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THEME:

Africa's Climate Diplomacy at COP31: Mobilising Investment for Sustainable Development, Regional Security, and Economic Resilience

Africa's engagement at COP31 must move beyond calls for climate finance towards shaping how investment is mobilised, allocated, and translated into development outcomes. The continent faces interconnected challenges of energy poverty, food insecurity, youth unemployment, environmental degradation, and climate-related disasters. These undermine livelihoods, strain public finances, and threaten human security. COP31 offers an opportunity to align climate diplomacy with economic transformation, regional cooperation and resilience-building. The Presidency's Action Agenda identifies clean energy transition, food security, youth and education, oceans and seas, and zero waste among its ten priorities. These provide entry points for advancing Africa's development interests. However, commitments must be matched by stronger project preparation, regulatory coordination, institutional capacity and accountability to ensure climate investments deliver measurable gains in productive capacity, livelihoods, resilience and regional stability.

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Leveraging COP31 for Clean Energy Transition and Electrification in Africa

Africa's energy challenge is not simply a shortage of electricity generation, but the limited capacity to provide reliable and affordable electricity to households, businesses and public institutions. Around 600 million people in Africa remained without access to electricity in 2024, despite the continent possessing substantial renewable energy resources. This deficit constrains industrial productivity, limits the delivery of essential services and raises the cost of doing business, particularly for small enterprises. The International Energy Agency estimates that approximately US$15 billion in annual investment is required to achieve universal electricity access by 2035, yet less than US$2.5 billion was committed to new electricity connections in sub Saharan Africa in 2023.

The financing gap reflects structural barriers extending beyond the availability of capital. Weak transmission and distribution infrastructure, high project preparation costs, currency risks, uncertain regulatory environments and limited purchasing power undermine the commercial viability of energy investments. Although private capital can expand investment, relying exclusively on market based financing risks excluding rural communities and low income households where returns are less attractive. African governments therefore need to combine public investment, concessional finance, guarantees and carefully regulated private participation to address different market conditions.

At COP31, African countries should prioritise investment frameworks that connect electricity generation with transmission, distribution, storage and productive use. Regional power pools can improve electricity trade, expand market size and reduce the costs associated with fragmented national energy systems. National governments should strengthen independent regulation, improve utility performance and establish transparent procurement arrangements, while development finance institutions provide risk mitigation and long term capital. The African Union and regional economic communities should support cross border infrastructure planning and harmonised



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electricity markets.

The central measure of progress should be whether new investment expands reliable electricity access and supports economic activity. Governments should track new connections, electricity reliability, affordability, renewable energy integration, industrial electricity consumption and the participation of underserved communities. These indicators would help distinguish projects that merely increase generation capacity from those that improve access and productivity. Without this shift towards integrated energy planning, Africa risks expanding its energy infrastructure without adequately addressing the economic and social constraints that make electricity inaccessible to millions.

Tuesday 3rd November 2026

Advancing Africa's Climate Agency at COP31 to Mobilise Investment in Food Resilience in Eastern Africa

Food insecurity in Eastern Africa increasingly reflects the interaction between climate variability, conflict, displacement, weak agricultural productivity and disruptions to regional markets. Droughts, floods and unpredictable rainfall undermine crop production, livestock systems and household incomes, while conflict and trade disruptions restrict access to food even where supplies are available. Data covering five countries in the Intergovernmental Authority on Development region shows that the number of people facing Crisis level food insecurity or worse increased from 13.9 million in 2016 to 41.7 million in 2025. This deterioration demonstrates that emergency food assistance alone cannot address the structural vulnerabilities affecting regional food systems.

Climate related shocks become particularly damaging where agricultural production depends on rain fed systems and where farmers lack access to irrigation, insurance, improved inputs, storage and reliable market information. Weak transport infrastructure and fragmented cross border trade arrangements further increase the cost of moving



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food from surplus to deficit areas. Conflict and insecurity compound these constraints by disrupting farming, displacing communities and limiting humanitarian access. Consequently, food resilience requires coordinated action across climate adaptation, agricultural investment, conflict prevention, infrastructure development and regional trade.

COP31 offers African governments an opportunity to advance a shift from reactive humanitarian interventions towards sustained investment in resilient food systems. Priority areas should include climate smart agriculture, water harvesting, irrigation, drought resistant crops, livestock protection, storage infrastructure and climate information services. National governments should integrate these priorities into agricultural and climate adaptation plans, while regional institutions strengthen early warning systems, cross border trade and coordinated responses to food supply disruptions. Development finance institutions should expand affordable financing for smallholder producers, agricultural cooperatives and enterprises operating across regional value chains.

Eastern Africa's food security challenge cannot be resolved through production increases alone. Governments must also address the institutional and market failures that prevent vulnerable households from accessing available food and participating in productive value chains. COP31 commitments should therefore be assessed against improvements in agricultural productivity, household food access, market connectivity, water security and the capacity to anticipate climate shocks. Reducing the recurrence of food emergencies will require treating resilient food systems as an economic and regional security priority rather than primarily a humanitarian concern.

Wednesday 4th November 2026

COP31: Investing in Youth and Education for Climate Resilience, Peace, and Stability in Africa

Africa's expanding youth population presents a significant development opportunity, but the continent's ability to realise this demographic dividend depends on whether economic and political institutions respond to young people's aspirations. The International Labour Organization estimates that 70.9 million African young people aged 15 to 24 were not in employment, education or training in 2025, representing 23.2 per cent of the youth population. This challenge persists despite improvements in educational access and economic growth across several African countries. The disconnect between education, employment opportunities, economic participation and political inclusion risks deepening frustration among young people.

The problem cannot be attributed to education systems alone. Fragmented economic, social and political initiatives often fail to connect skills development with labour market demand, enterprise opportunities, social protection and meaningful participation in public decision making. Climate change compounds these vulnerabilities by threatening agriculture, fisheries, pastoral livelihoods and other sectors that support significant proportions of young people. Where institutions cannot provide credible pathways to economic security and participation, exclusion can contribute to social discontent, political instability and susceptibility to mobilisation around grievances.

COP31 should therefore be used to position

position youth investment as an integral component of climate adaptation, economic transformation and peacebuilding. African governments should strengthen technical and vocational education, expand green skills development and connect training institutions with employers, research centres and emerging industries. Climate finance should support youth led enterprises in renewable energy, sustainable agriculture, waste management, ecosystem restoration and the blue economy. Governments should also strengthen mechanisms through which young people influence climate policy, local development planning and decisions affecting their livelihoods.

The credibility of these interventions will depend on whether they create accessible and sustainable opportunities rather than isolated training programmes. Progress should be measured through employment outcomes, enterprise survival, access to finance, participation in decision making and the inclusion of young women and vulnerable groups. Education must be connected to productive economic opportunities and institutions that recognise young people as contributors to development. Otherwise, the demographic dividend could become a source of heightened social and political pressure rather than a foundation for inclusive growth and stability.



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Harnessing Africa's Blue Economy for Sustainable Development, Maritime Security, and Regional Cooperation

Africa's oceans, seas, lakes and other aquatic ecosystems provide significant opportunities for food production, trade, tourism, employment and renewable energy. Fisheries and marine resources support coastal livelihoods, while ports and maritime transport connect African economies to international markets. However, pollution, overfishing, habitat destruction, illegal fishing and climate related changes threaten the ecological systems on which these economic activities depend. These pressures also create governance challenges for coastal states whose maritime resources and security interests extend beyond national boundaries.

The economic potential of the blue economy remains constrained by inadequate marine infrastructure, limited scientific information, weak enforcement and fragmented maritime governance. Illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing can undermine local livelihoods, reduce public revenue and weaken the capacity of states to manage their marine resources. Climate change, including ocean warming, acidification and rising sea levels, increases pressure on coastal settlements and marine ecosystems. Addressing these challenges requires governments to connect environmental protection with maritime security, investment planning and regional cooperation.

At COP31, African countries should advocate for financing that supports sustainable fisheries, marine ecosystem restoration, coastal protection, maritime surveillance and resilient port infrastructure. National governments should strengthen fisheries regulation, improve monitoring and enforcement, and integrate marine conservation into development planning. Regional organisations should deepen information sharing, coordinate action against illegal fishing and strengthen cooperation on shared marine ecosystems. Development partners and private investors should support infrastructure and technology that create local value while maintaining ecological sustainability.

Africa's blue economy will generate lasting benefits only if resource exploitation is matched by effective governance and fair distribution of economic opportunities. Governments should monitor the health of marine ecosystems, the sustainability of fish stocks, the contribution of ocean based sectors to employment and income, and the effectiveness of maritime enforcement. Coastal communities must also have a meaningful role in decisions affecting access to marine resources and the protection of their livelihoods. Stronger regional cooperation is essential because environmental degradation, maritime crime and resource pressures cannot be contained within national jurisdictions.



Photo Credit: african.business

COP31: Advancing Circular Economies and Waste Governance as Drivers of Sustainable Development and Environmental Security in Africa

Africa's rapid urbanisation, population growth and expanding consumption are increasing the volume and complexity of waste generated across cities and settlements. In many countries, collection systems, disposal facilities and recycling infrastructure have not expanded at the same pace as urban development. Poor waste management contributes to water and soil pollution, public health risks, blocked drainage systems and increased vulnerability to flooding. It also represents a loss of potentially valuable materials that could support manufacturing, employment and local enterprise development.

The persistence of these challenges reflects weaknesses in municipal financing, regulatory enforcement, infrastructure investment and coordination between national and local governments. Informal waste workers already perform important collection, sorting and recovery functions, but often operate without adequate recognition, occupational protection or access to formal markets. Limited investment in recycling facilities and material recovery systems further constrains the development of viable circular value chains. Addressing waste therefore requires more than public awareness campaigns or periodic clean up initiatives; it requires a functioning economic and institutional system for reducing, recovering and reusing materials.

COP31 provides an opportunity for African governments to mobilise investment in waste collection, sorting, recycling, composting and safe disposal infrastructure. National governments should establish clear standards for producer responsibility, improve enforcement and create incentives for businesses to reduce waste and incorporate recovered materials into production. County and municipal authorities should strengthen waste management planning and financing, while development finance institutions support investment in viable recovery and recycling facilities. Policies should also recognise informal waste workers through appropriate occupational protections, integration into service delivery



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arrangements and access to enterprise opportunities.

The transition to circular economies will ultimately depend on whether governments can make resource recovery commercially viable and institutionally accountable. Progress should be assessed through improvements in waste collection, recycling and recovery rates, reduced open dumping, private investment and employment across circular value chains. Effective waste governance can reduce environmental and public health risks while creating opportunities for local manufacturing and enterprise development. For African cities, the priority is to build systems that prevent waste generation, recover economic value from materials and protect communities from the consequences of unmanaged disposal.

CONCLUSION

Africa's climate diplomacy at COP31 should be judged by its ability to convert international commitments into investments that address the continent's interconnected development and security challenges. Energy access, food resilience, youth inclusion, sustainable marine resources and circular economies are not separate policy concerns. They are mutually reinforcing foundations of economic transformation and social stability. Their effective implementation requires predictable climate finance, stronger national institutions, coordinated regional frameworks and meaningful participation by communities and businesses. African governments should therefore approach COP31 with clear investment priorities, credible implementation plans, and measurable outcomes that strengthen resilience while advancing inclusive and sustainable development.

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