

Research Article

Engaging Youth in Climate Change Action in Africa

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Abstract

Africa, home to the world's youngest population, is disproportionately affected by the climate crisis despite contributing minimally to global emissions. This article investigates the pivotal role of African youth in driving climate action across policy, entrepreneurship, education, and grassroots mobilization. Drawing on recent data and case studies—including the YouthADAPT Challenge and RCOY Africa—it highlights the transformative potential of youth-led initiatives while acknowledging persistent challenges such as funding gaps, limited policy inclusion, and gender disparities. The article concludes with strategic recommendations to amplify youth engagement and climate resilience, emphasizing that the continent's future is inextricably linked to the energy, innovation, and leadership of its young people.

Keywords :African youth, climate change, youth engagement, green entrepreneurship, climate policy, education, grassroots mobilization, climate justice, youth empowerment, sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

Africa, home to the world's youngest population—with nearly 60% under the age of 25—stands on the frontline of the climate crisis. Despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, African nations feel acutely the impacts of climate change, experiencing extreme weather, food insecurity, and economic volatility. Against this stark backdrop, the continent's youth have emerged as powerful agents of change, championing innovative solutions and demanding climate justice at all levels. This article examines the landscape of youth climate engagement in Africa, highlights successful initiatives, assesses challenges, and proposes pathways to amplify meaningful participation and impact.

Context: Why Youth Matter in Africa's Climate Response

Demographics and Vulnerability

- **Youthful continent:** Africa's median age is 19.7 years, and 70% of sub-Saharan Africa's population is under 30.
- **At-risk futures:** Young Africans face compounding threats from droughts, floods, and food insecurity, which endanger education, livelihoods, and long-term prospects.
- **Intergenerational justice:** Calls for justice emphasize that those least responsible must not bear the heaviest burdens of climate change.

The Need for Agency

Youth are not just victims—they are crucial stakeholders whose engagement can:

- Accelerate innovative adaptation and mitigation strategies.
- Foster resilience in communities through grassroots initiatives.

- Ensure that climate policies are inclusive, equitable, and sustainable^{[1][2][3]}.

PATHWAYS FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

1. Policy and Advocacy

- **Regional Conference of Youth in Climate Change for Africa (RCOY Africa):** Gathers youth leaders from across the continent to train, strategize, and develop collective policy outputs. Outputs feed into COP negotiations and national policies, amplifying youth voices in formal decision-making^[4].
- **Involvement in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs):** Examples from Liberia and Kenya show youth organizations influencing the design and implementation of national climate plans^[5].

2. Grassroots and Community Mobilization

- **African Youth Initiative on Climate Change (AYICC):** A network spanning 42 countries with over 10,000 members, focusing on community adaptation and climate justice activism. AYICC has catalyzed local campaigns, awareness drives, and youth-led adaptation projects^[6].
- **African Youth Climate Justice Caravan:** Mobilized hundreds of youth across six countries to demand climate action at major global forums, such as COP17^[6].

3. Entrepreneurship and Innovation

- **YouthADAPT Challenge:** Launched in 2025, this program funds 100 youth-led enterprises across Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana, and Nigeria to deliver climate adaptation solutions in agriculture,

infrastructure, and clean mobility. Each venture receives \$30,000 to scale their impact, create green jobs, and foster resilience^[7].

- **Local entrepreneurial solutions:** From tree nurseries and sustainable waste management in Tanzania, to organic farming and water conservation in Kenya, young innovators are transforming climate risks into opportunities for local development and enterprise^{[8][9]}.

4. Education and Capacity-Building

- **Climate clubs in schools:** Initiatives such as tree planting, waste management, and food gardening in Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania engage thousands of students, making environmental stewardship a lived reality^[8].
- **Mentoring and peer learning:** Programs led by organizations such as Ashoka and the Asante Africa Foundation promote changemaker skills—empathy, leadership, and problem-solving—vital for scaling youth impact^{[9][8]}.

5. Civic Action and Global Advocacy

- **Youth strikes and mobilizations:** African youth have participated in continent-wide climate marches, digital campaigns (#AfricaClimateSummit, #FridaysForFutureAfrica), and international forums^{[3][11]}.
- **Legal advocacy:** WYCJ Africa champions legal recognition of climate justice, bringing youth interests to African and international courts^[2].

Visualizing Youth Engagement and Impact

Table 1: African Youth Engagement Modalities and Outcomes

Engagement Pathway	Example Initiative	Key Outcomes
Policy Advocacy	RCOY Africa, NDC influence	Policy inclusion, recognized youth voices
Community Mobilization	AYICC, Climate Caravans	Awareness, local resilience projects
Entrepreneurship	YouthADAPT Challenge	Green jobs, scalable adaptation
Education	School climate clubs, Ashoka mentoring	Skills, behavior change
Legal Action	WYCJ Africa	Rights recognition, climate justice bills

Graph: African Youth Participation in Major Climate Initiatives

Year	No. of New Youth Climate Projects	Youth-Led Policy Interventions	Green Entrepreneurs Funded
2021	110	17	18
2023	185	32	41
2025	245	54	100

Data synthesized from regional reports and program outputs.^{[4][7][8]}

Achievements and Success Stories

- **Policy Change:** Over 60 youth organizations shaped Liberia’s NDC revision; similar outcomes reported in Kenya and Ghana^{[5][4]}.
- **Enterprise and Jobs:** YouthADAPT Challenge projected to create over 2,500 green jobs by end-2025 in five African countries^[7].
- **Community Impact:** In Uganda, tree planting by primary students resulted in over 3,700 fruit trees planted in Kyenjojo district alone^[8].
- **Advocacy Impact:** Youth-driven mobilizations have brought climate adaptation and justice higher onto national agendas and COP platforms^{[4][3]}.
- **Visibility:** Young African activists such as Nisreen Elsaïm and Fatima Zahra Yusu have inspired national and continent-wide engagement, especially for marginalized groups^[3].

Challenges and Barriers

Youth engagement faces persistent obstacles:

- **Funding and resources:** Many grassroots efforts are hampered by lack of access to capital or sustained donor support^[3].
- **Political marginalization:** Youth voices, while organized and visible at the local level, often remain underrepresented in high-level decision-making^{[4][11]}.
- **Capacity gaps:** Rural, less-connected youth populations face digital and educational divides.
- **Gender disparities:** Female youth climate leaders contend with additional social and institutional barriers^{[3][8]}.

Table 2: Key Barriers and Needed Interventions

Barrier	Description	Recommended Response
Funding	Resource shortfalls, lack of grants	Increase investment & micro-granting
Policy Exclusion	Underrepresentation in forums	Mandate youth quotas at all governance levels

Skills gap	Limited technical & advocacy know-how	Expand youth climate education, mentorship
Socioeconomic	Unemployment, poverty	Integrate climate action with green job creation

Opportunities and Recommendations

- **Integrate youth in policy design:** Institutionalize youth participation in climate decision-making (youth councils, quotas in climate bodies).
- **Scale funding for youth-led innovation:** Support youth enterprises, community solutions, and research initiatives through public and private investment^[7].
- **Foster cross-sectoral partnerships:** Connect governments, businesses, NGOs, and youth to create inclusive climate action platforms.
- **Prioritize education:** Mainstream climate science, sustainability, and green skills in African curricula^[8].
- **Harness digital media:** Support youth-driven climate campaigns, information sharing, and advocacy online.
- **Promote gender inclusion:** Empower young women leaders; fund women-led projects; address gender barriers in STEM and environmental careers.

CASE STUDIES

1. YouthADAPT Challenge (2025)

- **Countries:** Kenya, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ghana, Nigeria
- **Focus:** Adaptation in agriculture, clean mobility, infrastructure
- **Outcome:** Funding 100 youth-led ventures, over \$3 million invested, job creation, and scalable climate resilience solutions^[7].

2. Asante Africa Youth Climate Actions

- **Tanzania:** Tree nurseries and circular economy projects led by high-schoolers, integrating environmental restoration with economic empowerment.
- **Kenya:** Drought-prone communities practicing water-efficient agriculture, led by environmental clubs and mentored by local NGOs^[8].

3. RCOY Africa (2024)

- **Regional Youth Gathering:** 250 youth leaders, strategic workshops on policy, green entrepreneurship, adaptation, and education.
- **Key Output:** Unified policy statement shaping African position at COP negotiations and UN summits^[4].

CONCLUSION

The engagement of Africa’s youth is not merely an

ethical imperative but an economic and ecological necessity. As climate threats intensify, African youth—innovative, vocal, and resilient—demonstrate the transformative potential of bottom-up action, policy advocacy, and green entrepreneurship. Overcoming persistent barriers requires broader investment, policy reforms, and deeper integration of youth in all aspects of the climate response. With the world’s youngest population, Africa’s climate future is inseparable from the action, creativity, and vision of its rising generation.

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