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Africa's Priority Areas for COP30: Navigating A New Geopolitical Reality

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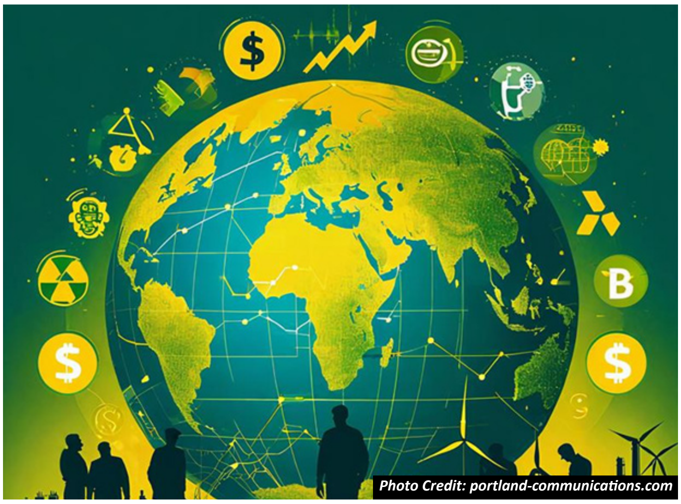
Executive Summary

Africa approaches the 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30) in Belém at a moment of unprecedented climate urgency and destabilizing geopolitical shifts. The continent faces cascading climate impacts such as droughts, floods, and food system disruptions that erode development, destabilize governance, and fuel insecurity. This crisis is intensified by a volatile global diplomatic landscape. President Donald Trump's renewed withdrawal of the United States from the Paris Agreement in 2025, coupled with his September 2025 United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) speech dismissing climate change as a hoax, marks a fundamental shift in global climate consensus. His administration's fossil-fuel agenda and threat to exit the UNFCCC deepen the credibility crisis in climate finance and emissions commitments.

This context makes a unified African bloc at COP 30 more critical than ever. Africa's strategy must shift from vulnerability to agency. The Addis Ababa Declaration from the Second Africa Climate Summit (ACS2) offers a strong counter-narrative. It emphasizes African-led solutions and the links between climate, peace, and justice. The brief recommends embedding climate security in adaptation, reframing migration as proactive adaptation, and advancing a just energy transition

that expands access and drives industrialization. By uniting as a strategic bloc, Africa can present itself not as a victim but as a partner for global stability and sustainable growth. Success at COP30 will depend on Africa's ability to forge coalitions with willing states and investors. Geopolitical fragmentation should be turned into a moment of strategic assertion.



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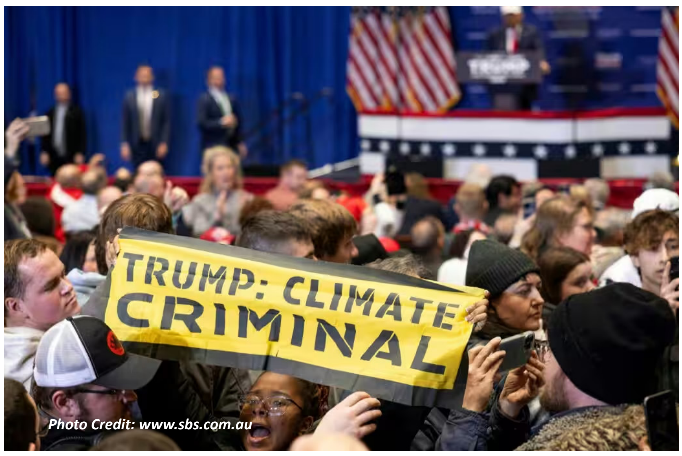
Context

Climate change continues to disrupt Africa's development trajectory in unprecedented ways. Prolonged droughts in the Horn of Africa, devastating floods in Mozambique and Malawi, and intensifying heatwaves across the Sahel are dismantling agricultural production systems and forcing millions into vulnerability. These shocks are no longer seasonal anomalies but permanent features of a worsening climate crisis. They not only erode livelihoods but also weaken governance systems, reduce fiscal space for social spending, and exacerbate inequalities across society. Communities that rely on rain-fed agriculture, informal labor, and fragile infrastructure are among the most exposed, with limited options to adapt or recover.

The outcomes of COP29 in Baku highlighted both progress and significant limitations. Negotiators advanced work on the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG), proposing interim financing of $300 billion annually by 2035, with discussions on scaling up to $1.3 trillion. Yet the absence of enforceable commitments mirrors the credibility gap that followed the unmet $100 billion pledge. The capitalization of the Loss and Damage Fund at $770 million, although a step forward, pales in comparison to Africa's estimated annual climate-related losses in the hundreds of billions. The underlying problem remains structural inequities in global climate finance and barriers that prevent the timely delivery of resources.

Regionally, African-led initiatives have articulated strong visions but struggled to secure delivery. The Nairobi Declaration (2023) and the Addis Ababa Declaration (ACS2, 2025) outlined ambitious agendas on climate finance, food systems resilience, technology transfer, and climate-peace linkages. ACS2 in particular emphasized the inseparability of climate justice, peace, and security, reflecting the lived reality of African states where environmental shocks drive conflict and instability. Yet progress remains uneven due to fragmented institutions, limited negotiating leverage, and a global financing system skewed against the continent.

The geopolitical environment further complicates Africa's path to COP30. Trump's dismissal of the climate agenda intensifies this fragility by undermining global contributions and weakening multilateral consensus. His stance risks emboldening



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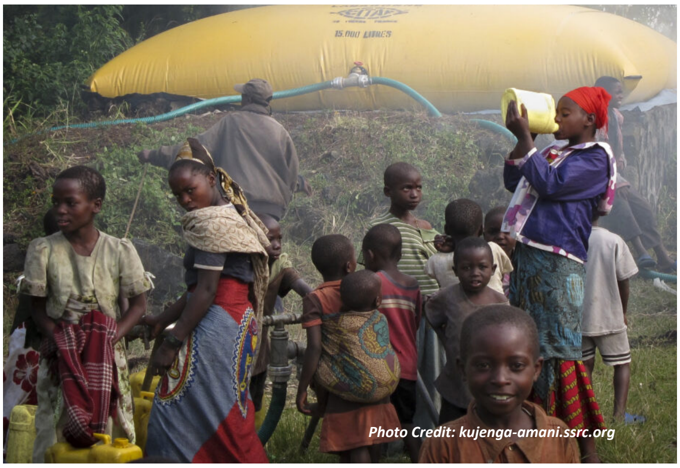
other reluctant states, further fragmenting negotiations, and delaying delivery of urgently needed resources.

As COP30 approaches, Africa must recognize that climate diplomacy is no longer insulated from global geopolitical shifts. The polarization between states advancing rapid climate action and those reversing commitments will shape both the ambition and credibility of outcomes in Belém. In this fractured landscape, Africa's leverage lies in acting as a unified bloc, presenting bankable projects, insisting on enforceable accountability, and framing its demands not as vulnerability pleas but as justice-driven, peace-centered solutions critical to global stability.



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Key Issues

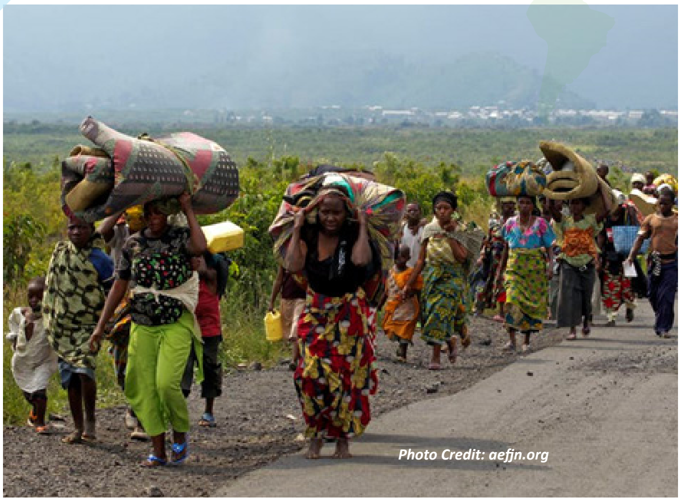
Climate Security & Peacebuilding

Climate change is an active threat multiplier across Africa. Recurrent droughts, floods, and heat stress have eroded livelihoods, intensified competition over scarce natural resources, and contributed to spikes in food insecurity and displacement that feed local grievances and insurgent recruitment. In 2024, in parts of the Horn and Sahel regions, millions were displaced by weather disasters, undermining fragile local governance and heightening the risk of communal and insurgent violence. The ACS2 declaration explicitly recognized the climate–peace–security nexus, calling for integration of climate-sensitive conflict prevention, early warning, and community-level resilience as a foundation for regional stability. Yet global climate frameworks still treat security as secondary, detaching adaptation from the realities of instability on the ground. Ignoring the linkage between climate and peace risks undermining the very programs intended to build resilience.

In recent years, debates over whether climate change should be treated as a security issue have remained politically fraught at the global level. Proposals to establish a permanent agenda item on climate-related security risks have continued to face pushback from major powers. Equally, within the UNFCCC process, negotiations under COP27–29 acknowledged adaptation and finance shortfalls but stopped short of embedding conflict-sensitive approaches, reflecting a persistent reluctance to merge security with climate governance. This institutional divide forces African states to manage climate-driven instability largely through their own regional mechanisms, such as AU peace missions and early-warning systems that are chronically underfunded. While the Addis Ababa Declaration elevated the climate–peace agenda regionally, the absence of corresponding recognition in global climate frameworks risks leaving Africa's security challenges politically acknowledged but materially unsupported.

Climate-Induced Migration

Climate change is no longer only an environmental concern for Africa, but it is reshaping demographic and geopolitical dynamics with consequences that extend beyond the continent. The World Migration Report 2024 documents that more than 7.5 million Africans were displaced by droughts, floods, and storms in 2022, while the World Bank's Groundswell study projects that up to 34 million people in West Africa's coastal zones could be forced to relocate by



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2050 if global warming continues unabated. These movements are not confined to African borders. Intensifying drought in the HoA and advancing desertification in the Sahel are already contributing to irregular migration across the Mediterranean, while coastal erosion and livelihood collapse threaten to amplify pressures on Europe's southern borders. Climate-related mobility must therefore be understood as both an adaptation strategy for vulnerable African communities and a global governance challenge that directly engages European and US interests.

Current Western responses, however, are largely securitized. The EU has expanded investment in border externalization and deterrence through its New Pact on Migration and Asylum. Equally, in September 2025, President Donald Trump used his address to the UN General Assembly to portray migration as a destabilizing force for advanced economies. He further called for stronger borders and a return to traditional energy sources. Such positions entrench restrictive narratives that frame migrants as threats rather than recognizing climate change as the structural driver of displacement. This framing overlooks a critical reality where Africa contributes less than 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions yet disproportionately bears the human and economic costs of climate disruption.

Just Energy Transition

Africa faces the twin challenge of acute energy poverty and the global push for decarbonization. Nearly 600 million people on the continent still lack access to electricity, yet Africa attracts less than 3 percent of global clean-energy investment despite its vast solar and wind potential. This chronic underinvestment constrains growth, perpetuates dependence on fossil exports, and risks locking African economies into high-carbon, low-value pathways.

The global energy transition, however, is unfolding unevenly. Advanced economies continue to depend heavily on fossil fuels to power their industries and set global energy prices, while at the same time urging Africa to leapfrog directly to renewables. In September 2025, President Donald Trump's address to the UN General Assembly openly called for a return to fossil fuels, signaling a retreat from the Paris Agreement and reinforcing a fossil-first narrative. China, Russia, and even EU states also remain reliant on coal and gas, even as they push forward with selective clean-energy investments and impose green protectionist measures that limit access to affordable renewable technologies.

This creates a deep structural paradox. Africa is encouraged to embrace renewable energy but faces higher costs, limited subsidies, and systemic barriers

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in global markets. Without equitable financing and genuine technology transfer, the energy transition risks becoming another form of dependency, in which Africa shoulders the adjustment costs while developed states continue to capture the rents of both fossil and green markets.

COP30 therefore, represents an opportunity for Africa to recast the transition as a question of developmental justice rather than a narrow decarbonization exercise. African negotiators can make the case that universal electrification, industrial competitiveness, and job creation must stand alongside emissions reductions as core benchmarks of success. This would mean pressing for concessional and predictable financing, revenue-replacement mechanisms for fossil exporters, and de-risking tools to attract private capital into renewables. It would also require technology-transfer commitments that enable local manufacturing and value addition rather than locking Africa into dependence on imported equipment.

Finance & Accountability

Finance underpins every other element of Africa's climate agenda, yet remains the weakest link in global governance. The continent's experience with unmet pledges, such as the $100 billion shortfall and now the fragile rollout of the NCQG, has entrenched skepticism about the credibility of multilateral promises. Africa's persistent underrepresentation in global finance flows is not just a numbers problem; it reflects structural inequities. Borrowing costs for African governments remain two to three times higher than the global average, even as the continent confronts escalating climate shocks. This systematically erodes fiscal space, leaving governments forced to choose between debt servicing and climate investment. Beyond scale, the architecture itself is skewed as climate finance is dominated by loans rather than grants, flows largely bypass


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local authorities, and disbursement timelines are misaligned with the urgent nature of climate shocks.

This credibility crisis is further complicated by geopolitics. The U.S. withdrawal from climate finance commitments in 2025 has deepened uncertainty, sending signals that could embolden other reluctant contributors and undercut collective targets. Meanwhile, advanced economies are introducing green protectionist policies such as carbon border adjustment mechanisms and restrictive renewable technology subsidies that limit African exporters' competitiveness and raise the cost of the very transition they advocate. African states are being urged to accelerate decarbonization while being denied equitable access to affordable finance, technology, and markets.

At COP30, Africa's core task is therefore not only to demand more finance but to reshape the rules of delivery. This means pressing for mechanisms that lock in accountability, including clear schedules, disbursement tracking, and an agreed grant-to-loan balance. Africa also needs to push for systemic reforms, such as concessionality linked to vulnerability and expanded debt-for-climate swaps. Regional facilities like the proposed African Climate Facility should be empowered to pool and direct resources more effectively. Crucially, climate finance must be reframed not as a siloed issue but as the backbone of Africa's climate agenda. It determines whether the continent can embed conflict-sensitive adaptation, manage climate-related migration, and pursue a just energy transition. Without enforceable reforms, every other pillar of Africa's COP30 agenda risks being stranded at the level of declarations rather than delivery.

Conclusion

Africa enters COP30 facing intersecting crises of finance, energy, migration, and security, yet also with significant leverage. The continent contributes least to global emissions but bears disproportionate climate costs, and its demographic weight, resource endowments, and strategic location make its demands impossible to ignore. What emerges from Belém will determine whether climate finance becomes a credible backbone for just transitions and resilience, or whether credibility gaps widen further. For Africa, the task is to frame climate action not as charity but as shared investment in global stability anchored in enforceable finance, equitable energy transition pathways, and mobility strategies that recognize climate displacement as a governance challenge, not a security threat. In doing so, African negotiators can shift the debate from promises to delivery, aligning climate justice with long-term global peace and prosperity.


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Recommendations

1. **The African Union Group of Negotiators & African Ministerial Conference on the Environment should:**

a) Coordinate a unified African bloc at COP30 to strengthen negotiating leverage across all core issues.

b) Lobby for enforceable COP30 commitments linking adaptation finance to conflict-sensitive programming and early-warning systems.

2. **Ministries of Finance & Central Banks should:**

a) Operationalize the African Climate Facility to pool resources for adaptation, migration management, and energy transition projects.

b) Advocate for COP30 binding accountability mechanisms, predictable disbursement schedules, and transparent grant-to-loan allocations aligned with Africa's vulnerabilities.

3. **Ministries of Energy should:**

a) Secure concessional renewable financing and technology transfer agreements to enable a just energy transition.

b) Negotiate revenue-replacement mechanisms for fossil-exporting states to support industrialization and energy access while phasing down high-carbon energy sources.

4. Ministries of Urban Development & Internal Security should:

a) Position migration as a managed adaptation strategy in COP30 discussions, emphasizing urban resilience and infrastructure.

b) Engage EU and US counterparts during COP30 to link support for African adaptation with reduced migration pressures on their borders.

5. Peace & Security Councils (AU, RECs, national) should:

a) Advocate for COP30 outcomes that integrate conflict-sensitive governance in climate adaptation funding.

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