

AFRICAN CLIMATE SUMMIT: SHAPING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE AMIDST CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

By

Areeba Arif Khan

Research Associate

Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA), ISSI

Edited by

Amina Khan

October 16, 2023

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



The African Climate Summit, held in Nairobi (Kenya) from 4-6 September 2023, marked a historic occasion for the African Continent.¹ This brought together African leaders, experts, and stakeholders from diverse sectors to collectively address one of the most pressing challenges of time: climate change. The Summit's significance cannot be overstated, as it provided a platform for Africa to articulate its common concerns, aspirations, and strategies in dealing with climate change.²

Climate change has become an existential threat to humanity, and Africa, with its unique vulnerabilities and challenges, is on the frontlines of this global crisis. The African Climate Summit was a crucial forum for the Continent to assert its collective voice and vision for a sustainable future. The Summit's overarching goal was to unite African nations in their efforts to mitigate and adapt to the impacts of climate change.³ Furthermore, climate-related challenges have underscored the necessity for immediate action, making the urgency of this Summit all the more pronounced.

The Summit was organized around seven central themes, each representing a critical facet of Africa's climate agenda:

¹ John, "The African Climate Summit: A Turning Point for the Continent", ACS23, September 04, 2023. <https://africaclimatesummit.org/>

² Sarah Johnson, "African Leaders Unite to Tackle Climate Change at Nairobi Summit." The New York Times, September 7, 2023. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/07/africa/african-leaders-climate-change-summit.html>.

³ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. "COP28: Agenda and Expectations." Accessed September 20, 2023. <https://unfccc.int/COP28/agenda>.

Themes of the Summit

One of the paramount concerns addressed at the Summit was the need for a new financing mechanism aimed at restructuring the debt of African countries.⁴ This mechanism is vital to relieve the financial burdens of African nations, allowing them to allocate resources effectively towards climate adaptation efforts as climate disasters are costing African countries a lot of money. The African countries need \$124 billion every year by 2030 to adapt to these changes, but they are only getting \$28 billion. More money is required to help them adjust to the changing climate and the strain of repaying these loans has hindered their ability to invest in climate resilience.

The Summit underscored the urgency of transitioning to sustainable energy systems. African leaders emphasized the importance of concerted international efforts to reduce carbon emissions and expedite this transition. Clean energy not only addresses climate change but also provides opportunities for economic growth and job creation in Africa.

Investments aligned with the sustainable utilization of Africa's abundant natural resources were emphasized. Striking a balance between economic development and environmental preservation is a critical challenge for African nations. The Summit explored strategies to harness mineral wealth while minimizing ecological harm.

The Summit called for reforms in critical climate change agreements, including the Bridgetown Initiative, the Accra-Marrakech Agenda, the UN Secretary-General's SDG Stimulus Proposal, and the Paris Summit for a New Global Financing Pact. These calls for reform underscored the need to align global commitments with the evolving climate landscape. It was recognized that current financial mechanisms are inadequate to address Africa's unique challenges.

Africa accounts for 3.9 percent of carbon emissions and the Summit explored opportunities in carbon markets and their potential to drive sustainable development in Africa. Carbon markets offer the promise of financing climate projects while encouraging emissions reductions. However, their implementation requires careful consideration to ensure equitable outcomes.

Engaging the youth in climate action was another significant aspect of the Summit as the Continent has 60% of the young population and they are not only the future of the Continent but also

⁴ "Debt Relief Tops Agenda at African Climate Summit." The Washington Post, September 8, 2023. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate/africa-summit-debt-relief/2023/09/08>.

passionate advocates for climate justice. The Summit recognized their vital role in shaping Africa's climate future and fostering inter-generational dialogue.⁵

The Summit advocated for a rapid transition to green energy systems. This transition is essential to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and build resilience to climate impacts. However, it also entails technology transfer and capacity building, particularly in remote and underserved regions of Africa.

Nairobi Declaration

The Nairobi Declaration, arising from the African Climate Summit, signals Africa's determination to lead in climate action and advocate for equitable solutions on the global stage. It is a pivotal document that underpins Africa's aspirations for a greener, more resilient future.

The resolutions emanating from the African Climate Summit coalesced around three core pillars:

Africa's Debt Restructuring: Restructuring the debt of African countries was deemed essential to free up financial resources for climate adaptation efforts. Many African nations have long struggled with high levels of debt, often owed to foreign creditors. These debts place significant financial burdens on governments, limiting their capacity to invest in climate resilience measures.⁶ The Summit's call for debt restructuring aimed to alleviate this burden and provide African nations with the financial flexibility needed to address climate change effectively.

Global Decarbonization: African leaders stressed the urgent need for concerted international efforts to reduce carbon emissions and transition to sustainable energy systems. Africa has abundant renewable energy resources, such as solar and wind power, which can be harnessed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. However, the transition to clean energy requires substantial investments in infrastructure, technology, and capacity building.

Sustainable Investments: The Summit highlighted the importance of investments that align with environmental preservation and economic development. Africa possesses vast natural resources and opportunities for sustainable agriculture, eco-tourism, and green technologies. However, striking a balance between economic growth and environmental conservation is a complex challenge. The Summit emphasized the need for investments that promote both prosperity and ecological sustainability.

⁵ "Youth Activism and Climate Change: Insights from the African Climate Summit." Al Jazeera, September 9, 2023. <https://www.aljazeera.com/environment/2023/09/09/youth-activism-african-climate-summit>.

⁶ United Nations. "Nairobi Declaration: Commitments from the African Climate Summit." September 20, 2023. <https://www.un.org/african-climate-summit/nairobi-declaration>.

A Landmark Achievement: The Global Climate Finance Charter

The most significant outcome of the African Climate Summit was the collective commitment to develop a new Global Climate Finance Charter.⁷ This commitment, slated to materialize through the United Nations General Assembly and COP processes by 2025, stands as a landmark achievement. Embodied within the Nairobi Declaration, this charter reflects the unified position of African countries as they prepare to engage with COP28.

The Global Climate Finance Charter serves as a roadmap for climate finance on the African Continent. It outlines principles, guidelines, and mechanisms for mobilizing and allocating climate finance to African nations.⁸ This charter is not merely symbolic; it represents a tangible commitment to securing the financial resources needed.

Challenges and Opportunities

While the African Climate Summit inspired optimism about the Continent's sustainable development future, challenges remain. One major hurdle is the lack of project readiness and availability to absorb the anticipated climate finance.⁹ Philanthropic finance or its equivalent will be needed to bridge the gap between potential funds received and projects available. Additionally, issues such as the effectiveness of debt restructuring mechanisms and ensuring that climate finance reaches its intended targets must be addressed.

The African Climate Summit, as reflected in the Nairobi Declaration, symbolizes Africa's unity and determination to tackle climate change collectively. It empowers the Continent to engage effectively in global climate negotiations. However, the success of these commitments will ultimately depend on effective implementation, overcoming project readiness challenges, and ensuring that climate finance reaches its intended recipients. As Africa prepares to engage with COP28, the real impact of the Nairobi Declaration will be appraised, offering hope for a greener and more resilient future, not only for Africa but for the entire global community.

⁷ "The Global Climate Finance Charter: A Step Forward for Africa." Financial Times, September 10, 2023. <https://www.ft.com/climate-finance-charter-africa>.

⁸ "Africa's Role in Global Climate Negotiations: Perspectives from the Nairobi Summit." The Times of India, September 25, 2023. <https://www.timesofindia.com/african-climate-negotiations-perspectives>.

⁹ "The African Climate Summit: Reflections and Challenges Ahead." Nairobi Daily, September 30, 2023. <https://www.nairobi-daily.com/african-climate-summit-reflections>.