wen, Y., Aspuru-Guzik, A., Sargent, E.H., & Seh, Z.W. (2022). Machine learning for a sustainable energy future. *Nature Reviews. Materials*, 8, 202 - 215.