



Sustainability
Summit
2025

Sustainability Summit 2025

Policy Brief

Advancing Climate Justice to Build Resilient Communities



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Foreword

Climate change is no longer a distant environmental concern; it is a lived reality that is reshaping livelihoods, governance systems, and social norms across Africa. Its effects are uneven, cutting deepest where structural inequalities already exist. Women, young people, persons with disabilities, and rural communities are disproportionately affected. This is not because they are inherently vulnerable, but because their rights, knowledge, and contributions remain insufficiently recognized and embedded in policy design and implementation.

As governments and institutions accelerate climate action, a growing consensus is emerging that technical solutions alone cannot deliver resilience. Effective climate strategies must interrogate the social, legal, and economic conditions that determine who adapts, who participates, and who benefits. This policy brief emerges from that recognition. It reflects a collective reflection on how climate adaptation, disaster response, digital innovation, and environmental governance can be strengthened when viewed through the lens of gender equality and social justice.

The insights captured here are informed by practitioners, researchers, and innovators working at the intersection of climate governance, law, public health, and technology across the African continent. Their experiences reveal that climate impacts do not occur in isolation; they intersect with land rights, mobility, reproductive health, access to finance, and control over digital tools. Addressing these linkages requires rethinking how climate action is conceived, funded, implemented, and evaluated.

This policy brief, therefore, offers more than a diagnosis of gaps: it provides clear, actionable recommendations grounded in real-world practice. It demonstrates that when climate policies are inclusive, resilience becomes attainable rather than aspirational.

We are confident that the insights advanced in these pages will support policymakers, development actors, and community leaders in charting a pathway where climate action is not only effective but also equitable. The future of climate resilience depends not on whether we act, but on whom our actions are designed to serve.

The second edition of the Sustainability Summit was made possible through strong cross-regional collaboration. Together with ALN Kenya as co-convener, partners from Nigeria, Kenya, and Qatar shaped impactful discussions that continue to guide our work on the ground. We sincerely thank GSMA, Icelis Global, and Green Legacy for their essential support and commitment.

Samuel Ngoga, Director of Center for Climate Justice, Certa Foundation

Introduction

Building on the inaugural 2024 Sustainability Summit on Climate Resilience and Preparedness held in Kigali, Rwanda, the 2025 edition, convened on 6 October in Kenya deepened the continental conversation on climate justice, policy transformation, effective inclusion and representation, and Africa's role in shaping a sustainable future. Co-convened in Nairobi, Kenya by the Center for Climate Justice at Certa Foundation, Rwanda and ALN Kenya, the Summit brought together policymakers, legal practitioners, development agencies, private-sector innovators, researchers, students, and grassroots actors, all sharing a conviction: Africa's climate trajectory must be defined by its people, grounded in its realities, and guided by principles of equity, dignity, and accountability.

Across keynote interventions, panel discussions, and community showcases, the Summit reframed climate change as a governance, socio-economic, and justice imperative, rather than a purely environmental issue. Discussions demonstrated that Africa's sustainability transition is not merely contingent upon technology or finance; it hinges on centering human rights, local leadership, and knowledge systems that reflect the continent's cultural, ecological, and economic contexts.

The Summit highlighted a growing recognition that climate justice is not merely aspirational rhetoric, but a practical doctrine that shapes how policies are drafted, funds are allocated, partnerships are forged, and communities are empowered. Whether through youth-led innovation, circular economy models, renewable energy pathways, or rights-based governance, participants agreed that Africa has both the imperative and the capacity to lead a new global paradigm, one that prioritizes fairness, inclusivity, and shared prosperity.

Problem Statement

While the continent's commitment to climate action has grown stronger, participants at the Summit agreed that Africa continues to face complex, interrelated challenges that hinder the realization of its sustainable and inclusive future. These challenges are not confined to the environment alone but extend into governance, finance, education, and social inclusion. They reflect structural barriers that, if left unaddressed, risk widening inequalities and leaving vulnerable populations further behind.

1. Climate Justice as a Human-Centered Imperative

While climate change is often framed in scientific terms, such as temperature increases, rainfall variability, and emissions trajectories, its most profound effects in Africa are social. They manifest in food insecurity, disrupted livelihoods, increased health burdens, displacement, and intergenerational poverty. The Summit underscored that the climate crisis in Africa is deeply human. Climate justice, therefore, requires more than technical compliance with international agreements; it requires interventions that reflect lived realities and prioritise local agency, dignity, and accessibility. In addition, it is imperative to advocate for systemic reform that ensures every policy, every innovation, and every investment uplifts communities rather than marginalizing them. Summit deliberations confirmed that climate policy remains disconnected from the people it aims to serve, rendering technical terminology inaccessible and limiting public engagement.

2. Limited Access to Climate Finance

Despite the escalating impacts of climate change, Africa receives less than 2% of global climate finance. Existing mechanisms are cumbersome, centralized, and disproportionately filtered through intermediaries, with significant resources being absorbed before they reach communities. In particular, women, youth, and grassroots innovators who are at the forefront of adaptation often face structural barriers, including collateral requirements, complex application processes, and exclusion from financing platforms. Participants emphasized that the lack of funding is not merely a funding gap, but a structural design flaw that prioritizes presentation capacity over practical solutions.

3. Weak Policy Implementation and Institutional Fragmentation

Although many African states have adopted climate policies, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), and adaptation plans, implementation remains inconsistent. Overlapping mandates, limited technical capacity, and budgetary constraints weaken enforcement. The region's challenge is not the absence of policy frameworks but their operationalisation. Without coordinated mandates, predictable resources, and accountable institutions, policy instruments cannot be effectively translated into measurable outcomes.

4. Gender Inequality and Exclusion from Decision-Making

Women play central roles in agriculture and natural resource management, yet they remain structurally excluded from climate leadership and benefit-sharing arrangements. Constraints include discriminatory land tenure systems in many African countries, high licensing costs, inadequate legal protections, and social norms that restrict effective representation and participation. This exclusion undermines adaptation efforts, perpetuates vulnerability, and weakens the continent's collective capacity to implement gender-responsive climate solutions.

5. Marginalisation of Local and Indigenous Knowledge

Across the continent, indigenous practices, such as regenerative agriculture, circular waste economies, rainwater harvesting, and conflict-sensitive grazing systems, offer scalable models of resilience. However, national and regional climate policies rarely integrate these capabilities, favouring externally designed solutions that lack contextual legitimacy. Participants highlighted that countries that systemically embed local knowledge demonstrate greater resilience and community ownership of climate outcomes.

6. Reactive Governance and Limited Early-Action Systems

Climate responses remain predominantly reactive, activated after floods, droughts, and storms devastate infrastructure and livelihoods. The absence of early-warning systems, contingency financing, and anticipatory governance frameworks accelerates humanitarian costs and increases dependency on emergency support. This reactive posture delays innovation and prevents long-term resilience planning.

7. Disconnect Between Research, Innovation, and Policymaking

African research institutions and think tanks lack the same resources (funding, human capacity, technological support) as their counterparts elsewhere, hindering their ability to carry out the research and analysis needed to inform policy-making. Moreover, when evidence on adaptation pathways is produced by such researchers, this knowledge rarely influences policy design, budget allocations, or program implementation. Innovations emerging from informal and local economies, such as the repurposing of waste into construction materials, are often overlooked as legitimate climate solutions due to formalistic criteria that prioritize academic proof over contextual efficacy.

8. Underinvestment in Grassroots and Non-Traditional Innovation

Local climate solutions remain underfunded, fragmented, and insufficiently scaled. Financing systems prioritise high-profile enterprises over community-driven models that demonstrate cost-effective, culturally rooted impact. Participants agreed that evaluation metrics must shift from assessing “pitch readiness” to measuring relevance, replicability, and community ownership.

The challenges outlined above converge into a single structural reality: Africa possesses the ideas, human capital, and policy frameworks required for climate transformation, but lacks the governance, financing, and institutional mechanisms that enable these assets to operate at scale. Without systemic reforms rooted in justice, participation, and local leadership, the continent risks designing climate solutions that remain aspirational rather than operational.

Policy Recommendations

The Summit concluded with a unified message: ***the time has come to translate Africa’s commitments into tangible progress through inclusive, transparent, and well-resourced policy action.*** The recommendations presented reflect both the urgency of Africa’s climate reality and the optimism that the continent can lead a just transition through collaboration, education, and accountability.

At the heart of these recommendations lies the recognition that climate justice cannot be achieved through isolated initiatives. It demands coherent frameworks that combine law, finance, innovation, and social equity. Governments, businesses, and communities each hold unique responsibilities in shaping a resilient and sustainable Africa, but their success depends on shared vision and partnership. The following actions are therefore intended as a roadmap for collective impact.

For Policymakers and Government

- Governments must prioritize the implementation of existing environmental and climate laws by strengthening oversight, implementing transparent monitoring, and ensuring adequate institutional resources are allocated. Establishing or strengthening national and regional green funds will help mobilize both public and private investments toward adaptation, clean energy, and biodiversity protection, as well as enhance research to inform policymaking effectively.

- Legal and policy frameworks should embed the principles of corrective and distributive justice to ensure fair compensation for affected communities. Climate adaptation plans must explicitly recognize the inclusion of gender, youth, and people with disabilities as pillars of national resilience strategies.
- Governments should incorporate sustainability education into public programs and national curricula, in collaboration with universities and training institutions. This will foster environmental awareness and cultivate future leaders capable of managing climate challenges through evidence-based and ethical decision-making.
- To enhance equity, policy design must follow a bottom-up approach. Communities should be meaningfully involved at every stage of the policymaking process, from consultation to evaluation and implementation. Governments should create formal mechanisms for public participation, ensuring that indigenous and local perspectives shape national climate priorities.
- Climate finance should be directed toward projects that have a tangible, positive impact on the community as well as those that leverage technology and innovation to ensure transparency and scalability. Oversight mechanisms should track not only the amount disbursed but also the quality and inclusiveness of outcomes. Funding should prioritize long-term adaptation over short-term visibility, ensuring that resources strengthen livelihoods rather than create additional administrative layers.
- Governments should adopt proactive risk management frameworks, establish early warning systems, and invest in regional cooperation for joint negotiations in international climate forums. Strengthening Africa's collective bargaining power is key to ensuring equitable access to technology and finance.

For Businesses and the Private Sector

- Businesses play a transformative role in achieving climate justice. The Summit urged companies to champion sustainable growth through investment in green industries, renewable energy, and circular economies. Creating innovative financial instruments such as carbon markets, sustainability bonds, and blended finance initiatives can unlock private capital for the public good.
- Corporate leaders were called upon to align operations with regional sustainability frameworks such as the East Africa Single-Use Plastics Bill. Companies should adopt responsible production and waste management practices that minimize environmental degradation while creating green employment opportunities.
- Gender equality and youth inclusion must also become central to business sustainability. Firms should invest in women-owned and youth-led enterprises and integrate gender-sensitive financing mechanisms that remove barriers to participation. In doing so, they not only promote equity but also unlock the economic potential of the continent.

- Partnerships between corporations, universities, and local innovators can bridge the gap between research and communities of practice. Businesses should provide mentorship, seed capital, incubation, and market access for community-based innovators developing affordable climate solutions.
- The private sector should also commit to transparent carbon accounting, clear ESG reporting, and collaboration with governments to ensure that growth does not come at the expense of environmental or social integrity.

For Communities and Civil Society

- Communities are the frontline of Africa's climate response. Strengthening their agency is critical to sustaining long-term adaptation. The Summit highlighted models such as Farmer Managed Natural Regeneration, which demonstrate how local stewardship can restore degraded landscapes and revive livelihoods.
- Civil society organizations should continue to facilitate community participation in policy processes and advocate for fair distribution of climate finance. Local NGOs and community groups can serve as accountability partners, ensuring that funds reach those who need them most.
- Community-based education is equally vital. Participants recommended integrating sustainability lessons into everyday community life through school programs, faith groups, and youth clubs. Such initiatives will help embed environmental consciousness across generations.
- Youth inclusion was a recurring theme. Future summits and policymaking spaces should intentionally involve young leaders, allowing them to share perspectives and shape decisions that will define their future. Intergenerational dialogue will ensure continuity of ideas and innovation.
- Investments targeting women should be designed to deliver tangible and lasting benefits by first addressing the structural barriers that limit women's access to finance. As climate change intensifies existing vulnerabilities, women are disproportionately affected due to intersecting social and economic challenges. Therefore, any climate or development solution that overlooks factors such as gender-based violence, inadequate access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), and unequal employment opportunities, among others, cannot be considered sustainable. A holistic, gender-responsive approach that integrates financial inclusion with broader social protections is essential to ensure meaningful and equitable outcomes for women.
- Communities should also preserve and promote indigenous knowledge systems that have sustained ecosystems for centuries. Collaboration among elders, youth, and technical experts can blend traditional and scientific approaches to create adaptive solutions.
- Cross-border community partnerships should be strengthened to enable knowledge exchange and mutual support. Initiatives such as the collaboration between Kenyan and Zimbabwean women in conservation exemplify how regional solidarity can enhance resilience.

Conclusion

The Sustainability Summit 2025 reaffirmed Africa's unwavering commitment to pursuing climate justice, not as a distant aspiration, but as an immediate necessity. It reminded stakeholders that sustainable development is inextricably linked to fairness, participation, and accountability. Africa's climate future will be defined not by vulnerability but by its ability to transform challenges into innovation and cooperation.

The path ahead demands courage, consistency, and inclusion. Governments must enforce laws and invest in their people; businesses must align their profits with purpose; and communities must continue to lead with knowledge, resilience, and unity. By embedding justice in every climate action, Africa can build a future where no one is left behind and where sustainability becomes the measure of true prosperity.