



AFRICAN YOUTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE POLICY BRIEF

A policy brief in light of COP27

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Overview

This policy brief was made in light of the upcoming COP27 to address significant themes concerning climate change and African youth engagement. Several pieces of research indicate that climate change severely threatens African youth's health and livelihoods. We find that despite the urgency of including youth in climate discussions, there are several difficulties that African youth face in getting involved. Five focus areas concerning youth engagement in climate change decision-making were identified: loss and damage finance, gender, adaptation and agriculture, biodiversity, and renewable energy. Reasons for why these focus areas are of concern for African youth are elaborated on, followed by recommendations concerning these issues.

The latter portion of the policy brief summarises four challenges that African youth face regarding participation in climate matters: Political inclusion on the local and global stage, access to training opportunities, deterrents to participation in strikes and protests, and integration of climate change education. Details on these challenges and why they exist are given, followed by recommendations concerning these problems that African youth face.

Introduction and Summary

Despite its development since the industrial revolution, climate change has increasingly become a point of contention in recent decades. It is recognized by professionals worldwide as a serious threat to humanity and ecosystems. Excessive outputs of greenhouse gases and other pollutants are set to continue raising global temperatures, resulting in dramatic weather patterns, rising sea levels, and changes in precipitation worldwide. At the same time, countries with widespread poverty will be limited in their ability to adapt (Beukes, 2021).

Youth and children, in particular, are among the population that will be most affected by climate change due to health complications that may arise from a lack of safe drinking water, increased frequency of floods and droughts, extreme heat, and infections that originate from bacteria. On top of these direct effects, there is also the threat of social problems that may arise during the resulting unrest and conflict over remaining natural resources, such as water and arable land. Climate change is of the most significant concern for youth since it is their future at risk, but some experts argue that the youth are also "crucial stakeholders" in the movement for climate change action (Beukes, 2021).

At COP26, thousands of young people from all over the world submitted The Global Youth Statement, an open letter to world leaders calling for action. The Youth Policy Teams pooled young people's and professionals' knowledge from environmentalism and education to identify the most urgent steps needed to address the global climate issue. The youth called on world leaders in 15 different subject areas to finally give the essential policy framework at COP26 to ensure we win the fight for 1.5°C. The Youth Cafe is honoured to have contributed to the Global Youth Statement released at COP26.

Young people are well-positioned to build support for the health and well-being of current and future generations. Even though climate change and its effects on humanity and ecology are already having serious consequences, many decision-makers, from ordinary customers to government officials, are not doing enough to address the issue.

The recent IPCC report on "Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability" shows that the climate catastrophe has already resulted in significant damages and permanent losses to both people and the earth. Between 3.3 and 3.6 billion people currently reside in locations highly affected by climate change, thwarting attempts to reduce vulnerability and increase resilience. Furthermore, climate change has caused humanitarian situations to worsen, especially in the developing nations of the Global South. Without immediate action to keep warming below 1.5 degrees Celsius, adaptation would be impossible in many parts of the world, and both economic and non-economic loss and harm will increase dramatically, especially for the most vulnerable people living on the front lines of climate change. Our generation of young people is greatly concerned about the planet's future in light of these gloomy forecasts.

Focus Areas for Youth Engagement in Climate Change Decision Making in Light Of COP 27's Major themes.

(I) Loss and Damage Finance

Loss and Damage were added to the Paris Agreement as a distinct article at COP 21 in 2015. Loss and Damage refer to the harmful effects of climate change that cannot be mitigated through adaptation measures. As a result of many climate-related dangers, the most vulnerable people (who are usually found in Africa) are experiencing a wide range of loss and damage, both economic, social and environmental. Cyclones, floods, droughts and other forms of extreme weather patterns are responsible for destruction of property and loss of livestock, and crops. These climate-change-related disasters cause deaths, ruin economies, and displace communities.

70% of the population of Sub-Saharan Africa is younger than 30 years, making it the most youthful region in the world. Despite contributing the least to the problem, Africa is one of the continents most at risk from the effects of climate change. The inescapable effects of climate change on African countries have already resulted in significant losses and damages. These Losses and damages usually affect the African Youths, who comprise more than two-thirds of the African population. The African youth are already grappling with livelihood losses due to climate change. Deserts are expanding, rivers are getting dry, and biodiversity is being lost at an alarming rate. These youths require immediate financial interventions to aid in their recovery, safeguard their rights and plan for future development and livelihood losses.

Disagreements regarding liability and compensation have delayed efforts to mobilise Loss and Damage Finance for affected countries. The Warsaw Mechanism Executive Committee can launch an investigation into the best short-term avenues for Loss and Damage financing. Loss and damage mechanisms at the national level should be established to conduct comprehensive needs assessments inside countries, guarantee that financial flows adhere to principles of country ownership transparency and that funds reach the most vulnerable populations.



Figure 1: Deceased animals due to drought in Northern Kenya

(II) Gender

Gender and climate crisis nexus are central topics in climate negotiations because climate change affects men and women differently. The socially ascribed roles to men and women differ in most cultures, implying that climate change affects men and women differently. In rural African communities, boys have ascribed roles such as herding while women are designated tasks like fetching water and performing domestic work. Because boys mostly do herding in most African rural communities, climate change has been causing a scarcity of pastures in many areas, which means that boys and men have to walk for several kilometres in search of pasture. African women and girls, on the other hand, are compelled to trek for many kilometres in search of water.

Human rights, especially women's rights, are negatively impacted by loss and damage, especially in fragile developing countries (Women and Gender Constituency, 2019). In fragile nations, male citizens typically bear a disproportionate burden of disaster-related deaths, injuries, and property destruction. Compared to men, women typically have less freedom of movement and less influence in decision-making settings (Shahid, 2018). In addition, women are typically excluded from decision-making processes regarding climate change. They have less access to the information and skills necessary to mitigate the risks of loss and harm. When household income drops due to climate change, families may opt not to send their daughters to school or may pressure their daughters into early marriage, both of which exacerbate gender inequality (CARE, 2020).



Figure 2: Children from West Pokot carrying water (source: World vision, 2015)

(III) Adaptation and Agriculture

The World Bank argues that the fastest way to stimulate economic growth and create jobs for young people on the African continent is to invest in agriculture, which is already the continent's largest employer. However, climate change is projected to complicate efforts to strengthen Africa's agricultural sector. Due to increasingly unpredictable weather, the yields of crops and livestock are becoming progressively unstable. The Food and Agriculture Organization predicted that extreme events' frequency and/or intensity would increase when temperatures rise, and rainfall patterns change even further. Temperature ranges, precipitation, wind speed and direction, and other climatic factors play a significant role in the success of agricultural endeavours. Global agricultural output could drop by as much as 17% by 2050 if climate change projections prove accurate. A severe impact on the agricultural sector could threaten to leave many of today's youth without reliable employment in the near future, which would bring a domino effect of compounding issues.

The U.S. and European Union's approaches to addressing climate change have offered only vague guarantees of financial support for African adaptation efforts. According to the UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), funding to carry out country-level adaptation strategies is still on the way. The sluggish availability of financing for adaptation programs is quite concerning because rich countries pay for the large bulk of climate change actions. Unfortunately, the Kyoto protocol's emphasis on the notion of common but differentiated duties and respective capabilities has not always been applied to the funding of Africa's climate change programs.

The European Union (EU) has launched the Advancing Capacity to Support Climate Change Adaptation project (ACCCA) to foster collaboration between African stakeholders and scientific communities to pinpoint adaptation initiatives that can lessen the continent's susceptibility to climate change. Scaling up such programs could prove to be a substantial contribution in boosting adaptation efforts on a regional level, which is particularly important given the low capacity of African research and development organizations in expediting responses to climate change.

(IV) Biodiversity

The United Nations has designated 2021-2030 as the decade for ecosystem restoration. A shared objective of the decade is to avoid, stop, and reverse the global ecosystems' degrading trends. The designation came as a result of massive biodiversity losses that have occurred in the past centuries due to industrialization, intensive agriculture and urbanization. There is substantial evidence from research that biodiversity is impacted by climate change. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment predicts that by the end of the 21st century, climate change will be one of the most important drivers of biodiversity loss. Many species have already begun adapting to climate change by moving to new areas, altering their reproductive cycles, or developing entirely new phenotypes. Because of their importance in the global carbon cycle and in responding to climate change, ecosystems play a central role in the overall aims of the Convention on Biological Diversity and the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. Ecosystems also provide a wide range of ecosystem services that are necessary for human well-being.

The youth population is a powerful force for biodiversity restoration. They promote active consumerism and are dynamic, technologically savvy, ever-evolving, problem-solving, and oriented people. Their deep understanding of sustainability, which promotes lowering impacts and raising living standards in all fields, is crucial for the future. In order to ensure biodiversity's continued importance to the provisioning, regulating, cultural, and supporting functions of ecosystems, it must be understood how these services relate to sustainability. Therefore, it is essential that young people understand the importance of biodiversity to human survival. Whereas younger youth have the power to vote on potential policy changes, older youth hold positions of influence in government and industry and can shape strategic directions. Recognising this sizable population segment requires policymakers to cater to their needs and interests. The youth should be taught to be good environmental stewards, given the tools they need for a lifetime of environmental management, and acknowledge the agency to make environmental concerns an integral part of everything they do. Our descendants will have a tough time in a world where resources are depleted and where living conditions are depressing due to environmental vdegradation from a culture defined by consumption and resource-intensive behaviour.

The best way to get young people to become conservation advocates is to help them make the most of their resources by expanding their understanding, motivation, and application of conservation strategies. It's also crucial to organize a sizable number of engaged and motivated young people into conservation advocacy networks. To unify the youth voice advocating for conservation-centred policies, we must simultaneously strengthen their connections to national, pan-African, and global networks and coalitions.

In addition to promoting systemic changes that will increase young people's agency as decision-makers, we must also cultivate individuals by providing the knowledge and skills that motivate conservation-minded behaviour. When it comes to advancing the conservation agenda, COP27 should acknowledge that young people are not only recipients of conservation interventions but also as powerful mutual partners. Keeping in mind that young people in Africa have a distinct perspective to share, institutions should keep strengthening youth-led community-based organizations and youth-led networks.

(V) Renewable Energy

The youth have tremendous unrealized potential in the energy transition. They are well-positioned to play a significant role in the energy transition by contributing innovative solutions and pursuing jobs focusing on decarbonising the industry. Helping young people become change agents is essential if SDG 7 is to be realised, which calls for universal access to clean, reliable, and cheap energy. Many in positions of authority fail to recognise the value of today's youngsters in the movement toward renewable energy sources. Young leaders are eager for policymakers to learn this. More than 42 million new jobs might be generated by the renewable energy sector by 2050, according to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Therefore, the system should train the next generation of workers to make a fair transition to clean energy. UNDP's engagement with young people revealed a dearth of entrance points for young people into professions in renewable energy. In contrast, fossil fuel businesses often offer attractive incentives, such as college tuition. Young individuals from marginalised groups, such as women, rural residents, distant places, and those without a high school diploma, would benefit significantly from the increased mentoring and networking opportunities the energy industry can provide throughout their professional development.

By successfully taking on and defeating large fossil fuel corporations, young climate activists have sent a strong message that businesses will be held accountable for their effects on society and the environment. There is increasing demand for businesses to be more environmentally responsible. There is a massive opportunity for young people to link ideas and agitate for change by spreading messages worldwide in a couple of minutes, especially now that the internet has made the globe into a village.



Figure 3: Solar Panel energy

Recommendations for Youth Engagement focus areas in Climate Change decision-making

(I) loss and damage finance

Financial compensation should not come in the form of loans that further hinder the development of climate-affected countries. Additionally, loss and damage should be integrated into global and national policy and practice; the emphasis should be put on vulnerable people, communities, developing countries, and ecosystems. Furthermore, countries should be better equipped to prevent, reduce, and address loss and damage and have effective processes in place to give effective action and support.

(II) Gender

Approaches to climate change mitigation should take precautions regarding context-specific gender roles within particular cultures. Due to the threat of climate change on women within impoverished rural communities, mitigation actions are also in the best interest of those looking to support the fifth UN sustainable development goal: to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

(III) Adaptation and agriculture

Agriculture is Africa's largest employment sector, which is considerably put at risk by the consequences of climate change. While various climate change mitigation measures need to be implemented to protect this vital industry, efforts should also be made to adapt and prepare the youth population. The current outlook for youth employment is a monoculture of sorts. Thus, diversification of employment sectors needs to take place in the form of training for alternative livelihoods in order to be prepared for changes when they occur.

(IV) Biodiversity

On top of general global initiatives to fight greenhouse gas emissions, facilitating youth involvement and training in environmental conservation practices can help ensure that biodiversity is protected for future generations. At the same time, governments and corporations must do their part in discouraging the excessive clearing and pollution of vital ecosystems, such as forests, rivers, and lakes.

At the centre of this issue is the worldwide habit of overconsumption, which is a large product of advertising culture within the global north. If the youth can win the cultural battle against consumerism, there will be no need for excessive industry worldwide.

(V) Renewable energy

Developed and developing nations must invest in low-carbon energy production methods to ensure a sustainable future. Additionally, Target setting is an essential first step towards higher renewables deployment. How the targets are to be achieved needs to be set in strategies and action plans. These should provide a roadmap for implementation based on assessing resources and acknowledging the country's current technology development and deployment status. These plans should be regularly updated

Challenges facing African Youth Participation in Climate Matters

African youth are among those who face the most significant risks resulting from climate change. Yet, those who wish to get involved in climate change action face several institutional, structural, and financial obstacles that can make a difference (Mugeere et al. 2021). Climate activism-inclined African youth face challenges with:

(I) Political inclusion on the local and global stage

(II) Access to training opportunities

(III) Deterrents to participation in strikes and protests

(IV) Integration of climate change education

(I) Political inclusion on the local and global stage

While there are several approaches to addressing climate change action, the most commonly proposed solution is to democratically vote for officials who are concerned with climate change action, or convince the ruling bodies that it is an issue. The problem for African youth in this regard is that many are not yet of legal voting age and, thus, are not fully represented politically. As a result, many African youths have voiced their concerns in other fashions, such as petitions and information movements across social media. Efforts by youth to influence government policy within Africa have varied in success but face a unique dilemma even when successful.

African countries are in a situation where climate change puts them at the most significant risk, yet the continent has the lowest per capita yields of greenhouse gas emissions. Because of this, youth who have the opportunity to make a difference at a local level may feel discouraged that the most influential changes must come from other regions of the world.

(II) Access to training opportunities

Youth who are inclined to get involved with climate change may have difficulties in accessing relevant training opportunities. Many ideas may require using specific resources and technologies, which can be challenging to obtain given that many young people can face discrimination, especially considering gender disparities and poverty (Mugeere et al. 2021). Likewise, in-person training opportunities related to climate change can be scarce, and many youths may simply be situated too far away for repeat in-person attendance to be viable.

Additionally, many African youths reside within settlements which can vary in access to internet services. In regards to education and development, there has been a push for massive open online courses (MOOCs) that are free and accessible internationally, but this requires a stable internet connection in combination with set meeting times that may not work for the schedules and time zones of those meant to attend (Van Houweling, 2021).

Another issue with certain online courses is that many require full competency in a select few languages, such as English. At the same time, there are also concerns that learners do not benefit as much as they would from an in-person setting. For example, widely available online courses that address environmental issues may be euro-centric in their subject matter and be less relevant to issues concerning overseas students.

(III) Deterrents to participation in strikes and protests

Several prolific young climate activists have gotten their start by organising peaceful strikes or protests within their own respective countries, such as the Fridays For Future movement that was started in 2018 by Swedish activist Greta Thunberg. Thunberg was later joined by South African climate activist Ayakha Melithafa, among many others, who joined teens worldwide as youth representatives on the global stage. She contributed to a petition submitted to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child and joined other activists to make her voice heard at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. (Beukes, 2021).

Young women have been described as being key to bringing this global effort to Uganda and South Africa, but note that not all young people have such an opportunity. The personal risks of holding strikes vary greatly from one region to another, as 20 young activists in Uganda were arrested in 2020 during a demonstration to protect the Bugoma Forest from logging (Mugeere et al. 2021).

(IV) Integration of climate change education

Youth involvement in climate change matters is the most effective with collaboration amongst like-minded individuals, who can work together to solve issues. Those who are forced to approach such issues alone naturally make much slower progress in achieving their goals.

The number of youths involved in climate change action depends heavily on how engaged they are in the subject matter. Knowledge is key to fostering interest and concern in climate change, yet education on the matter may vary between younger African populations. In order to mount an effective response, a common understanding of the crisis is needed amongst those who are to inherit this uncertain future.

An extensive survey conducted by The Royal Institute of International Affairs in 2019 surveyed people aged 18-35 years old, across 13 African countries. The findings suggested that just 10% of respondents saw climate change as an important issue, yet recent studies amongst youth populations yield alternative findings. A survey of secondary school learners within South Africa found that there was greater acknowledgement of its occurrence, but despite 68.7% agreeing that climate change is a serious issue, only 59.7% agreed that human activity is responsible (Kutywayo et al., 2022).

In summary, there remains a sizable portion of secondary students that still do not acknowledge climate change as a serious issue, and even more who do not recognize human involvement and other intricacies. This can cause a disconnect between communities, and make involvement more difficult for those who wish to participate in climate action.

In contrast, a separate survey amongst a diverse population of African university students abroad found that the topic was generally familiar, yet still issues remained, as not as many linked the issue of global warming with problems such as poverty.

Additionally, attitude and commitment among the educated students remained average, but many agreed that solutions must come from participation at both a personal and governmental level (Oumarou & HongXia, 2022). Hence, experts generally agree that educating the population on climate change is vital in ensuring that activities that contribute to climate change are dealt with.

Recommendations for challenges in youth climate change participation

(I) Political inclusion

Approaches to political inclusion on a local level vary greatly depending on regional contexts. Regardless of location, recognising youth as important stakeholders and facilitating their participation should be a priority. Simultaneously, governments should be aware of the mutually beneficial nature of youth inclusion, as inclusivity in decision-making can easily aid in garnering political favour and trust (Benkenstein et al., 2020).

Given that the futures and livelihoods of African youth are those most at stake, there needs to be a transition towards including youth representatives in all forms of discussions relating to climate change policy around the world. International discussions relating to climate change policy, such as the Conference of Parties, should not just be open to including youth voices, but also actively seek out qualified youth representatives from around the world. Costs associated with involvement such as flights or accommodation can act as roadblocks to those coming from impoverished backgrounds, and should ideally be covered via sponsorship.

(II) Access to training opportunities

Much like scholarships that exist for medical students, governments and NGOs should ensure that financial aid or subsidies exist for those who wish to get involved in climate change action. Whether directly or through relevant organisations, allowing talented youths to get involved in training opportunities related to climate change action can be seen as an investment in the world's future.

Some general improvements to infrastructure also come as a solution to various issues relating to access training. For example, a reliable and affordable internet connection would come as an asset to many, in addition to robust public transport that can aid in helping youths attend the in-person training.

(III) Deterrents to participation in strikes and protests

Those who have the right to peacefully voice their concerns through protests and/or strikes should be mindful that they do not lose that right. Unfortunately, being able to do so is a privilege in many parts of the world, but it is important to remember that there are many other ways to raise awareness of an idea or problem.

Movements gain momentum through numbers, so it follows that youth activists must seek collaboration with schools, unions, and other organisations. Many youths today have access to technology, which has brought a new age of information and communication. Social media can help spread ideas of change, which can come from organising community events and fundraisers to bring awareness to climate demands and goals.

(IV) Access to climate change education

Experts note that raising knowledge levels of climate change amongst youth influences concerns and understandings surrounding it. While changes can come from personal adjustments, many believe that support must come from governments through public service information and the inclusion of relevant information within school curriculums. Additionally, health and safety information regarding the impacts of climate change should be widely available, even to remote communities. This can be done via awareness-raising and changing behavioural campaigns that integrate climate change education in and outside schools.

Conclusion

The youth are not only the victims of climate change but are also an important resource when it comes to the fight for climate justice. Global climate movements like Fridays For Future are youth-led initiatives that advocate for climate justice globally. The youth promote active consumerism and are dynamic, technologically savvy, ever-evolving, and problem-solving-oriented people. Recognizing this sizable population segment requires policymakers (COP27) to cater to their needs and interests. The youth should be given the tools the resources need for a lifetime of environmental management, and acknowledge the agency to make environmental concerns an integral part of everything they do. Our descendants will have a tough time in a world where resources are depleted and where living conditions are depressing due to environmental degradation from a culture defined by consumption and resource-intensive behaviour.

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The Youth Cafe is a multi-award winning, pan-african, youth organization that strives to enrich the lives of young people by modelling and advancing youth-led and rights-based approaches to foster young people's civic efficacy, community resilience, sustainable development, and equitable society, as well as proposing innovative solutions, driving social progress, and inspiring transformative change by utilizing innovative research policy and advocacy actions.

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