



Power and Resources

Environmental and Climate Policy in Africa

Regional Cohesion and National Challenges

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The African Union's Agenda 2063 sets out the aspiration of African countries to focus on sustainable development. The continent has gained influence at international climate negotiations. However, many countries face enormous challenges when it comes to the implementation of national environmental and climate targets, which cannot be explained by a lack of financial resources or technical expertise alone. Rather, good governance is a prerequisite for effectively protecting the environment and combating climate change.

It is exactly 50 years since the first United Nations (UN) conference was held to discuss the human environment and ecology at the international level. The Stockholm Conference was followed by numerous regional agreements and initiatives in the 1970s and 1980s to improve environmental protection in industrialised countries, and is considered to be the birth of global environmental policy. It was not until the end of the 20th century, in the context of increasing globalisation, that environmental protection started to be perceived as a global issue requiring action beyond local and regional approaches. With the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, better known as the Rio Conference or Earth Summit, environmental protection was firmly transferred to a global context that also included developing and emerging countries.¹ With the adoption of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in Rio, and the Agenda for Sustainable Development in the 21st Century, climate change was no longer restricted to ecological aspects but linked to key development issues. Since then, the focus of international climate diplomacy has been on creating appropriate policy frameworks and establishing global governance mechanisms.²

Climate Diplomacy: African States Speak with One Voice

In this global context, African countries have managed to establish themselves as influential

players in global climate policy.³ The African Union (AU) is also considered to be one of the dominant continental groups at the annual Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UN Convention on Climate Change.⁴

Three institutions in Africa are essentially responsible for this: the African Ministerial Conference on the Environment (AMCEN), the Committee of African Heads of State and Government on Climate Change (CAHOSOCC), and the African Group of Negotiators (AGN).

AMCEN was established in 1985 with the aim of providing a political forum for African environment ministers. Today, AMCEN is an important platform for implementing environmental initiatives at the regional level, and building African capacity in the environmental sector. AMCEN has also launched numerous regional initiatives, thus leaving a lasting mark on environmental policy in Africa.⁵ AMCEN is not only responsible for coordinating environmental policy within Africa, but also provides policy support and prepares joint positions that serve as a basis and orientation for African representatives at international negotiations on climate change and the environment.

The second and highest-ranking part of the structure is CAHOSOCC, which meets at AU summits, and issues key resolutions and statements on environmental and climate matters. Its members are elected for two years.

Founded in 1991, the AGN comprises technical experts from all African countries. The group draws up strategies and sets priorities for African climate and environmental issues, which are then submitted to AMCEN for consideration and finally approved by CAHOSOCC.

African countries are severely affected by climate change.

The goal of African climate diplomacy is to present a common position at international climate negotiations with a view to strengthening the continent's negotiating mandate. In this context, the three aforementioned institutions – AMCEN, CAHOSOCC, and AGN – form an important steering mechanism for environmental and climate protection, and their interaction is now firmly anchored in the AU.⁶ In the AU's Agenda 2063, the heads of state and government have also set out their aim of focusing the continent on sustainable development. In 2009, when the Copenhagen Climate Change Conference was scheduled to adopt a binding set of rules to limit global warming, African countries presented a common African position for the first time. This image of a continent united on climate issues attracted a great deal of attention. In the past, African countries only had a marginal influence on the negotiations. However, this commitment to common concerns and a unified position on global climate policy created a power shift in Africa's favour.⁷ It should be emphasised here that it is extremely difficult to unify 54 extremely heterogeneous states and their very different interests with regard to the environment and climate change.⁸ African nations can, therefore, be justifiably proud of their united stance.

African Priorities in International Climate Negotiations

The common African position has to be renewed in the run-up to every international climate conference, but it is guided by three principles.

Focus on Adaptation to Climate Change

African countries are responsible for a mere four per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, yet are severely affected by climate change due to their socioeconomic characteristics and high dependence on the agricultural sector. African nations already spend up to nine per cent of their gross domestic product (GDP) on adaptation to climate change – often more than on health or education.⁹ Meanwhile, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has stated that temperature in Africa is increasing at a faster rate than in the rest of the world,¹⁰ which in turn could lead to more extreme weather events. However, the majority of global climate finance is currently spent on greenhouse gas mitigation. Therefore, as far as Africa is concerned, this focus fails to adequately address the problems it faces.

As a result, African countries have been lobbying for more international attention to be paid to climate change adaptation. The inclusion of a Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA) in the Paris Climate Agreement can, therefore, also be seen as a success for African climate diplomacy. There is, however, to date no binding agreement on what such a global goal should look like. It would focus on improving resilience to the effects of climate change. This would shift the current focus of climate negotiations away from greenhouse gas mitigation, thereby more closely aligning it with Africa's needs. A binding goal on adaptation would also include financial commitments for adaptation measures.

At COP 26 in Glasgow in November 2021, it was therefore decided that a panel of experts should present concrete ideas on such an adaptation target in two years' time, which can also be viewed as an African negotiating success. It can also be assumed that the topic of adaptation will be high on the agenda at the next COP in Egypt, which is already being referred to as the African COP.

African countries argue that climate finance should be predictable, long-term, and appropriate, and not simply a reorganisation of existing development cooperation or finance.¹¹

African negotiators also call for funding to be allocated based on a country's capacities, needs, and equal geographic distribution. They advocate a regular review of funding based on the assessment reports of developing countries, and recommend an annual review of adaptation financing. Developed countries have committed to providing an annual 100 billion US dollars of public and private funding between 2020 and 2025 to help developing and emerging countries reduce greenhouse gases and adapt to climate change. African countries view this commitment as the centrepiece of climate negotiations.

International environmental performance rankings place African countries at the bottom.

Addressing Permanent Loss and Damage

Permanent loss and damage caused by climate change is a particularly important issue for Africa, and one that African negotiators believe has historically been underrepresented in international climate negotiations. In the negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement, the AGN repeatedly stressed the need for compensation for permanent or unavoidable loss and damage caused by the adverse effects of climate change, and called for rehabilitation and compensation measures. While some success has been achieved by including a specific provision on loss and damage in Article 8 of the Paris Climate Agreement, it remains unclear how this will be implemented in practice. African countries are calling for climate change impacts to become an integral part of UN climate negotiations. This requirement has gained relevance with the recent IPCC report in

2021, which found new and stronger scientific-based evidence that global warming can be attributed to human activity.

It can be stated that African countries have managed to introduce their key concerns in international environment and climate change negotiations. This should be seen as a success for the continent, especially given that African countries do not have any bargaining chips at their disposal, such as significant reductions in CO₂ emissions, or financial support to offer to other countries.

Environmental Protection and Climate Change in the National Context

The implementation of international treaties, especially the Paris Agreement on climate change, must take place at the national level, with nation states formulating effective laws on environmental and climate protection. This is where international environmental performance ratings place African countries at the bottom, occupying 32 of the 50 lowest places. This is the conclusion of a global Environmental Performance Index (EPI) ranking, which uses 32 indicators to measure the current health of the ecosystem, its projected future vitality, and resource management in 180 countries.¹²

No Money to Fight Climate Change?

The EPI demonstrates a causal relationship between GDP and the ability to implement efficient and effective measures to tackle climate change and protect the environment.¹³ The ability to provide clean drinking water or a functioning sewage system, to promote energy efficiency, or to reduce greenhouse gas emissions requires financial resources that are more readily available to wealthy countries. Growing populations and rapid urbanisation are also intensifying the pressures on environmental infrastructure and available resources, requiring ever-greater investment to improve ecosystem quality. For example, Niger's ranking has fallen compared to previous EPI surveys, as rapid population



growth of around four per cent per year has placed the ecosystem under extreme stress.¹⁴

Nevertheless, positive examples from Africa can also be found in the EPI. The Seychelles, for example, is ranked first in Sub-Saharan Africa and 38th in the world for its reduction of harmful greenhouse gases and its commitment to coastal protection with the help of a sustainably designed Blue Economy Plan. Mauritius has developed

an impressive waste management plan that is leading the way in the region, and Botswana and Zambia have made great strides in the area of biodiversity.¹⁵ In 2016, Kenya became the first country in Africa to adopt comprehensive framework legislation on climate change, with the aim of providing climate change adaptation measures, while promoting low-carbon development. Many other countries on the continent have since followed suit. In East Africa, Uganda



Wind farm near Nairobi: Kenya was the first African country to adopt comprehensive framework legislation in response to climate change, not least to promote low-carbon development. Source: © Thomas Mukoya, Reuters.

a 150 million US dollars deal, after independent experts determined that Gabon could demonstrably reduce deforestation of its rainforest and halt land-use degradation. The money will be used to invest in sustainable forestry, research, and building more environmental databases. Gabon plans to capitalise even more on the environmental services provided by its rainforest, which covers some 88 per cent of the country.¹⁶ Even Malawi in southern Africa has a much better environmental balance sheet, measured in terms of GDP, than some richer countries on the African continent.¹⁷

Democratic Principles Are Good for the Ecosystem

The example of Malawi shows that environmental performance cannot be explained solely by the financial resources available. The authors of the EPI also examined the extent to which good governance has an impact on environmental performance. This was done using the six indicators of the World Bank's governance ranking – voice and accountability, political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption.¹⁸ There is also a correlation between the quality of governance and environmental performance, which is not initially surprising because the quality of governance reflects whether a government can enact legislation, or whether the public can hold policymakers accountable for the implementation – or otherwise – of efficient and effective policies relating to the environment and climate change. Moreover, in democracies, free access to information and scientific debate on environmental problems facilitates political learning. Since democracies are generally based on a free market economy, businesses can be subject to both environmental incentives and sanctions.¹⁹ Among the six indicators of good governance, control of corruption, regulatory quality, and the

has sought to improve its resource management and ecosystem protection by creating a National Environment Information Centre (NEIF) within its Environment Ministry. Gabon, which also ranks very highly on environmental issues compared to other African countries, has even found a way to capitalise on its natural resources. In 2021, the Central African Forest Initiative (CAFI), an initiative set up by several European countries and South Korea, transferred an initial tranche of

rule of law have a greater influence on the environmental performance of nation states. This means that, regardless of GDP, individual elements of good governance are also responsible for the implementation of environmental and climate policies.²⁰

Corruption is a particular barrier to effectively protecting the environment and mitigating climate change in Sub-Saharan Africa because bribery and the use of public power for private gain is so widespread in the region. Statistics show that Sub-Saharan Africa consistently leads the world when it comes to corruption. According to Transparency International's Corruption Index, ten of the world's 20 most corrupt countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa.²¹ In the area of environmental and related resource management, corruption can occur during environmental impact assessments, for example by taking payment in return for glossing over the environmental risks of a project. This often has devastating consequences for ecosystems and biodiversity. In Sierra Leone, for example, an investigation by the Environmental Protection Agency Sierra Leone (EPA-SL) found that around a third of the companies audited were operating without conducting the legally required environmental impact assessments. In addition, environmental regulations were unknown or incomplete, and companies regularly violated them. In addition, the EPA-SL itself does not use the financial resources at its disposal to conduct the mandatory monitoring of businesses.²²

In most cases, countries have passed national environmental laws based on international agreements, but these laws are undermined by corrupt practices. Thus, corruption is responsible for improper and illegal land use, and for the exploitation of natural resources.²³ It is estimated that the financial losses suffered by the poorest countries as a result of bribery and corruption are ten times the amount of development aid paid.²⁴ So it is hardly surprising that the failure of environmental policy in developing countries is due to weaknesses in the rule of law rather than to political or economic factors.²⁵ The West African

country of Liberia, which comes last in the EPI's global ranking, provides a good illustration of the link between good – and bad – governance and environmental performance. The country is beset by political instability, and its energy supply system was totally destroyed during the civil war of the 1990s and 2000s. Today, fossil fuels provide about 50 per cent of the country's electricity, while comparable countries, such as Malawi or Mozambique, generate more than 70 per cent of their electricity from renewable energy sources.²⁶ Lack of environmental regulation has led to a significant deterioration in air quality over the past decade. Forests and green spaces are shrinking, which in turn has led to an above-average decline in biodiversity.²⁷

Many people are unable to place changing weather patterns in a broader climate context.

Planting Trees to Fight Climate Change?

Another reason for the poor environmental performance of African countries is the lack of, or inadequate, communication about the purpose of environmental policy measures.²⁸ The vast majority of people in Africa are aware that weather patterns are changing but are unable to place cause and effect within a broader climate context. To a large extent, people equate climate change with the importance of trees and forests, and often believe that weather events are influenced at local level by felling trees or pollution. This gives the impression that climate problems can be solved locally simply by planting trees.²⁹ The role of greenhouse gases does not figure in this narrative, meaning that policymakers find it difficult to gain public support for actions to mitigate climate change. It is also doubtful that policymakers themselves have an adequate understanding of climate change, as reforestation and tree planting initiatives tend to be the most common environmental measures initiated by local government officials.³⁰

Journalists also seem to have difficulties presenting the causes and consequences of climate change in such a way that the local population understands its complexities. It is often the case that journalists themselves lack in-depth knowledge. They might report on international climate negotiations, or on local environmental and climate-related initiatives, but they do not necessarily put them into context. Lack of understanding of the urgent need for environmental policies significantly hinders their implementation, as acceptance of these policies and public support are vital for their successful implementation, especially when it involves changing behaviours and habits.

In countries with weak governance, resources could be used more effectively by first improving the quality of governance itself.

Opportunities to Improve National Policies on the Environment and Climate Change

Sub-Saharan Africa is lagging behind when it comes to protecting the environment and combating climate change, despite the fact that African countries are united on the international stage in their efforts to implement the Paris Agreement. Therefore, Africa's nation states should be supported to develop more effective and efficient environmental policies. Financial resources and technical expertise are needed to do this, but they are not necessarily the key, as these instruments can only partially remedy problems in the implementation of environmental legislation. If such policies are to succeed, good governance is essential – curbing corruption above all – along with targeted communication about the purpose of environmental measures. In South Africa, for example, climate and environmental protection has gained political importance and, compared to other developing and emerging countries, civil

society has many opportunities to participate in consultation processes.³¹ South Africa is heavily dependent on coal for power generation, so the transition to renewables, and the accompanying loss of an important industry for the country, will only be possible or manageable if it attracts broad public support.

On the other hand, increasing financial resources for the environment and climate change, either through international climate finance or public finance, could lead to a deterioration in the environmental performance of certain countries if this is not accompanied by steps to combat corruption.³² An analysis of data from the Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN), which uses a variety of indicators to show how countries can improve their resilience to climate change,³³ concludes that it makes sense to target environmental problems directly in countries that have high levels of economic, regulatory, and social consolidation. In countries with weak governance, however, resources could be used more effectively by first improving the quality of governance itself.³⁴ Given the likely increase in global climate finance in the coming years, the link between good governance and efficient and effective environmental and climate policies should be considered. It must be ensured that investment in climate change and the environment is applied in a targeted manner. Corresponding international agreements and initiatives should always strengthen the bodies responsible for implementation and provide recommendations on how to ensure that funding is spent for the intended purpose.

If African countries are to be more involved in international efforts on climate change, then actions and targets should also be aligned with their national development goals and the needs of their people. Partners such as the UN, but also the EU and Germany, should therefore ensure that developed nations' environmental and climate goals are compatible with African priorities relating to infrastructure, energy, land, food security, and industrialisation.³⁵ This will also counteract the impression that environmental protection is incompatible with

Children playing in a dried out reservoir in South Africa: Many people on the African continent clearly perceive increasing weather extremes, but the link between such phenomena and global climate, including greenhouse gas emissions, is mostly absent from public debates.

Source: © Mike Hutchings, Reuters.

economic growth. Land use rights and access to resources have long been key issues in Africa,³⁶ but these are formulated in a localised way that does not necessarily coincide with the understanding of industrialised nations. However, this does not mean that environmental and climate protection are irrelevant for African countries.

The AU may have made its voice heard in international climate negotiations, but it has also tended to play a passive role, namely as a continent affected by climate change and dependent on foreign (financial) support in the fight against the consequences of global warming.³⁷ However, Africa possesses the renewable energy sources, minerals, and raw materials that industrialised nations need for their energy transition. This includes cobalt, which is needed for the production of electric cars and energy storage systems. Sixty per cent of the world's cobalt comes from the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the hydropower available from the Congo River could generate almost enough low-emission electricity to fuel the whole of Africa. This potential could also be used to produce green hydrogen in an emissions-neutral manner and at a globally competitive price. In addition, tropical ecosystems such as the Congolese rainforest store carbon and are thus an important part of the global effort to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions. COP 27, which will take place in Egypt in November 2022, would be a good opportunity to shift the common African position more strongly in this direction. Because without Africa and its raw materials, there will be no energy transition, and hence no implementation of the Paris Agreement.





The invasion of Ukraine has also provided Germany and Europe with a dramatic demonstration of the fragility of their energy supply and security. So far, African countries have played no role in Germany's energy transition. However, this could change in the medium-to-long term due to geopolitical developments – war in Europe, disagreements within the EU, and the strained relationship between China and the US. For example, the EU hydrogen strategy adopted in June 2020 is based, among other things, on the assumption that large parts of Europe could be supplied with cheap green hydrogen produced in Eastern Europe, and especially Ukraine. But now it seems doubtful that the infrastructure will be available for this in the near future.

Africa is still far from being in a position to take over the role of Europe's energy supplier in the immediate or near future, and supplying electricity to their own populations should be a priority. However, Germany would be well advised to reconsider Africa's future role in its energy transition, and to seek innovative forms of collaboration on environmental and climate issues that incorporate the issue of energy security.

- translated from German -

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