

Third Africa Climate Talks

Climate change and development in Africa: African perspectives on climate-resilient recovery from COVID-19

Second session¹

Climate change, COVID-19 and development in Africa and its small island developing States (SIDS) – from vulnerability to building resilience

17 and 18 May 2021, 10 a.m.–1 p.m. (Praia time, GMT-1)

Introduction

The coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic has wreaked havoc on economies, communities and ecosystems across the world. It has been described as a revelatory crisis, enabling us to see more clearly the crises that already were unfolding before the pandemic. One of those is the climate-change crisis, which has caused more frequent and intense extreme-weather events (including flooding, droughts and heatwaves), shifts in ecosystems, and rising sea levels (which has increased the acidification of oceans) among other things.

There are clear links between health, the environment and the economy. Climate change, resource extraction, urban and agricultural expansion, and pollution have led to the loss and degradation of ecosystems and habitats. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem shifts have brought humanity into closer proximity with wildlife, thereby increasing the risk of zoonotic diseases, such as COVID-19, which, according to the World Health Organization, made the leap from wildlife to humans, possibly through an intermediate species. Research suggests that the emergence of new human diseases and the spread of long-existing diseases is closely linked to climate change, as seen with malaria and the dengue and zika virus, which have been linked to the expansion of the range of the mosquitoes that are their vectors. Likewise, low water and air quality are linked to other serious diseases. The health challenges arising from the impact of climate change are thus just a harbinger of things to come in the absence of urgent and meaningful concerted global action on climate change.

¹ For the second session of the Third Africa Climate Talks, interpretation will be available in English, French and Portuguese.



Although Africa accounts for 17 per cent of global population, it contributes less than 4 per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Yet the continent is already bearing the brunt of the impact of climate change, with governments spending between 2 and 9 per cent of their GDP on unplanned responses to the impact of climate change, while economies are losing 2–5 per cent of GDP per year as a result of the climate crisis. The continent’s small island developing States (SIDS) and coastal regions, whose economies depend very much on tourism, are even more vulnerable to the combined impact of the climate and COVID-19 crises, given that their tourism sectors have collapsed as a result of COVID-19 travel restrictions, while ocean acidification is causing coral bleaching, and rising sea levels could readily wipe some island communities out of existence.

The vulnerability to climate change is a reflection of wider development issues, including poverty; massive infrastructure gaps in various sectors (e.g., energy, water, agriculture, transport, and ocean-related facilities); low levels of institutional development; and overwhelming capacity constraints. The COVID-19 crisis has occurred at an inflection point during the climate crisis. This is reflected in the categorical calls by citizens, civil society, the private sector and other stakeholders for a better post-COVID-19 world that is more resilient to such shocks.

A post-pandemic world should take stock of the crises and challenges that existed before and their linkages with the pandemic, devise solutions, and build a better, more equitable, resilient and sustainable world. Governments worldwide, but mainly in developed countries, have invested more than \$12 trillion in COVID-19 crisis relief stimulus packages. However, most of the stimulus packages do not sufficiently incorporate climate resilience and ecosystem sustainability into their recovery plans. Furthermore, developing countries – particularly those that are most vulnerable to climate change, such as African SIDS – have fiscal deficit and liquidity challenges that make it difficult to implement meaningful stimulus packages, while developed countries make very little allowance for those vulnerable countries in their stimulus packages. Furthermore, the commitment made by developed countries at the fifteenth Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Copenhagen in 2009, to provide \$100 billion per year in climate financing to developing countries, has never materialized.

A recent report by the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) of the United Nations, entitled “Building forward for an African green recovery”,² shows that governments can seize the moment during this narrowing window of opportunity to build a more climate-resilient world by shifting stimulus investments and interventions towards green recovery options. In so doing, countries can ride out the triple storm of pandemic, climate change, and economic devastation to build more resilient economies, with better jobs and economic growth, while meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement.

There are many similarities between the crises induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and climate change, as well as significant differences. Both crises pose an existential threat to Africa countries, which are also suffering the consequences of related disinformation and “infodemics”. How can the lessons and experiences of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic be harnessed to promote green and blue resilient recovery, along with climate-informed, post-pandemic reconstruction through concerted global partnerships, solidarity, and a strong multilateral framework? This is the central question for discussion at the Third Africa Climate

² Available at <https://www.uneca.org/sites/default/files/com/2021/E2100302-Building-Forward-African-Green-Recovery.pdf>.

Talks (ACT!),³ which is being held as part of a webinar series by the African Climate Policy Centre (ACPC) of ECA on “Climate change and development in Africa: African perspectives on climate-resilient recovery from COVID-19”.⁴

Africa Climate Talks is a series of events to engage Africans from all spheres of life in a stimulating and wide-ranging discourse, informed by emerging common African positions on a range of pertinent issues affecting the continent’s development agenda, within the context of an evolving and complex global geopolitical landscape. It serves as a platform for the discussion of African perspectives on key issues at the intersection of climate change and Africa’s transformative development trajectory. The Africa Climate Talks series seeks to drive multi-level climate action by enhancing public awareness of the implications of climate change, along with its challenges and opportunities for Africa.

The second session of the Third Africa Climate Talks is being co-organized in partnership with the University of Cabo Verde.

Objective

The objective of the second session of the Third Africa Climate Talks is to explore the convergence of the COVID-19 and climate crises, and what this means for vulnerable communities and global climate governance and action during and beyond the pandemic. Specifically, it will bring together participants from academia, civil society, the private sector, regional institutions and development partners in Africa to stimulate a pan-African discourse aimed at contributing to the emergence of an African narrative, with particular emphasis on African SIDS, to respond better to climate change in the time of COVID-19 and beyond. It will focus on building resilience through the development of green and blue economies, and on realizing and ensuring the means of implementation, by building on the respective capabilities of each country and the firm principle of common but differentiated responsibilities that’s enshrined in UNFCCC.

Key topics for discussion

To ensure that there is adequate discourse and engagement on the aforementioned regional climate change challenges, the deliberations will be organized into sessions to discuss the following key topics:

- Riding the combined climate, COVID-19 and economic storm: regional and global perspectives.
- First climate change. Now COVID-19. The North-South divide continues. What then for Africa? What expectations from the twenty-sixth Conference of the Parties to UNFCCC (COP 26)?
- From vulnerability to resilience through the green/blue economy. What will it take? Challenges and opportunities for Africa, especially for African SIDS and coastal economies.

³ Launched in 2015, the Africa Climate Talks (ACT!) series is an all-of-society initiative that seeks to democratize the climate change and development narrative in Africa by engaging all stakeholders, from the local, national, subregional and regional levels, in fully inclusive discussions to catalyse organic African perspectives on climate change and development, which will contribute to climate resilience and the realization of the 2030 Agenda and Agenda 2063.

⁴ See <https://repository.uneca.org/handle/10855/43764>.

Five break-out groups, each addressing one of the topics listed below, will facilitate the consolidation of key messages coming out of the second session of the Third Africa Climate Talks:

- What should Africa seek to leverage from COP 26, and how can that be done?
- Africa's voice and agency in the global climate governance and geopolitical landscape – lessons from Africa's journey in the UNFCCC process during the time of COVID-19 and beyond.
- Building resilience: innovative ideas for African solutions to Africa's climate and recovery challenges.
- One for all, and all for one. What constitutes climate justice and a just recovery/transition for Africa?
- Tapping the green/blue economy for African SIDS and coastal economies: challenges and opportunities beyond COVID-19.

Expected outcomes

- Enhanced voice and agency for Africa in global climate governance and in the resulting geopolitical landscape in the time of COVID-19 and beyond.
- Better understanding of how to leverage the linkages between climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting economic crisis, to build forward towards a green and resilient future for Africa beyond the pandemic.
- Strengthened regional strategies and global frameworks for a just transition towards resilient economies and the attainment of the goals of the Paris Agreement.

Target audience

The primary target audience of the Africa Climate Talks is African non-State actors (civil society, academia, the private sector, young people and other marginalized groups), within the context of UNFCCC, as well as policymakers, regional and subregional institutions, and development partners.

Venue and date

The second session of the Third Africa Climate Talks will be a virtual event hosted by ECA in collaboration with the University of Cabo Verde. It will take place on 17 and 18 May 2021.

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