

THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE OF YOUTH ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN SOUTHERN AFRICA 2024



THE SOUTHERN AFRICA YOUTH CLIMATE POSITION PAPER

Theme:
Shaping financial climate resilience for child and youth led adaptation and
Mitigation

Foreword

We, the children and youth of Southern Africa, representing our diverse and intersectional identities, convened in Lusaka, Zambia from 24 to 26 September 2024 at the Regional Conference of Youth (RCOY). During this pivotal meeting, we demanded urgent climate action and addressed the pressing climate change issues. Representing the majority of the countries in our region, we recognize both the immense challenges posed by climate change and the unique opportunities our demography provides.

Southern Africa is at the forefront of climate vulnerability, and we reinforce our determination to lead in the transition to a sustainable, green, and just society. As young people, we stand positioned as key drivers of change and essential stakeholders in building climate resilience in the region and the globe as a whole. Our region's geographical diversity, economic dependency on climate-sensitive sectors, and socio-economic challenges amplify the effects of climate-related shocks. As the climate continues to change, Southern African countries are already experiencing increasing temperatures, prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, and rising sea levels. These phenomena have threatened and continue to threaten food security, water availability, public health, and economic stability, exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

We recognize the severe impacts of climate change across our region. These disruptions affect essential services such as health, education, water and sanitation, and social protection leaving the majority of our population vulnerable to adapt to the negative effects of climate change. Environmental crises have continued to negatively impact our well-being as young people and many other vulnerable populations within our countries, leading to displacement, loss of livelihoods, and even loss of life due to climate induced disasters.

The impact of climate change on youth and children is particularly devastating. Despite being one of the groups most affected, we continue to face barriers in contributing to climate action. These obstacles include limited access to resources, structural barriers that hinder the scalability of our innovative solutions, and a lack of an enabling environment for adolescent and youth engagement in climate justice efforts.

However, despite these challenges, we wish to reiterate that Southern Africa is a youthful region, presenting a powerful opportunity. We as Youth, are well-positioned to drive the transition to a Green Economy, harnessing our innovation potential, embracing cutting-edge technologies, and bringing fresh perspectives to old challenges.

United by our shared experiences and challenges, we come together under the banner of the RCOY to present this declaration. It underscores the critical role of young people in driving climate action and addressing the most pressing issues across various thematic areas. Considering the heightened risks we face due to the impacts of climate change, such as droughts, floods, rising temperatures, and environmental degradation, we emphasize the need for urgent action. These challenges hinder socio-economic development and disproportionately affect us and the most vulnerable, including children and marginalized communities. Together, we stand committed to leading the charge towards a sustainable and resilient future for Southern Africa.

Acknowledgement

We would like to express our heartfelt gratitude to all the young leaders, activists, and organizations across Africa who have contributed their insights and experiences to this statement. Your commitment to climate action and sustainable development is inspiring and vital for our collective success.

We extend our appreciation to the Government of the Republic of Zambia through the Ministry of Green Economy and Environment as well as the following entities for their support and collaboration:

- ❖ The United Nations Family in Zambia through UNICEF Zambia and UNDP Zambia as well as other UN Agencies that provided technical support such as International Organization for Migration (IOM) as well as Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and UNICEF Mozambique,
- ❖ The European Union through COMESA.
- ❖ The Information and Communications University Television (ICU TV).
- ❖ The Civil Society Organizations – ActionAid-Global Platform Zambia, the consortium of Voices for Just Climate Action – (World Wildlife Fund (WWF), HIVOS and SSN).
- ❖ To the organizers of the RCOY Southern Africa 2024: The Zambia Climate Change Youth Task Force consisting of - Youth Projects Development Platform (YPDP), The United Nations Youth Association of Zambia (YUNA ZAMBIA), Young Emerging Farmers Initiative (YEFI), Rethink Youth Platform (RYP), Centre For Climate Change Action and Advocacy (CCCAA-ZAMBIA), Agents of Change Foundation (ACF), and COP Youth Task Force Zambia (CYZ).
- ❖ The Co-Organizers from other countries - Youth 4CHAN Namibia, All for Climate Action Zimbabwe, Youth Organization Malawi, and Hlumisa (Eswatini)
- ❖ The umbrella, **YOUNGO**, the official UNFCCC youth and children constituency for providing technical support as well as a platform for young people to engagement hold leaders accountable while they take a center stage as key partners and stakeholders in the agenda for just climate Action.

We are especially grateful to the technical team for their invaluable leadership and commitment throughout this process in ensuring that the voices of young people are captured as well as young people from the Southern Region of Africa for their meaningful contribution both through virtual consultations as well as in person during the conference. Their passion, resilience and commitment despite the climate crisis, really inspire us to shape the future we want to see and live in.

Special thanks to:

Technical Team: Reuben Sapetulu, Mutetelenu Kalama, Patrick Mweetwa, Blutus Mbambi, Richard Kachungu, Esnart Njobvu, Yande Banda, and Nawa Joe Silishebo.

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List of Acronyms

RCOY - Regional Conference of Youth

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund

UNDP - United Nations Development Programme

IOM - International Organization for Migration

FAO - Food and Agriculture Organization

COMESA - Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa

ICU TV - Information and Communications University Television

ACF - Agents of Change Foundation

YEFI - Young Emerging Farmers Initiative

RYP - Rethink Youth Platform

CCCAA - Centre for Climate Change Action and Advocacy

YPDP - Youth Projects Development Platform

CYZ - COP Youth Task Force Zambia

YOUNGO - Youth NGO, official UNFCCC youth constituency

UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

SADC - Southern African Development Community

NDC - Nationally Determined Contributions

NAPs - National Adaptation Plans

NBS - Nature-Based Solutions

Introduction

At the 2024 Regional Conference of Youth (RCOY) for Southern Africa in Lusaka, Zambia, children and youth from across Southern Africa gathered to demand urgent action on climate change, with a particular focus on *financial climate resilience for child and youth-led adaptation*. Representing a region severely impacted by climate change, these youth emphasized the critical need for resilient financial systems to support adaptation efforts, especially as the region faces increasing droughts, floods, and other climate-induced disasters. Southern African youth recognize their unique role as key drivers of climate action and highlighted the opportunities presented by their demographic to lead the transition to a green, just, and sustainable future.

Southern Africa is acutely vulnerable to climate change due to its socio-economic challenges, dependence on climate-sensitive sectors, and underdeveloped infrastructure. The costs of climate adaptation and mitigation are substantial, and financing gaps leave the region ill-prepared to address the growing threats. As young people, we recognize the importance of financial resilience, the ability to withstand and recover from climate-related financial shocks as essential for securing our future. We acknowledge that our region lacks sufficient access to climate finance, particularly for youth-led initiatives, and that more needs to be done to ensure young people can contribute effectively to climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

The climate action gap in Southern Africa is largely driven by inadequate funding, weak policy enforcement, and limited infrastructure to combat climate change effectively. Despite the region being highly vulnerable to extreme weather events, resource scarcity, and economic fragility, progress toward climate resilience remains slow. Many governments face competing priorities, and climate adaptation efforts are often underfunded or sidelined, leaving communities, particularly youth, vulnerable to climate-induced displacement, poverty, and food insecurity. *Article 9* of the Paris Agreement obligates developed countries to provide financial resources to developing countries, with a focus on vulnerable populations, including youth, for both mitigation and adaptation projects

Youth in the region continue to play a crucial role in closing this gap by driving innovative solutions, advocating for stronger climate policies, and leading grassroots adaptation initiatives. With over 70% of the population under the age of 30, young people are not only the most affected by climate inaction but also the most motivated to push for change. Youth-led movements, entrepreneurship in renewable energy, and climate advocacy have been established in various countries. The youth now seek to hold government's accountable, securing climate finance, and ensuring that Southern Africa transitions to a resilient, low-carbon future.

Preamble

To the Parties and the Secretariat of the UNFCCC, The Regional Southern Africa Youth Statement represents the collective voice of children and youth in the United Nations Climate Change process. This year's document speaks directly to the negotiation rooms at COY19 AND COP29, aligning with the recently published provisional agendas.

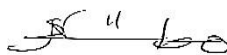
From the local stage of more than 12 countries to the regional level, more than 1000 children and youth have volunteered more than 20 hours to create this statement. We thereby push for our demands to be delivered at COP 29, encouraging policies to be more ambitious and urgently address the climate crisis.

The theme of “*Shaping Financial Climate Resilience for Child and Youth-led Adaptation*” calls for attention to the urgent need to empower young people with the financial tools and resources required to adapt to climate change and mitigate its effects. Financial resilience is critical to ensuring that children and youth, particularly those in vulnerable communities, have access to sustainable livelihoods, adaptive capacities, and the opportunity to thrive in a changing world.

In an era where climate finance remains largely inaccessible to those who need it most, this report reflects the collective voices of youth who convened at the Southern African Regional Conference of Youth (RCOY) from 24th – 26th September 2024 at Mulungushi International Conference Center in Lusaka, Zambia, advocating for a reimagined financial system one that prioritizes the well-being of future generations, integrates climate risks into economic decision-making, and fosters equitable access to resources for adaptation and resilience.

*The Regional Youth Statement makes it clear: **Action is needed NOW!*** In a year marked by record breaking global temperatures, we continue to see procrastination in taking the urgent steps required on the ground. This year, many lives and livelihoods have already been lost, especially among those on the front lines of climate change who cannot be present in the negotiation rooms. Today, we speak on behalf of the children and youth who will inherit this crisis unless bold action is taken immediately, not by 2050, but today.

RCOY 2024 Chairperson



Nawa Joe Silishebo

Action for Climate Empowerment

At COP 22 in Marrakech, Morocco during the Education Day, guidelines were developed and launched as a joint initiative between UNFCCC and UNESCO, to respond to the urgent need for raising awareness and building capacity, particularly among young people and other vulnerable populations especially in southern Africa, that face severe effects of climate change. The Action for Climate Empowerment (ACE) framework emphasizes the importance of equipping individuals through education, public awareness initiatives, training, and fostering public participation. By enhancing climate literacy and promoting inclusive approaches, ACE aims to strengthen climate resilience, support sustainable development, and ensure that policy-making processes are participatory and representative of all community members, especially the youth and children in the region.

Countries facing heightened vulnerability to climate change show a particularly high willingness to contribute. As such, climate education and sensitization remains one of the predominant challenges that are affecting young people to fully understand the concept of climate change and fully support the fight against climate change, through other forms of support aside from monetary support.

Education is the building block of sustainable, climate safe and just futures for young people and adolescents in all their diversity and intersectional identities. We reaffirm that the knowledge and skills needed to address climate challenges and develop innovative solutions lie closely in the acceleration of climate change solutions.

Articles 4 and 6 of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), and Article 12 of the Paris Agreement, include indicators on education, as does SDG 13. Yet of the billions of dollars invested in the climate sector and secured in climate tariffs annually, there has been meager investment in global education, or education in emergencies.

We therefore;

- Call for building and strengthening the capacity of educators across different levels of education to ensure the integration of foundational knowledge and or references to climate change when carrying out lectures in their different fields. This is to ensure educators are equipped about climate change and its effects so as to be able to teach the students.
- Call for inclusion of climate change education and traditional knowledge in the educational curriculum of primary and high schools across Africa to engage and educate children on climate literacy as early as the join school. This is to instill climate action and environmental consciousness in the next generation of climate leaders.
- Call for organization of children and youth programs such as climate camps, workshops, hackathons, etc., for intensive, interactive, collaborative and practical hands-on experience for children to develop and hone their skills to create solutions to the impact of climate change across their communities and network with other young people doing the same.

- Call for designing and implementing a tailored capacity building in climate education and communication to encourage young people to utilize storytelling, social media advocacy, and intergenerational collaboration to raise awareness, mobilize support, and ensure all voices are heard in climate action efforts.

Climate Finance

Southern Africa faces significant barriers in advancing climate finance and green job creation due to lack of accessible climate financing institutions, underdeveloped carbon markets, and limited green investment opportunities. These challenges hinder the region's ability to scale sustainable projects, particularly in agriculture, and create green jobs for young people. Additionally, the region's financial systems are ill-prepared for the investments needed to tackle climate change. As southern countries are vulnerable to access international climate finance, while the underdeveloped insurance sector leaves many unprotected from climate-related disasters.

We therefore;

- Call for the establishment of the southern African regional youth accessible climate body, thereby creating transparent, user-friendly, and sustainable finance mechanisms to ensure marginalized youth can access resources for climate initiatives.
- Call for governments, international organizations, and UNFCCC Parties calling for funding programs to enhance youth skills in climate finance, project management, and green job creation, empowering them to lead sustainable development efforts.
- Demand for more collaboration between the public and private sectors to enhance the funding and implementation of climate-smart solutions, including agriculture and renewable energy projects, ensuring broad based economic benefits and sustainable growth.
- Call for Parties and private sectors to support youth driven innovations by providing financial and technical support for green businesses and projects. This includes establishing local financing models that support entrepreneurship in renewable energy, waste management, and climate-smart agriculture development.
- Demand the strengthening of accountability mechanisms within climate finance to ensure transparency in fund allocation and usage. Parties must engage youth in monitoring and evaluation processes to build trust and ensure that funding reaches the intended beneficiaries.
- Call for balanced climate finance to support resilient healthcare systems, essential for Southern Africa, which faces health crises due to climate change impacts.
- Urge financing to support Southern Africa's transition from extractive industries towards sustainable development and poverty eradication.
- Advocate for funding mechanisms to empower youth in Southern Africa to lead green entrepreneurship and climate resilience projects.
- Request dedicated climate finance for women-led community projects, crucial for addressing gendered vulnerabilities in Southern Africa.
- Demand that youth and children's perspectives be integrated into climate finance decision-making, reflecting Southern Africa's active youth advocacy.

- Seek targeted finance for youth-led projects enhancing agricultural resilience, and addressing food security issues in; Southern Africa.

Adaptation

Despite contributing less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, Africa bears the brunt of climate change. The continent's low emissions and high vulnerability to climate-induced weather events highlight the need for sustainable adaptation actions. Effective strategies are urgently needed to help Africa cope with the increasing effects of climate change.

According to the 2005 SADC report, biodiversity in Southern Africa is declining. This is largely due to habitat destruction, fragmentation and loss, mainly as a consequence of land use changes and poor land management. It is estimated that about 22.5 million ha of the regions' indigenous forests were lost during a 10 year period, 1990-2000.

We therefore;

- Call for empowerment of relevant national institutions at various levels (i.e. basin, local, national in the SADC region) on weather and climatic information gathering; strengthening of communication and information sharing among national government institutions in all relevant sectors; and strengthening the use of the SADC network on information and knowledge sharing on weather and climate information under the SADC DRR Unit.
- Demand for the establishment and/or strengthening of existing institutions to enhance the quality of observation, research and knowledge generation on weather and climatic issues.
- Call for development of adequate, accessible financial mechanisms for capacity building for children and youth inclusion in the implementation of the NAPs.
- Demand southern African countries to prioritize increased investment in National Meteorological and Hydrological Services and accelerate implementation of the Early Warning Systems.
- Call for strengthening capacity-building programs and technical assistance to provide and equip youth with the skills needed to lead adaptation efforts.

Loss and Damage

Africa continues to be the hotspot being adversely affected by climate change. According to the United Nations Economic commission for Africa (UNECA), alongside the devastating toll on human lives, the economic costs are skyrocketing across the continent, particularly in the Southern African region. The costs of climate losses and damages are estimated at USD 400 billion a year by 2030, rising to USD 1 to 1.8 trillion a year by 2050 for low income countries alone.

Additionally, recognizing that 61 million people were affected by El Nino just in 2024 across the region calls for proactive and active responses to the climate induced losses and damages. The Southern African Development Community (SADC, 2022) report showed that Loss and Damage was the key topic of climate negotiations in 2022 and securing an agreement on operational modalities for

financing will be the litmus test, not only for COP29 but for the entire global governance system on climate change. Climate Change induced losses and damages affect everyone, but not equally. In particular, children and youth living in rural communities are at risk of economic marginalization in the Global South who bear the least responsibility for greenhouse gas emissions.

However, there are severe losses and damages that are brought about due to climate change which include lack of rainfall and floods which threaten food security and migration. Due to all these effects, most families have resulted in negative coping mechanisms that include withdrawal of Children and Youth from schools, selling of livestock, and some committing suicide due to lack of coping mechanisms.

We therefore;

- Call for all parties to urgently recognize the heightened vulnerability of children, women, youth and marginalized local communities in Southern Africa, as they are most affected by climate change.
- Demand transparent reporting systems must be put in place, that is, Develop a digital platform for real-time tracking of loss and damage finance allocation and impact to promote transparency.
- Demand predictable, needs-based, and grant-based funding to effectively address the loss and damage caused by extreme weather events and slow-onset climate impacts.
- Call for all Parties to address these non-economic losses urgently and establish small grants programs specifically for local youth-led initiatives focused on addressing non-economic loss and damage which supports youth leadership.
- Call for all parties to address Non-Economic Losses, Recognize and fund initiatives that protect cultural heritage and enhance social cohesion, which are critical for community resilience.
- We urge Parties to establish small grants programs that provide resources directly to local youth-led initiatives addressing loss and damage.
- Call for all parties to support the creation of regional and national loss and damage disbursement mechanisms in Southern Africa, ensuring that resources reach the most affected communities swiftly. These mechanisms should be co-developed with local stakeholders to reflect their specific needs and challenges.

Energy

Southern Africa's current energy sources, largely reliant on fossil fuels, are causing significant environmental degradation and increasing health issues among both rural and urban populations. Renewable energy presents a viable solution to mitigate these challenges, offering sustainable, replenishable alternatives such as biogas, hydro, solar, and wind Energy. However, the region faces several policy and infrastructural gaps, particularly in Zambia, where the absence of a comprehensive renewable energy act hinders the participation of local stakeholders in energy production, distribution, and consumption. While there are some existing frameworks like the Renewable Energy Action Plan and Electricity Act, they require urgent revision to align with modern energy demands. Additionally,

energy efficiency in the region remains well-structured, but there is a need for further improvements in energy production, supply, and consumption processes to optimize resource use and lower costs.

We, therefore:

- Call for the urgent review and update of existing renewable energy policies, such as the Renewable Energy Action Plan and the Electricity Act, across Southern African countries. These policies should create a structured framework that empowers local stakeholders and facilitates the participation of communities in the renewable energy transition. Tax incentives, reduced bureaucratic hurdles, and increased access to grants or subsidies must be provided to support local communities, businesses, and entrepreneurs in energy generation and distribution.
- Demand increased availability, accessibility and affordability of renewable energy for Children and youth that largely depend on inefficient traditional forms of energy in order to enhance their socio-economic status.
- Demand the allocation of dedicated funding for youth-driven renewable energy initiatives across the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. Parties must support Children and youth through grants, Community Development Funds, and capacity-building programs aimed at fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and job creation in clean energy technologies such as solar, wind, and biogas. This will ensure that Southern Africa's youth are at the forefront of the clean energy transition, driving sustainable development.
- Strongly encourage the diversification of energy sources in Southern Africa, with greater investment in biogas, hydro, wind, and solar power. To accelerate energy access for all, we push for the development of decentralized energy distribution systems to provide clean and affordable energy to remote and rural communities, reducing dependence on large-scale, centralized fossil fuel systems that often exclude the most vulnerable populations.
- Call on Parties in the southern region of Africa to foster greater participation from the private sector and local small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) especially those by young people in renewable energy projects, reducing dependency on foreign investors as well as create green job opportunities for local industries, by leveraging local resources and encouraging value addition, leading to sustainable economic growth and enhanced energy security within Southern Africa.
- Urge Parties to initiate and scale up investments in clean energy technologies, while also supporting research and development of innovative energy solutions tailored to Southern Africa's unique needs. International cooperation is crucial in achieving climate goals and emission reductions, allowing the region to meet its sustainable energy commitments.
- Call for improved access to renewable energy by enhancing energy efficiency and adopting energy-saving practices. This will ensure access to affordable, reliable, and modern energy for all Southern African communities. Promoting the use of renewable energy sources (solar, wind, hydropower, and biomass) in key sectors such as transportation, industry, power generation, agriculture, and households will drive a transition towards more sustainable energy infrastructures

Climate Technology and Innovation.

Science, technology and innovation have the potential to accelerate the realization of children and Youth full potential in solving the climate crisis. However, Southern African children and youth are poor and very vulnerable to climate change, as they do not have access to critical life changing technologies. Several aspects limit Access to Climate Technology and Innovation in Southern Africa such as insufficient funding, weak policy frameworks, inadequate infrastructure, and a fragmented innovation ecosystem, all of which impede the effective adoption and development of climate technologies.

The climate policy initiative report (2022) indicated that, Southern Africa receives less than 2% of global climate finance, despite contributing significantly to climate mitigation and adaptation efforts, in addition to that, Only 15% of Southern African climate projects receive funding from international sources like the Green Climate Fund (GCF), while, Less than 25% of governments in the region offer tax incentives or subsidies for green technology startups (UNEP, 2022).

According to the World Bank report (2022), Southern Africa has installed only 5% of the global total renewable energy capacity, despite high potential for solar and wind (IRENA, 2023). In addition, the Average internet penetration in Southern Africa stands at 28%, limiting access to digital climate technologies (World Bank, 2023). Approximately 30% of the population in Southern Africa lacks access to reliable electricity, hindering the deployment of advanced climate technologies (IEA, 2022). There are fewer than 20 dedicated climate innovation hubs across the entire Southern African region.

We therefore;

- Call for parties in the Southern African Region to create an enabling environment for technological development and appreciate and support efforts and actualize technologies Children and Youth bring on board.
- Call for parties in the Southern African Region to conduct national-level operational research and invest in robust national database systems to identify areas of technology and innovation that need to develop evidence-based and impactful technology and innovation-based interventions.
- Call for parties to commit to integrating and holding all technologies corporations accountable for greenwashing, and combat the spread of false information and disinformation, especially surrounding climate denialism.
- Based on para 217 A/RES/66/288, we call upon parties to reduce technological waste, mitigate the harmful environmental impacts of extractives, and recognize the global export of hazardous waste to the Global South as a manifestation of environmental racism.
- Demand the Promotion and financing of local, national, and regional innovation capabilities, bringing together local scientific research and solutions, Indigenous knowledge and practices, technology, and engineering for building sustainable and climate-resilient communities.

- Demand for science, technology and innovation to contribute to our efforts to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including in the areas of food and nutrition, health, water and sanitation, energy, climate and environment.
- Call for all parties to address persistent barriers to equal and meaningful access to and participation and leadership in climate science, technologies and innovation for children and youth.

Climate Debt Swap

Southern Africa faces a dual challenge of high vulnerability to climate change and a significant debt burden. Many countries in the region are already grappling with substantial debt, which restricts their ability to invest in essential services and climate-resilient infrastructure. According to the African Union's 2024 Overview Report on Climate Finance in Africa, meeting the continent's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) will require an estimated \$2.8 trillion between 2020 and 2030. This equates to approximately \$277 billion annually, yet between 2021 and 2022, Africa received only \$30 billion, merely 11% of the funding required for NDC implementation.

This gap severely heightens the region's vulnerability, especially as young people continue to face barriers in accessing climate finance. Notably, African countries have pledged to mobilize just 10% of the required funds domestically, leaving a significant 80% funding shortfall. Meanwhile, the region is acutely susceptible to climate impacts, such as extreme weather events, droughts, and floods, which disrupt agriculture, strain water resources, and threaten livelihoods, compounding poverty and obstructing sustainable development. Additionally, national budgets are heavily allocated to debt servicing, further constraining the capacity to fund climate action.

We therefore;

- Urge member states across the region to prioritize Climate Debt Swaps as a solution to these interlinked challenges as they will provide an opportunity for countries to redirect funds from debt repayment toward initiatives that strengthen climate resilience while ensuring reallocation of these resources to youth-led, climate-smart, and bankable projects such as renewable energy installations, reforestation programs, and climate-resilient infrastructure with demystified processes to access these resources. These swaps will not only foster sustainable development but also contribute to long-term environmental and economic stability.

This financial reprieve is vital to help the countries in the southern region of Africa, tackle both economic and environmental challenges simultaneously there is no better time than this to advance the call for Climate Debt Swaps when COP29 is focusing on Climate Finance and support Southern Africa's journey toward a sustainable and resilient future.

Nationally Determined Contributions NDCs

In Southern Africa, children and youth make up about 60% of the population and are increasingly disengaged in climate policies, including Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). As the region faces the escalating impacts of climate change, it is imperative to establish robust political will, adaptive and inclusive policies that empower communities to build

resilience. Currently, there exists a significant gap in the meaningful engagement of vulnerable groups, particularly children and youth, in climate policy decision-making processes.

We therefore;

- Call all parties to meaningfully engage Children and Youth in the ongoing NDC stock take process as well as NAPs to ensure they are Youth and Child Sensitive.
- Demand the establishment of regional children and youth consultative bodies where they do not exist, with the mandate and the requisite resources to engage in regional policy making and decision-making processes supported by the NDC processes.
- Call for Institutionalization, integration, and ensure the meaningful, substantive, and safe participation and co-leadership of children and youth , especially girls and gender diverse youth, in all their diversity and intersectional identities by shifting power dynamics, to prevent tokenism and ‘youth-washing’ by recognizing, centering and resourcing the substantive co-leadership, co-creation and co-ownership in decision-making spaces including in the methods of work and the work of the NDC’s.
- Demand promotion of regional representation rooted in diversity, intersectionality with a gender lens in climate governance. This entails ensuring equal participation of youth and adolescents in all their diversity and intersectional identities from the Sub-Saharan region in key policy discussions and decision-making processes. This will foster a more equitable and effective global response to climate change.
- Demand all Parties to commit to meaningful youth and adolescent participation especially through meaningfully and funded support movement-building led by girl and young women and gender diverse activists. Throughout the climate policy cycle, from the initial planning stages to implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.
- Demand provision and promotion of affordable, accessible, agency-driven, and sustainable technology and opportunities for innovation and center groups missing from the climate technology and innovation discourse, especially in remote, rural and grassroots settings, those living in poverty, and persons with disabilities, and ensure translation into regional languages, to realize their full, effective, meaningful and substantive participation and co-leadership in decision-making processes.

Nexus Climate Change And Migration

Climate change is increasingly associated with vulnerability, insecurity, fragility and conflicts. The extent of the effect of climate change on peace and security is dependent on different variables such as the political, economic, and social factors of a particular country. Climate change in the southern region has manifested through the increased frequency of extreme climatic events, particularly El Niño related droughts and Cyclones already altering Southern African ecosystems, economies, and livelihoods. Due to the erosion of livelihoods, climate change has also fueled inimical gendered practices such as child marriage, sexual exploitation, abuse and prostitution. In addition to amplifying the school drop-out rates, most families are forced to make the difficult choices of removing their girl

children from school in the wake of a climate crisis, which would have deeply impacted their income earning capacities and livelihoods.

The World Bank's Groundswell report of 2018 projects that by 2050, up to 85.7 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa could be forced to migrate due to climate-related factors. A significant portion of these migrants will likely be youths, who are more likely to migrate in search of better opportunities. Climate change is predicted to be the driver of up to 10% of all African Cross Border Migration.

A study by the Africa Centre for Strategic Studies suggests that Southern Africa could see the largest increase in cross border mobility due to climate change impacts, with between 200,000 to 800,000 people potentially moving to neighboring countries by 2050. Climate mobility should be reflected in decision making particularly taking into considerations the challenges that youths are facing through climate mobility.

The impacts of climate change on peace and security in the Southern Africa region can be seen through the intensifying intra-state conflicts, for instance the case of Mozambique and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Since 2017, Mozambique has encountered escalating violence and bloodshed in its northern province of Cabo Delgado. One of the main drivers and amplifiers of the conflict is the increasing impact of climate change which has led to shortage of resources affecting the livelihoods of people.

In addition, the increasing impacts of climate change causes people to migrate in search of resources for instance in search of Arable and fertile land. This forced migration leads to conflicts over land between farmers. This fight for resources has seen an increase in the number of insurgent groups in the region, for instance in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Mozambique. Children and young people are mostly prone to being recruited by these groups on the promise of their families receiving a share of the resources.

We therefore;

- Demand all parties to strengthen regional and national Early Warning Systems, including making available Climate change information and forecasting to reach the community level so that communities can be prepared for adverse effects of climate change.
- Call for all parties to develop climate change adaptation and peacebuilding synergies and strengthen intergovernmental partnerships that can be harnessed to assist governments, communities, and international organizations in times of climate change crisis.
- Demand all parties in the region to establish National Climate Funds which can be supported by a 10% budgetary allocation from the national budget.
- Call for all parties to develop and implement national and regional conflict sensitive adaptation and mitigation mechanisms that respond to climate induced migration.
- Call for all parties to develop local policies that protect individuals displaced and affected by climate change and migrants.

- Demand all parties to create a specific fund that will address climate mobility.
- Call for all parties to invest in green skills, green jobs and innovation opportunities for youths affected by climate mobility in Southern Africa.
- Call for Parties and bodies working in disaster prone areas to integrate Disaster Risk Reduction in all existing and new projects with a focus on inclusion of the most vulnerable groups such as children, youth and people with disabilities, at the local level in Southern Africa by 2030.
- Call for all parties to create multi stakeholder platforms to ensure meaningful, informed and effective participation and leadership of migrants, refugees, IDPs host communities and youths taking into account age, gender ethnicity and other diversity considerations.

Culture And Heritage

Climate change is increasingly recognised as a multifaceted issue, impacting not just ecosystems and economies but also cultural heritage. Across the globe, including Southern Africa, cultural heritage sites, traditional practices, and indigenous knowledge systems are becoming vulnerable to the effects of climate change.

It is imperative to note that 80 percent of the southern african cultural heritage sites are protected by indigenous communities. According to UNDP(2024), Indigenous peoples are custodians of unique knowledge and practices that emphasize the balance between humans and the natural world. Many Indigenous traditional practices offer effective climate solutions, such as sustainable agriculture systems and climate-resilient water management. By safeguarding key ecosystems that act as carbon sinks and protect biodiversity, indigenous peoples provide an environmental service to the rest of the world. However, they are frequently excluded from decision-making processes, their efforts in preserving the cultural heritage remain undocumented, and their rights to lands and resources are not always respected.

According to the World Economic Forum, less than 10% of the national climate action plans in Southern African countries explicitly integrate indigenous knowledge systems, while less than 5% of the climate finance has been directed towards preserving cultural heritage sites.

We therefore;

- Call for all parties to integrate indigenous people, especially Children and Youth, in Cultural Heritage preservation and in protection of their land rights.
- Demand all parties to recognize the rights of Indigenous Peoples, provide them with direct access to adequate climate finance and capacity building, and integrate Indigenous knowledge into climate action plans and policies.
- Call for all parties to increase investment in indigenous knowledge system for Cultural Heritage preservation.

- Call for all parties to take urgent action to integrate cultural preservation into climate adaptation strategies to prevent the irreversible loss of cultural assets.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we, the youth of Southern Africa, stand united in our call for urgent climate action and recognize the role of critical stakeholders in shaping the future. We commit to participating in advocacy, policy discussions, and grassroots climate movements that are geared towards adequate climate financing and resilience building. We are ready to develop and promote solutions for climate adaptation and mitigation while sharing knowledge within our communities. We urge governments to leverage our abilities beyond our potential and actively involve us in decision-making processes, ensuring that our demands are addressed and our commitments supported. Together, we can drive a more inclusive and effective response to the climate crisis in our region, securing a sustainable future for all.