

An armful of scientific evidence underpins Africa's case at COP27

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The world looks to COP27 to negotiate our future against a ticking clock. With the event taking place on African soil this year, this is a valuable opportunity to gain climate wins for the continent. The African Group of Negotiators (AGN) has been representing the common interests of African nations as a bloc since 1995's first COP in Berlin, Germany, ensuring that Africa's voice on climate issues is heard over competing interests.



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Since 2015, they have been supported by the African Group of Negotiators Expert Support (AGNES), who provide scientific evidence to inform the African position by facilitating the exchange of ideas between experts and negotiators. AGNES has been working with Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation (OGRC) as well as researchers from their partner programme, Future Ecosystems for Africa (FEFA), to incorporate the latest science on African environments into Africa's COP27 position.

The African position can be encapsulated in four key points:

1. Adaptation is a priority for Africa,
2. Africa's climate vulnerability must be recognised,
3. Africa's agricultural sector must be a point of focus,
4. Developed countries should raise their climate ambition.

Emphasis on nature-based approaches

There is increasing emphasis on nature-based approaches for minimising the extent and impact of atmospheric CO₂ on climate change, and land- and ocean-based mitigation approaches have become a key part of the climate negotiations at the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) while also having large impacts for the Convention on Biodiversity.

The convention is a multilateral treaty which aims to conserve biological diversity, promote sustainable use of its elements, and to ensure the fair and equitable sharing of benefits from genetic resources.

The joint UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) report on biodiversity and climate change emphasises the critical need to address both of these challenges simultaneously, highlighting that several land and ocean-based actions to protect, sustainably manage and restore ecosystems have co-benefits for climate mitigation, climate adaptation and biodiversity objectives.

However, there is also a crucial acknowledgment that there are important trade-offs that need to be recognised and managed.



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Stumbling block to mobilisation

There are myriad suggestions for both ocean- and land-based climate actions, but the evidence-base and technical understanding of their value in an African context is often unclear, which is a stumbling block to mobilisation. Investment by private capital into mitigation and other nature-based approaches has much potential for impact but can also lead down many maladaptive pathways if not considered holistically and within scientific and local knowledge.

Further capacity for decision-making can sometimes be limited and many knowledge gaps remain on how most effectively to enhance climate action on land and integrate and strengthen ocean-based action. Non-state actors have a key role to play in fostering pathways that emphasise co-benefits from ecological approaches rather than just focusing on singular metrics.

The Future Ecosystems for Africa programme, in collaboration with AGNES and OGRC, recognised the need to mobilise African science and evidence from the continent to feed into these important discussions and provide an integrated, technical summary of the potential synergies and trade-offs between climate actions and sustainable development from the perspectives of African scientists and practitioners.



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Key scientific reasoning

At a “We Mean Business” event, which took place at Sharm el-Sheikh in November, FEFA and OGRC showcased the two technical reports that resulted from this initiative: *Enhancing climate change adaptation and mitigation actions on land in Africa*, and *Integration of ocean-based adaptation and mitigation actions into the regional and national climate policies in Africa*. Earlier in 2022, these technical documents helped to provide some key scientific reasoning to bolster some of the positions of African group member states.

Each document was pulled together by one main author with a review process and inputs from others, but they are as such starting points for a broader, more engaged conversation on the state of the science of climate mitigation and adaptation on the African continent.

Potentially this will make even stronger ties not just to the UNFCCC process (which could leverage more financing and also steer actions away from maladaptation), but also to the Convention on Biodiversity and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). These are starting points to launch a more African-informed evidence base to inform decision-making in the intergovernmental negotiations.



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Supporting a stronger, louder voice from Africa

Africa is a vigorous contributor to many forums engaging with climate change challenges: at COP, critically, but there is also a BRICS position that South Africa sits on, a UN Group of 77 (G77) position, and then the LDC (Least Developed Countries, which includes many African countries) and even SIDS (Small Island Developing States). No party except country designated negotiators can influence a position, but the science to help inform it comes from organisations such as OGRC, AGNES and FEFA.

The scientific evidence is enlisted to emphasise the need for coherence around land and the oceans on the continent, the importance of tying UNFCCC to other convention objectives so they do not undermine each other, to unpack some of the technical aspects of what mitigation potential looks like on the continent and its ecosystems, and to ensure co-benefits for adaptation, livelihoods and the environment from mitigation efforts.

Oppenheimer Generations Research and Conservation (OGRC) supports a stronger, louder voice from Africa, strengthened by African research on African priorities, and this is to be heard at COP27.

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