



Climate

Conclusion: Challenges of achieving a Low-Carbon Future

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Africa will suffer more than any other region from climate change impacts despite having contributed little to the cause of this problem. Decisive leadership and an effective executive system capable of averting a global crisis is sorely needed. Today, geopolitics and domestic politics intertwine, leading to an uncertain future with devastating outcomes and consequences for many, particularly in Africa. Sustainable solutions and adaptation are becoming increasingly urgent. We examine many of these challenges in our forecast of [global futures](#).

Our findings highlight the complex nature of Africa's transition away from fossil fuels, presented in the separate theme on [Energy](#). Contrary to the rapid shifts proposed by UNEP and others, our analysis suggests a more gradual phasing out, starting with coal, then reducing oil and eventually gas beyond 2050. That transition is moving fast in many advanced economies such as Europe, North America, Japan and in China, but is much slower in developing countries, particularly in Africa which requires substantial support from wealthier nations to establish a feasible transition to renewables and a carbon emission pathways. For Africa climate finance is the critical enabler of the global energy transition which needs to be at the top of the COP agenda in Baku (COP29 in 2024) and Brazil (COP30 in 2025).

To date [little has come](#) of previous initiatives such as the 2021 Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero (GFANZ) that was to bring US\$130 trillion to bear on the climate crisis or the Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JET-Ps) also promoted at COP26. The flagship JET-Ps in South Africa and Indonesia have barely raised one-tenth of what is required and those in Indonesia, Vietnam and Senegal have not fared better. COP27 subsequently introduced a loss and damage fund that aims to provide financial assistance to nations most vulnerable and impacted by the effects of climate change but it is still unfunded. Rather than the promises from the developed countries who promoted both, it is China that is powering ahead in spending on renewables. The crisp question is: Who will finance the significant investments required for gas and oil as the world gradually moves away from fossil fuels? The world needs early and decisive action to prevent the catastrophic consequences of continued fossil fuel dependency in Africa if it is to avoid climate catastrophe and this theme examined the implementation of a global carbon tax that is the essential response component.

Adaptation efforts must catch up to mitigation efforts globally and in Africa. Efforts to adapt to climate change must prioritise the protection of communities, ecosystems, and economies from its adverse effects. Our report underscores the importance of enhancing resilience through various means—be it poverty alleviation, conflict prevention, or healthcare improvements—alongside modifying infrastructure (land use planning, climate-smart practices, climate-resilient infrastructure), being more efficient with natural resources (e.g. water and land use management) and formulating policies that enable societies to respond effectively to evolving climatic conditions (aid support, investments, early-warning systems etc.) to withstand climate challenges better. This becomes particularly complex when accounting for concurrent crises like poverty, undernutrition, and civil conflict. Africa's best response to the emerging threat of climate change is to pursue a sustainable development pathway, as reflected in the Sustainable Africa scenario.

Adopting diverse carbon reduction strategies globally, including carbon taxes and cap-and-trade systems, reflects a commitment to environmental stewardship. However, geopolitical tensions, notably between China, the US, and the EU, pose significant challenges to these efforts. On the one hand, the competition for green energy leadership could create a 'race to the top', spurring green investment, innovation and international climate action. On the other hand, the rising tensions undermine cooperation and fragment the green energy market. Tense geopolitics threaten to undermine collaboration across ideological divides.[1] With China dominating almost all clean technology supply chains, policymakers must square the imperative to reduce dependencies with adequate cooperation to meet decarbonisation goals.

Carbon pricing mechanisms like the EU's Emissions Trading System offer a flexible approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. In addition, carbon offset programs enable entities to counterbalance their carbon footprint by investing in

projects that mitigate emissions but remain controversial. Industries worldwide, particularly the aviation sector, have prominently embraced this approach through reforestation, renewable energy projects, and energy efficiency initiatives but the system is prone to greenwashing and shifting of responsibilities.

The effectiveness of these systems is also marred by concerns over their impact on vulnerable populations and the risk of **carbon leakages**, which could inadvertently shift emissions to less regulated regions.

This highlights the opportunity for mechanisms like Carbon Border Adjustments (CBAs) to level the playing field for imports and domestic products, as exemplified by the EU's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (**CBAM**), aiming to align industries within and outside the EU and impact specific carbon-intensive goods from 2026 onward. Despite its potential, concerns arise regarding potential **harm** to African economies. Industries in low- and middle-income countries need more resources to decarbonise production. Without careful consideration, CBAM will increase global inequalities and proactive measures are required to ensure that carbon strategies are practical and globally equitable. **UNCTAD** notes that African countries need expanded access to foreign currencies through central bank swaps and enhanced resilience during external crises through standstill rules on debtors' obligations, such as climate-resilient debt clauses. This, the Conference notes, would allow a halt in debt repayments, providing some breathing space for crisis management.

Moreover, integrating adaptation measures across sectors, including healthcare, agricultural practices, transportation, infrastructure resilience, social services, urban planning, etc, is imperative. Strengthening Africa's healthcare infrastructure, establishing robust disease surveillance systems, facilitating widespread access to vaccines, incorporating climate-resilient city design, and fostering international collaboration are indispensable steps in building adaptive resilience across the region.

In summary, our analysis emphasises the urgency of addressing both the causes and effects of climate change in Africa and the need for a concerted global effort to support the continent's transition to a low-carbon future. This entails a multifaceted approach involving mitigation strategies, adaptation efforts, and financial investments tailored to the continent's unique context. Africa needs international cooperation that is sensitive to the intricacies of its manifold challenges if it is to get to a sustainable and equitable future for its vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

Chart 17: Recommendations

Recommendations

1. Africa should adopt a more gradual transition away from fossil fuels compared to the rapid changes advocated by international bodies such as the UNEP. This phased approach should prioritise reducing coal usage and then oil.
2. Coordinated efforts are necessary to mitigate climate change. This entails adopting a multifaceted approach involving implementing effective strategies, formulating impactful policies, developing and deploying innovative technologies, transitioning to renewable energy quickly, and mobilising financial instruments to support these initiatives.
3. African countries, particularly significant emitters, must take their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) seriously and curb their growing emissions.
4. Accelerating the shift from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources and pursuing a sustainable development trajectory that aligns with the Sustainable Africa scenario is crucial. This involves integrating climate adaptation measures with economic and social policies to ensure a holistic approach to sustainable growth.
5. While Africa's contribution to the global implementation of a carbon tax is acknowledged, the emphasis is on the necessity of a worldwide effort to reduce emissions and manage the economic impacts equitably across different regions.
6. Mechanisms such as Carbon Border Adjustments (CBAs) should be carefully considered to prevent carbon leakage and ensure that African economies are not adversely affected by global carbon pricing mechanisms. To avoid exacerbating inequalities, efforts must be made to balance environmental objectives with economic realities.
7. Much more attention and financing should be placed on African adaptation efforts. By emphasising adaptation, Africa can assert its development rights while urging more significant emitters to take greater responsibility for mitigating climate change. This strategic focus would safeguard African populations and advocate for global equity in addressing the climate crisis. It includes improving resilience through poverty reduction, conflict prevention, healthcare improvements, and infrastructure modifications to withstand climate challenges.
8. Every African country needs proactive, climate-smart and science-based policies to mitigate the adverse effects of increased water use on ecosystems and communities. (For example, implementing comprehensive water governance, cooperation, and management strategies to address the challenges posed by increasing demand and the impacts of climate change on water resources.)
9. Emphasizing the importance of natural and technological carbon capture and sequestration methods to offset the continent's emissions. For Africa, forest regeneration and retaining vast savanna and grassland areas can be critical in reducing carbon emissions. Protecting, conserving, restoring, replanting and managing natural carbon sinks are thus vital in mitigation and sustainability efforts.
10. There is a need for aggressive adaptation financing to close the adaptation funding gap.
11. The continent requires substantial financial support and investment from wealthier nations to facilitate this transition. This includes funding for sustainable energy projects and the development of viable pathways for reducing carbon emissions.
12. Africa needs a collaborative international effort to support its low-carbon future. This includes fostering partnerships for financial and technological support and ensuring that global strategies are inclusive and considerate of Africa's unique challenges and opportunities.

Endnotes

1. See J Hammelehle, Heated Atmosphere, in Munich Security Report 2024, Lose-Lose, February 2024, pp 87-88

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