

REPORTING CLIMATE CHANGE: A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR AFRICAN JOURNALISTS

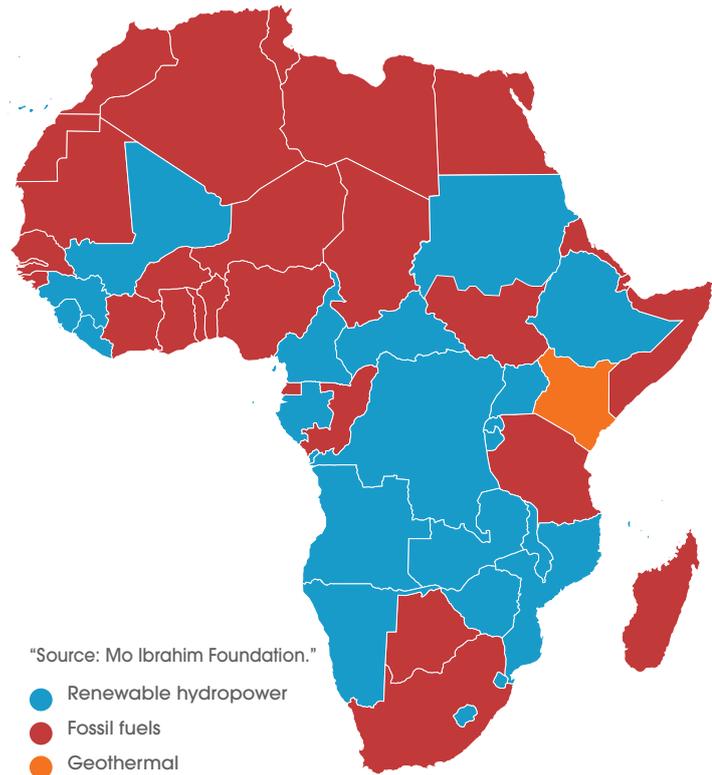
The Future is Bright: Why Africa Could Be a
Global Clean Energy Powerhouse



China 中南项目
Global South Project

The Quick Take

Africa has already made massive strides toward renewable energy, and it has the potential to be a future green energy superpower. This report outlines the continent's options for a just green transition. It also outlines both the progress made so far and the significant challenges.



22 African countries use renewable energy as their main electricity source, but less than half their populations have access to electricity

The Story in Numbers:

3.8% the share of global greenhouse gas emissions produced by Africa, compared to China (23%), the US (%19) and the EU (2020) (13%, CDP)

55.94% the rate of electrification on the continent (2020, World Bank)

5 - 15% the percentage of GDP Africa is losing to climate change annually

55.2 GW how much renewable energy capacity has been installed (2021, IRENA)

18% Africa's current contribution of renewable energy sources to electricity generation from hydro, solar, wind, geothermal and bioenergy.

\$1.2 - \$2.0 trillion how much money is needed before 2030 for Africa to transition to green energy

32% by 2030 in 2021 African nations committed to reducing collective carbon emissions by 32%

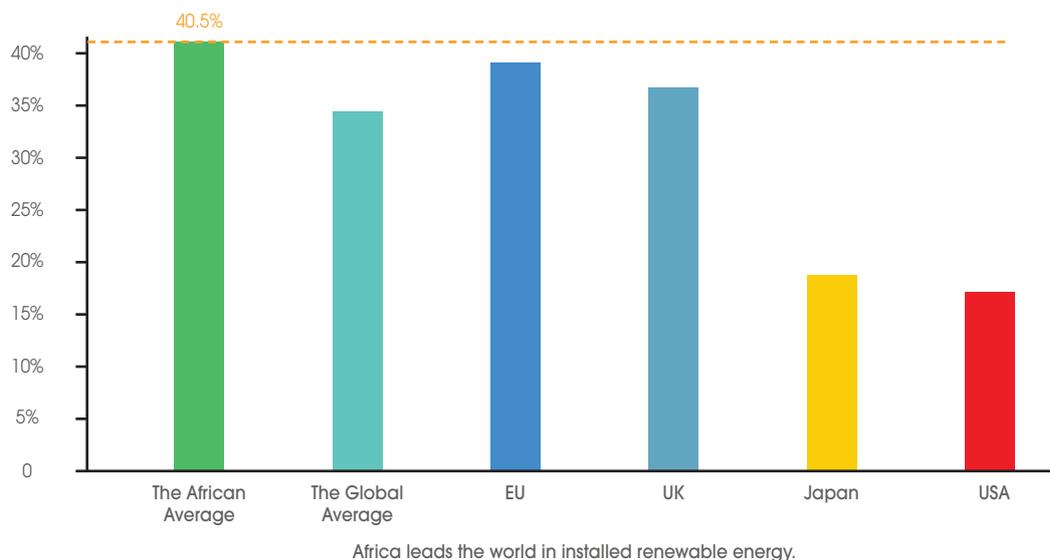


Three things you should know:

1. African nations are caught between the need to provide energy for a rapidly growing population and the imperative to avoid using fossil fuel energy sources to do it.

2. African leaders are lobbying to exploit the continent's fossil fuel, in particular gas, reserves to solve energy poverty on the continent.

3. Africa has more clean energy potential than any other continent, some 39% of the world's clean energy potential.



Introduction

Climate change does not recognize national borders. The reality that some nations are less responsible for the climate crisis than others, on account of lower current and historical carbon emissions, does not change the fact that we share one planetary system. Disruptions to this system affect us all and protecting it is a shared responsibility.

It will take the committed action of every nation to limit the potentially devastating consequences of climate change by transitioning away from the use of the fossil fuels responsible for global warming and towards more sustainable, renewable energy economies. That said, each country's options for how to achieve

this progress are different, as are the challenges facing them. Africa faces major challenges, including accessing funding and fostering an appropriate skills base. However, Africa also has significant renewable energy potential, and many African countries are moving towards accessing them.

In the report, we provide a high-level overview of Africa's just energy transition. First, we unpack the idea of a just energy transition. Then we focus on some of the initiatives already in progress on the continent. Finally, we show Africa's unique potential for renewable energy.

From Just Transitions to Just Energy Transitions

The term 'just transition' has its origins in the labor movement of the 1990s. North American trade unionists coined the term to describe what they believed was needed for workers who were losing their jobs as a result of emerging environmental protection policies. This approach would see a fair process for workers transitioning away from jobs, such as those in the coal

sector, towards more environmentally and socially sustainable work.

When the United Nations (UN) framed the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, it integrated the just transition agenda, specifically in the goals of decent work for all, clean energy for all, climate protection and poverty eradication.

What is the Green Economy?

The Green Economy is defined as low-carbon, resource efficient, and socially inclusive. In a green economy, growth in employment and income is driven by public and private investment into such economic activities, infrastructure, and assets that allow reduced carbon emissions and pollution, enhanced energy and resource efficiency, and prevention of the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services.

The notion of a green economy does not replace sustainable development but creates a new focus on the economy, investment, capital and infrastructure, employment and skills, and positive social and environmental outcomes.

The concept has also made its way into the global climate change conversation and formal negotiations. The Paris Agreement, a legally binding international treaty on climate change that was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris in 2015, refers to “the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities ...”

Including social responsibility and access to clean energy in the climate change narrative has broadened its scope. Within the climate change space, ‘just transition’ is the globally acknowledged framework for managing the social and economic impacts of moving away from fossil fuel for energy generation, which is the primary cause of carbon and greenhouse gas emissions, and subsequently climate

change. With energy introduced into the equation, a just energy transition is one that ensures the benefits of shifting to a sustainable or ‘green economy’ are shared widely, while those countries, regions, industries, communities, and workers who stand to lose economically are adequately supported.

For Africa, integrating climate adaptation, energy access, and development is key. In theory, the continent can use emergent green energy technology to overcome entrenched development backlogs while boosting development through new green economies. However, this would depend on forging development plans that put Africa’s green energy potential at the heart of development plans. This report focuses on outlining that potential, while subsequent reports will suggest a roadmap toward making the most of them.

Managed well, transitions to environmentally and socially sustainable economies can become a strong driver of job creation, job upgrading, social justice and poverty eradication. Greening all enterprises and jobs by introducing more energy and resource efficient practices, avoiding pollution and managing natural resources sustainably leads to innovation, enhances resilience and generates savings which drive new investment and employment.

- International Labor Organization (2015)



Africa's Just Energy Transition in a Global Context

The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) represents a global commitment by countries to cooperatively find a solution to managing climate change.

Climate science tells us that, to avoid climate disaster, we need to limit average global warming to no more than 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. This would require that the world achieves global net-zero emissions - where the amount of greenhouse gases emitted equals the amount removed from the atmosphere - by 2050. To achieve this, all economies will have to kick their fossil fuel addiction and transition away from energy technology built on coal, oil, and gas, towards more sustainable economies and renewable fuel sources.

Given the disparity in national responsibility for emissions, reliance on fossil fuels, and countries' ability to transition, the matter of how this will be achieved has been contentious. The UNFCCC recognizes that because of these disparities, which have resulted in extremely different socioeconomic conditions, countries have different duties

and abilities to address the effects of climate change.

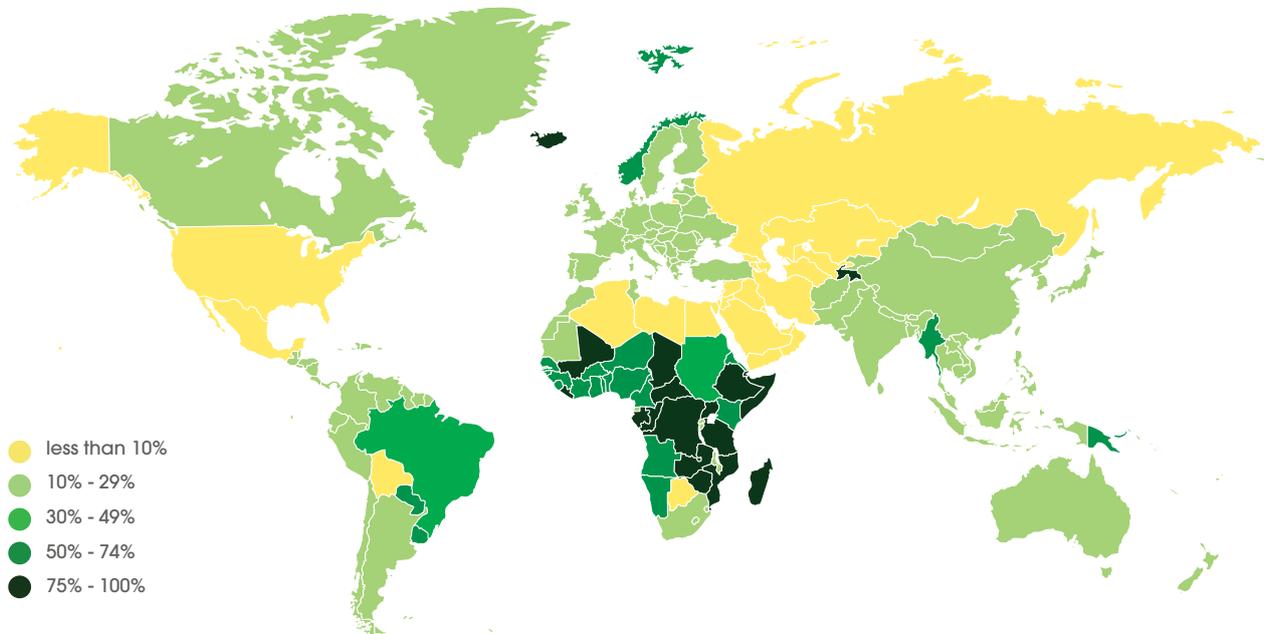
This approach is reflected in the 2015 Paris Agreement (PA), which may have found some balance in that it requires both developed and developing countries to commit to economy-wide emissions reductions while recognizing the different national circumstances of developing countries and placing the responsibility on developed countries to lead mitigation and finance efforts.

In practice, this means that there is an expectation that developing nations, African countries among them, will leave their fossil fuel resources untapped in favor of transitioning to renewable energy sources, thereby 'leapfrogging' the exploitation of their fossil fuel reserves and the associated potential carbon emissions into green economies. This has been controversial in African development circles, with some advocating for a special dispensation that would allow Africa to exploit some of its fossil reserves for development, while others have warned that this exposes the continent to the risk of stranded assets.

Important as this debate is, it shouldn't overshadow a bigger truth: Africa is uniquely rich in renewable energy potential. This potential is so substantial

that the continent can power its own development and export energy to the rest of the world if it manages these resources well.

Africa Leads in Renewable Energy Potential



Source: Mo Ibrahim Foundation

African Goals for a Just Energy Transition

As part of its logic of differentiated responsibilities, the UNFCCC process has included the obligation for the use of renewable energy sources, including solar, wind, hydroelectric, geothermal, and even hydrogen, to be financed by developed countries. Mitigation costs for a clean energy transition in Africa have been estimated at about \$190 billion annually to 2030.

At the same time, 53 of the 54 African countries – the exception being Libya – have submitted Nationally Determined Contributions to reduce their carbon emissions under the Paris Agreement.

While progress differs between the different African nations, a review released in January 2023 indicated that the 47 African countries that ratified the PA appear to have already collectively reduced their carbon emissions intensity by about 80.76 % of their pledges. This puts them far ahead of the Global North.

The just energy transition eludes a universal definition, with African visions for what it might entail varying as much as the nations that make up the continent. However, a few recent initiatives give some insight into Africa's current position.

- **The Kigali Communiqué** was signed in May 2022 by high-level representatives from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Uganda, and Zimbabwe. It reveals Africa's intention to pursue its pathway to a net-zero future aligned with the objectives of the Paris Agreement while urging easier access to financing.

- **African Common Position on Energy Access and Just Transition** led by the African Union Commission and other pan-African institutions in 2022 speaks to a balance between ensuring electricity access and catalyzing socio-economic growth in Africa while transitioning towards an energy system based on renewable and clean energy sources and the intention to deploy all forms of abundant energy resources, including non-renewable energy, to reach its ambitions.

- **The Desert to Power Initiative** focuses on the Sahel, a region that suffers under ongoing conflict fuelled by systemic underdevelopment. Yet the Sahel also has some of the highest solar energy

potential in the world. The Desert to Power Initiative aims to produce 10GW of solar energy, which will provide power to 250 million people via public and private means by 2030. Focusing on the G5 Sahel countries (Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Niger, and Chad) the project will combine grid and off-grid projects to expand access to both cities and rural areas.

- **Grand Inga Hydropower Project** in the Democratic Republic of Congo could produce up to 40,000 MW of electricity, twice the power generation capacity of the world's current largest dam, China's Three Gorges, and equivalent to over one-third of the total electricity produced in Africa. The project has faced numerous challenges, especially due to instability in the DRC. Hydropower faces its own climate-related challenges in the form of accelerating cyclical droughts, and while the Grand Inga project has been stuck in development for years, regional powers like South Africa and Nigeria have committed to purchasing some of its energy output. At present it's unclear when the project will move forward.



The Bottom Line:

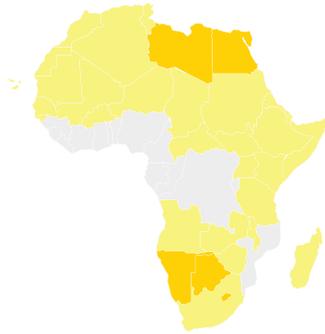
Africa is unique in the world in that it combines huge renewable energy potential with a significant energy capacity backlog. This means that it could in theory 'leapfrog' directly into accelerated development driven by abundant renewable energy resources. In reality, this energy revolution is hampered by a few key barriers:

- The lack of sustainable funding mechanisms is due to lapses in the global development financing system.
- Resistance by developed economies to meeting their commitments under the UNFCCC
- Hydrocarbon bias and resistance to renewables among African elites
- Too few comprehensive and mutually supported renewables-focused economic development plans are shared between African countries.

The latter is a particularly glaring problem. However, the first step toward such a plan is a focus on Africa's world-unique potential to become a new energy powerhouse. The future is bright – one just needs to see it.

Africa's Renewable Energy Potential

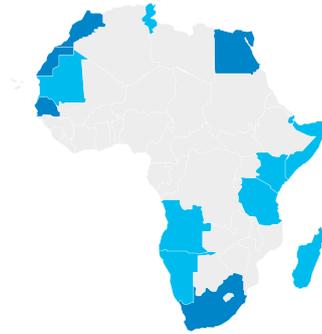
1. Solar



- **High Solar Potential**
 Morocco, South Africa, Sudan, Algeria, Eritrea, Zimbabwe, Chad, Niger, Zambia, Djibouti, Somalia, Madagascar, Mauritania, Tunisia, Ethiopia, Cape Verde, Mali, Angola, Malawi, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Gambia, Tanzania, Kenya, Central African Republic, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, South Sudan
- **Global Top 10 Solar Potential**
 Namibia, Egypt, Lesotho, Libya, Botswana

Source: World Bank

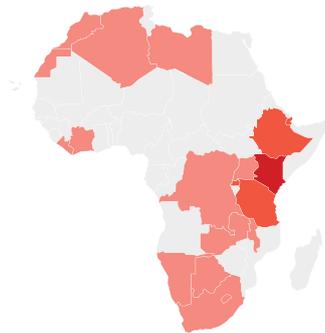
2. Wind



- **Countries Already Generating Wind Energy**
 South Africa, Senegal, Morocco, Egypt
- **Countries With High Wind Energy Potential**
 Madagascar, Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, Tanzania, Mauritania, Tunisia, Namibia, Angola

Source: Science Direct

3. Geothermal



- **Currently using geothermal energy**
 Kenya
- **Actively preparing geothermal energy capacity**
 Rwanda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Tanzania
- **High geothermal energy potential**
 South Africa, Lesotho, Namibia, Botswana, Zambia, Malawi, Uganda, DRC, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Libya, Morocco, Algeria

Source: Geothermal Energy Journal

4. Green hydrogen



- **Countries Currently Implementing Green Hydrogen Projects**
 Mauritania, Namibia, South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Djibouti, Kenya

Source: Energy Capital Power



Insights about covering climate change from leading journalists across the continent

Senior Climate Journalists' Tips and Insights on How to Improve Your Coverage of Africa's Just Transition and Climate Change Issues

Across Africa, balanced reporting on climate change matters is challenged due to the fact that the beat is fairly new and financial resources are scarce. These obstacles make it difficult not only for journalists assigned to cover these issues but also for their editorial directors who also learning about the story.

Senior climate journalists Aimable Twahirwa from Rwanda and Kimani Chege in Nairobi agree that most African journalists still don't fully understand the seriousness of climate change issues. They don't take climate change issues as

matters that will have implications beyond the one-off reports on disasters that are often produced based on press releases and interviewing experts.

It gets even more complicated when it comes to telling stories on Just Transition, a term that is fairly new in newsrooms. Climate journalists in Africa still have to grapple with limitations in telling their stories in ways that resonate with their audiences as far as just transition issues are concerned.

Twahirwa and Kimani spoke with Nairobi-based journalist Njenga Hakeenah about what needs to be done to improve the just transition coverage in African newsrooms.

NJENGA HAKEENAH: How well do you think African journalists, including those in your own newsroom, understand the fundamental aspects of just transition in the climate change discourse in Africa?

KIMANI: just transition is not very well understood. Climate reporting is not a very old beat, and those who report on it made the move from reporting environmental issues. In the same breath, climate reporting is quite wide and journalists find themselves reporting on any climate issue that comes to them. However, very few recognize the need to have a discussion about the equitable distribution of climate interventions. When it is discussed, they see it as the politics of climate change.

HAKEENAH: When we think about the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources, is there a particular African narrative or perspective on this topic or do most journalists largely rely on Western framing? How so?

TWAHIRWA: First of all, most African countries today aim at being fully powered by renewable energy, and when it comes to covering topics on transitioning from fossil fuels, some miss crucial aspects of the story since most of their coverage doesn't reflect local conditions, thus not engaging their audience directly. I will say that some journalists don't necessarily focus on climate risk formulation in their reporting which pushes them to rely on Western framing.

HAKEENAH: What needs to be done to improve climate change reporting in African news organizations to ensure that the coverage is consistent with African needs and narratives?

KIMANI: First, there is a need for a deliberate effort to establish climate desks in newsrooms. Then, these can be managed by journalists who are not only trained to report on climate change but also know how to do great stories/ storytelling so that the narratives can come out. It is one thing to report on a climate-related disaster, but it is another to report how this disaster affects current and future generations. This can be done beyond the breaking news stage.

TWAHIRWA: It is important to adopt solution reporting (eg: green mobility, beating plastic pollution) by telling Africa's climate story through an African lens, building on experiences and voices from communities affected by the climate crisis.

HAKEENAH: What kind of investments need to be made in newsrooms to better equip journalists to improve their reporting on topics like climate change and the just transition in order to amplify more African voices in the discussion?

TWAHIRWA: Capacity building for African reporters is key to producing high-quality journalism about climate change issues. Journalists need to understand the existing intersection of climate change and other sectors across the board and how this is affecting people's lives and local, regional, continental, and global levels.

KIMANI: The major investment is to provide grants that enable journalists to get resources to cover climate-related issues. Some of those most affected are in far-flung areas and the journalists find it hard to get a story without proper funding. There is also the need to provide training opportunities, especially on climate justice, carbon trading, and climate negotiations.

HAKEENAH: From your experience, what three things would you advise journalists covering climate change and just transition issues?

KIMANI:

1. Remain focused on those who are affected by climate change.
2. Explore all the areas touched by climate change in various news segments e.g. carbon trading for business desk, Climate justice in political news, how climate affects sports, and all other beats.
3. Don't be a climate activist, rather look for climate facts

TWAHIRWA:

1. Journalists need to find ways to compete with political and sensational news
2. Strengthening their capacity in understanding climate change issues remain crucial in Africa
3. There is a need to humanize climate in human interaction as a way to engage our audience



Kimani Chege is a journalist based in Nairobi. He reports on climate change and has written for several publishers locally and internationally. You can follow him on Twitter @Kymcee.



Aimable Twahirwa is a science journalist for more than two decades covering environmental topics. He is a graduate of science journalism and communication and an active member of several World Federation of Science Journalists programs. You can follow him on Twitter @ATwahirwa.

Reporting Guide: Resources for African Journalists

People, books and online resources focused specifically on African perspectives about climate change that will help you to improve your reporting on the subject.

Who to Follow



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Rebekah Shirley

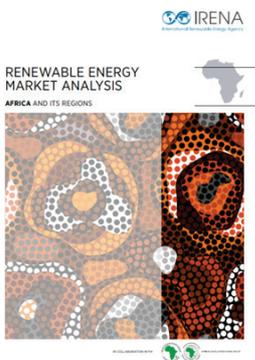
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Report Recommendations



just transition Research Portal

The South Africa-based research institute Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies (TIPS) produced a compelling portal for just transition information for SA that also provides many insights applicable to other countries across the continent.

Click here to view the TIPS Just Transition portal: bit.ly/JustTransitionAfrica



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