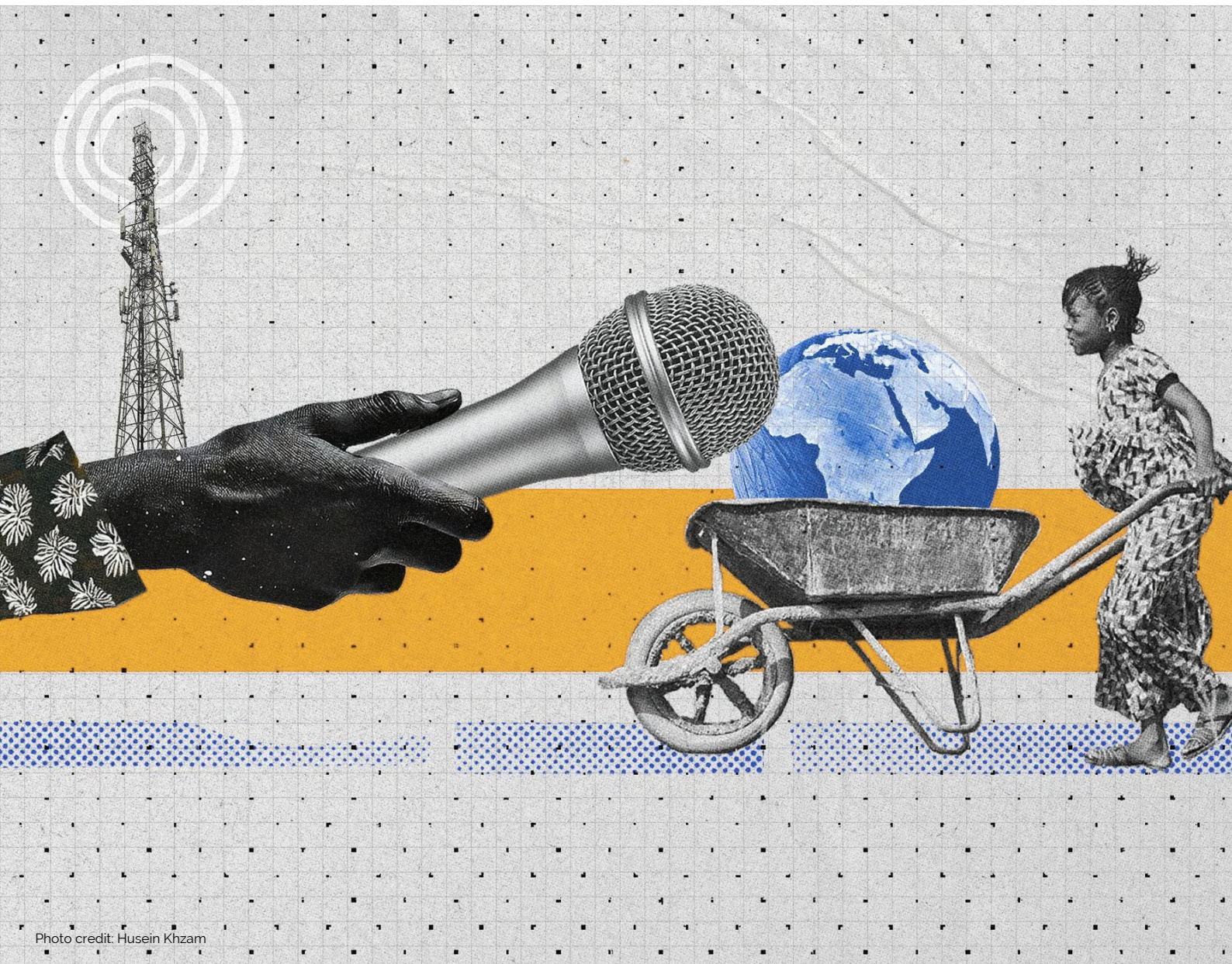


Telling Climate Change Stories: Perspectives from African Journalists

Authors: Dr. Grace Mbungu, Sage George, and Isabella Roberts



Dedication

This analysis is dedicated to our colleague and friend Mouhamadou Toure, who left us far too soon. His humanity, dedication to climate journalism and reporting, and immense contributions during his time in Berlin were invaluable to the success of the program and this publication.

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Our sincere gratitude goes to all the participants, who joined us in Berlin and online for their participation and contributions.

Our special thanks go to Edith Ogallo (Intern at APRI) for her research support and Simoa Nangle (Executive Assistant at APRI) who generously gave her time to take up the role of rapporteur during the climate reporting workshop in Berlin. We also acknowledge and appreciate the contributions and support of Phillip Offergeld and Kerstin Bückert (The Mercator Stiftung) on the day of the conference.

We would also like to thank the following organizations for their invaluable support in making this project a great success; the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), Stiftung Mercator, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, and the German Foreign Office.

Special thanks also go to the organizations that supported the participation and visitation of our participants during the program as well as all the participants in our conference on 03.05.2024 in Berlin and online.

About this Analysis

This analysis was developed with input and feedback from African journalists involved in the “*Climate Change Reporting in Africa program*” in Berlin/Potsdam between 2-7 May 2024.

The program was organized and hosted by MICT together with APRI and Angelina Davydova, a climate journalist, member of the World Future Council, and observer in the UN Climate Change negotiation process since 2008.

Participants engaged in a one-day conference and a half-day workshop on climate change reporting in Africa. These two events provided insights into the most urgent needs, challenges, barriers, and opportunities for climate change reporting while highlighting recommendations to local and international actors on supporting and improving climate reporting in the continent and globally.

Discussions emphasized the need to humanize climate change data to motivate broader societal awareness and action. They also spotlighted the scarcity of climate reporting by local journalists, underscoring the need for capacity development and access to data that supports effective, accurate, free, and independent reporting on the impacts of and solutions to climate change. Participants also shared examples of innovative projects and investigative journalism efforts tracking environmental degradation and pollution in some of Africa’s most vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

Contributors included 9 journalists from 8 African countries: Justice Baidoo – Ghana, Andiswa Makinca – South Africa, Banna Sabally – The Gambia, Mouhamadou Toure – Mali, Bernard Mwinzi – Kenya, Mary Kasoka – Zambia, Afy Malungu Bobyondo – The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Happy Mulolani – Zambia, Kra Akissi Marthe Benedicte – Côte d’Ivoire, and Vanessa Nakate, a youth activist from Uganda, who was also the workshop’s keynote speaker.

A draft was shared with all participating journalists to review the text and suggest ways to improve it.

This booklet aims to consolidate the themes and findings of the event to bring attention to the status and challenges of climate change reporting in Africa through the lens of local journalists.

Table of Contents

Foreword	5
Recommendations for Journalists and Media Houses	6
Recommendations for Local and International Policymakers and Actors	6
Introduction and Background	7
Status of Climate Reporting and Storytelling in Africa	8
Climate Change is Reported Through a Narrow Frame	8
The Majority of African Media Coverage of Climate Change is Episodic	8
Reporting and Communication is Dominated by Western Reporters and Media	10
Reporting Has a Tendency Towards Crisis Reporting	11
Importance of Local Climate Change Reporting and Storytelling	13
Examples of Climate Change Reporting and Storytelling by Local Journalists on and in Africa	15
Challenges to Climate Change Reporting by Local Journalists in Africa	18
Lack of Sufficient and Sustainable Funding for Climate Change Reporting	18
Access to Climate Change Data and Information	19
Threats and Risks to Life and General Well-Being	19
Limited Impact of African Journalists in International Climate Change Negotiations and Agenda-Setting	19
Negative and Crisis Narratives and Framing	19
Building a Culture of Effective Climate Change Reporting and Storytelling in Africa	21
Sufficient and Sustainable Finance	21
Institutional Support and Development	21
Access to Data and Climate Information	21
Capacity Building for Journalists and Editors	21
Localization of Climate Change Knowledge and Reporting	22
Prioritization of Local Solutions & Indigenous Knowledge	22
Key Messages	23
Endnotes	24
About the Authors	26
About the Organizations	27

Foreword

In 2022, I visited Turkana County in the Horn of Africa, where millions of people are at risk of famine after consecutive years of climate-induced drought. I spent the day at a UNICEF food program trying to help mothers and children suffering from severe malnutrition. Turkana is in the grip of its deadliest drought in 40 years and almost a third of its children are now suffering from acute malnutrition as a result. UNICEF treats the worst cases of severe malnutrition in Lodwar, the capital of Turkana County. I will never forget a young boy I met in a hospital there called Desmond. By the time his family was able to get him to the UNICEF food program, he was desperately unwell and suffering from chronic malnutrition. This condition is sometimes called "wasting" because the children are, quite literally, wasting away. We spent some time together. As the sun set later that day, Desmond died. He wasted away in front of our eyes.

This is the reality for millions trying to survive the climate crisis. Floods, droughts, and storms are becoming more frequent and intense causing farms to collapse. Extreme weather events are shattering communities around the world. The science of climate change is no longer disputed – the extraction and burning of fossil fuels primarily drives it. And while the increasing loss of livelihoods and lives is heartbreaking, there is an additional aspect to the climate crisis that is even more painful – its destructive injustice. Africa is the most vulnerable continent to climate change impacts under all climate scenarios above 1.5 degrees Celsius.¹ Yet despite being on the frontlines of the climate crisis, Africa is not on the front pages of the world's newspapers. I have only been able to tell Desmond's story because of my privilege in accessing and engaging on different platforms.

It is important to tell the stories of these frontline communities and put a human face on the climate crisis, illustrating that climate change is more than about weather, statistics, or data points; it is about people. This is why it is essential to amplify what is happening in affected communities and to highlight the solutions being implemented there to demonstrate the resilience of people working in them. I have always said that every activist (individual or community) has a story to tell. Every story has a solution to offer and every solution can change lives. We must highlight the most affected people and areas to show the possibility of a more equitable and sustainable world. By creating narratives that build hope and drive action, we work toward a better world.

But what does that world look like? We need an equitable fossil fuel phase-out, not just the reduction of emissions. This must be combined with a fair transition to renewable energy and the flow of loss and damage funds to the communities who need it the most.

One of the ways that we can ensure that nobody is left behind is by understanding the critical role of local journalists in our fight for climate justice. They are the ones on the ground and have the power to represent local contexts. They need to be supported and empowered to continue playing a vital role in creating a future that is sustainable and equitable for all of us.

By Vanessa Nakate
Youth activist, Uganda

Recommendations for Journalists and Media Houses



Emphasize **local contexts and Indigenous knowledge** to localize climate communication.



Focus on balanced climate reporting by **highlighting solutions**, not just crises.



Strengthen **investigative journalism**.



Enhance journalistic **networks and partnerships**.



Promote and implement **ethical climate reporting** practices.

Recommendations for Local and International Policymakers and Actors



Invest in **capacity building and training** for local journalists.



Improve **access to reliable climate information and climate data**.



Protect journalists reporting on climate change.



Provide **long-term and flexible funding**.



Support the **institutionalization of climate change reporting and storytelling** in diverse news mediums.

Introduction and Background

Africa is a continent of immense diversity encompassing a range of climates, ecosystems, and socio-economic contexts. This complexity means that the impacts of climate change and the responses required to address them differ dramatically between regions.

For example, while some areas face droughts and water scarcity, others experience flooding, sea-level rise, and other ocean disasters. This diversity requires a local approach to climate change reporting that takes the specific geographical, contextual, environmental, cultural, and economic conditions of each region into consideration. Local climate journalists can provide accurate and context-appropriate examples of climate change impacts and potential solutions, involving local and Indigenous knowledge that can serve positively for climate action. These perspectives are essential for providing a comprehensive understanding of the abstract nature of the climate, as well as highlighting the unique challenges and resilience strategies of diverse communities in Africa to promote solutions that are adapted to local contexts and needs.

The diversity and growing intensity of how climate-induced disasters are experienced by African communities set the continent apart from other regions of the world, regardless of the extent to which they are currently able to cope with their aftermaths. When a climate disaster occurs across many communities in Africa, pre-existing conditions make the situation hard to assess and manage. What appears in the news media, especially Western media, is immediate physical destruction and suffering. What is missed, however, are the layered impacts that threaten the immediate and long-term ability of such communities to

cope with impacts on the health and well-being of people and communities. This is where local journalists are invaluable, as they are keen observers of the additional social, economic, and geographical consequences. This gives them unmatched insight to effectively provide information about where help is most urgently needed. This information is crucial in preventing and coordinating disaster actions, protecting lives and livelihoods, saving lives, and humanizing climate impacts and actions.

There is also the issue of climate change justice. The continent of Africa, a group of 54 countries, contributes less than 4% of Global Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.² Despite being the least responsible for historical GHG emissions, Africa bears a disproportionate burden of its impacts. The Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN Index) shows that 9 out of the 10 countries most vulnerable to climate change are in Africa.³ This demonstrates a palpable injustice that is not of the continent's own making. Local journalists can play a critical role in highlighting these injustices, both within their countries and internationally. They are especially important in underscoring the historical responsibility and moral duty of polluting countries, documenting and exposing ongoing climate injustices, and holding powerful actors to account.

Finally, although the world is in the process of establishing the narrative of climate change, there is a shortage of media coverage from both local and international journalists in Africa. If African journalists do not tell their own story, someone else will do it for them and they will remain invisible. Support for local climate reporting is therefore urgently needed to provide perspectives and context to develop and communicate climate change narratives that align with the unique realities of African populations.

Status of Climate Reporting and Storytelling in Africa

The media's attention to climate change has been on the rise globally due to the frequency and intensity of severe weather events such as floods, wildfires, and extreme heat. According to Media Monitoring Africa (MMA), a steady increase in print media on climate change in Africa began in 2014, the year leading up to the adoption of the Paris Agreement⁴. This rise was complemented by advances in digital media and communication technologies, the use of social media platforms, online news portals, and social media apps, as well as the increase of environmental advocacy groups, civil society organizations, and grassroots movements. This section highlights some key trends.

Climate Change is Reported Through a Narrow Frame

The issue of how climate change impacts and solutions are framed and communicated was a recurring discussion between participating journalists. Lamenting the narrow framing of climate change, Vanessa Nakata, a climate justice activist from Uganda noted: *"While you often hear about floods, a flood can also mean that a community loses healthcare facilities, transportation networks, shelter, and entire livelihoods and lives. It can also upend social and economic facilities such as schools, sports, and markets."*

Respondents also took issue with how climate change actions are framed, communicated, and implemented. Bernard Mwinzi, a Kenyan journalist, gave an example of the opaque nature of carbon markets, noting: *"Government and academia aren't discussing it in a transparent way, which makes it difficult for the average African citizen to understand, engage, and benefit*

from it." The equitable energy transition in South Africa was another example: *"People weren't aware of what was going on, nobody was coming to them to tell them what was happening at a high level and how this might impact them on the ground."* said Andiswa Matikinca, a journalist from South Africa. Speaking of the injustices experienced by local communities, Afy Malungu Bobyondo, a Congolese (DRC) journalist, explained how, despite the investment of billions of dollars into the programs, there were no concrete plans or efforts to benefit local communities: *"While their main agenda is to preserve the forests, there is no consideration for how this will help the local communities... assessing things from a livelihood level should be the main monitoring level."* This narrow frame influences how communities experience climate change and how they benefit from climate change actions.

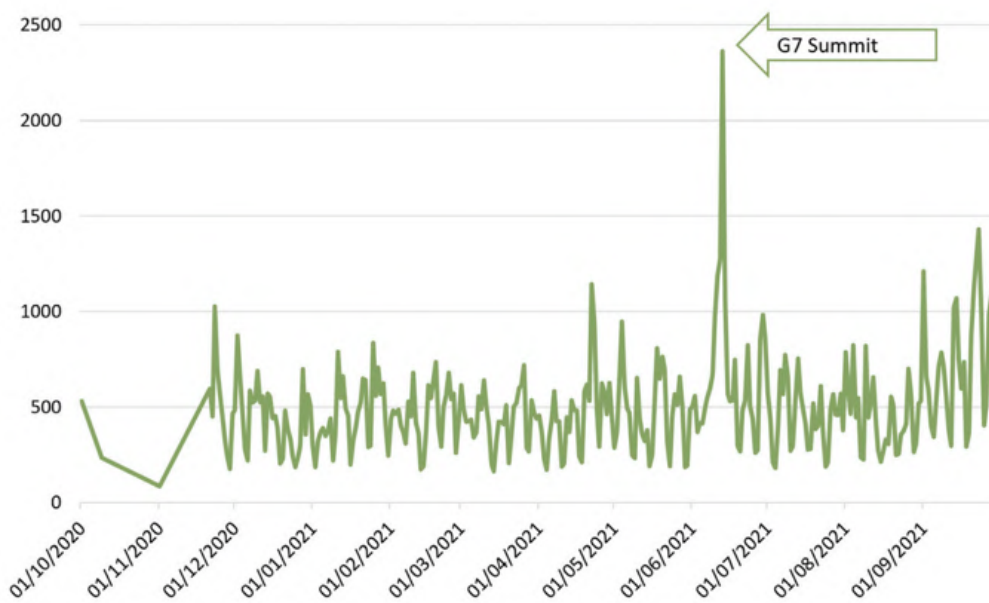
The Majority of African Media Coverage of Climate Change is Episodic

A frame analysis of mainstream news articles from 5 African countries (Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria, Madagascar, and Ghana) found that most of the African media coverage of climate change is episodic⁵. Spikes in reporting are usually related to major events, either catastrophes, disasters, or major diplomatic meetings. For example, in the period of analysis, coverage peaked during the G7 Summit (see Fig. 1) or when former Kenyan President Uhuru Kenyatta met with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken. Madagascar's frequent mention during the period of analysis could be attributed to the severe climate-related drought and famine it experienced at the time. This assessment is in line with the study conducted by Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, which revealed that approximately 73% (337 stories) of the climate change coverage focused on singular events like droughts, storms, floods, conferences, or meetings.⁶ Only 19% of the content consisted of analyses, opinions, or op-eds, while

investigative reports were the least common, making up just 8% of the total articles analyzed.⁷ This narrow focus allows the day-to-day experiences of local communities to go unreported. The distance between reported climate change effects and the experiences of the local populace creates significant shortcomings in communication on the climate crisis and available solutions. For instance, stories of

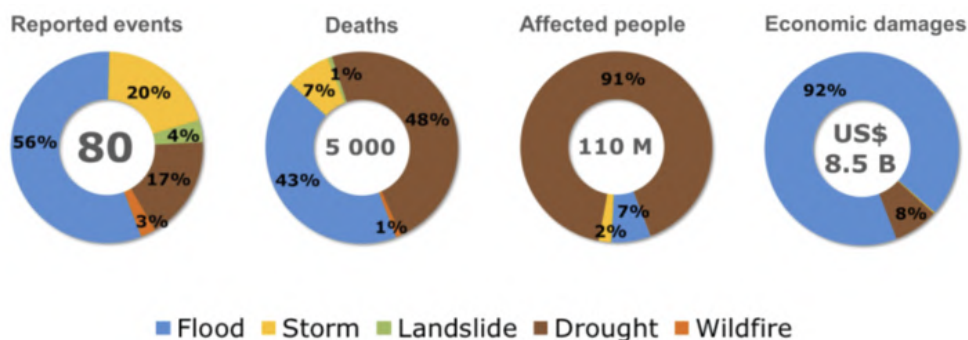
floods and storms are reported frequently but droughts are not, leading them to quietly wreak havoc in many communities (see Fig. 2). While the sensationalism of floods and storms is an obvious choice for newsrooms, the lack of reporting on day-to-day concerns prevents people from informing themselves and their communities on how to build resilience for current and future generations.

FIG 1: FREQUENCY OF AFRICAN CLIMATE CHANGE COVERAGE BETWEEN 1 OCTOBER 2020 AND 30 SEPTEMBER 2021



Note: From Pointer, R., & Matsiko, S. (2023). *How are Africans talking about climate change and who is doing the talking?* *Journal of African Media Studies*.

FIG 2: WEATHER- CLIMATE- AND WATER-RELATED DISASTERS IN AFRICA IN 2022.



Note: [Africa suffers disproportionately from climate change](#) (2023, September 4). *World Meteorological Organization*.

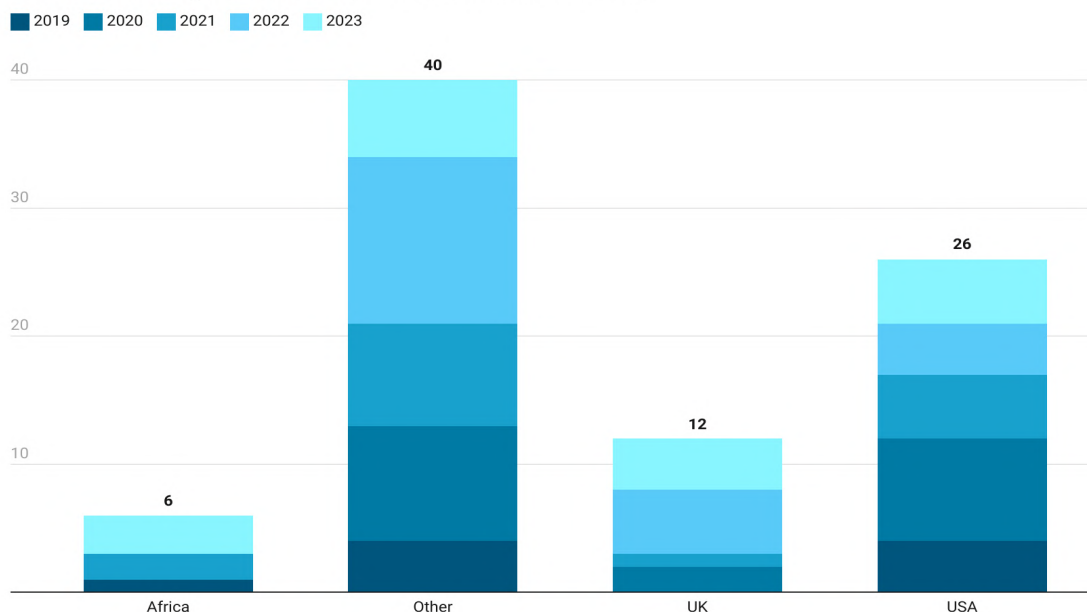
Reporting and Communication is Dominated by Western Reporters and Media

Analysis of articles and studies on climate change communication in Africa show that most of the reporting is dominated by Western journalists and actors.⁸ Pointer & Matsiko⁹ analyzed tweets containing the words 'climate change and Africa' or 'climate change' alongside the names of all 54 African countries. They found that of the top five tweets on climate change in Africa, only one was written by an African individual – Dr Robert Munang, deputy director of UNEP Africa. The only other prominent voices on the platform were NGOs based in Africa.

Globally, Africa is neglected in climate journalism and reporting by Western

media¹⁰. Western publishing houses often prioritize climate stories from their regions or other parts of the world. This is reflected in the list of "Best Climate Journalism for the Year" published annually by Greenpeace.¹¹ As shown in Figure 3 and 4 respectively, of the 84 print media articles listed from 2019-23, only 6 focused on a country or region in Africa, and all were written by Western journalists.¹² Only 7% of articles are dedicated to a continent that is home to 54 countries, is disproportionately impacted by climate change,¹³ and is home to 9 of the 10 countries most vulnerable to it.¹⁴ This is in direct contrast to the 26 articles (30%) that focused solely on the United States of America, underscoring the marginalization of climate change issues in Africa.

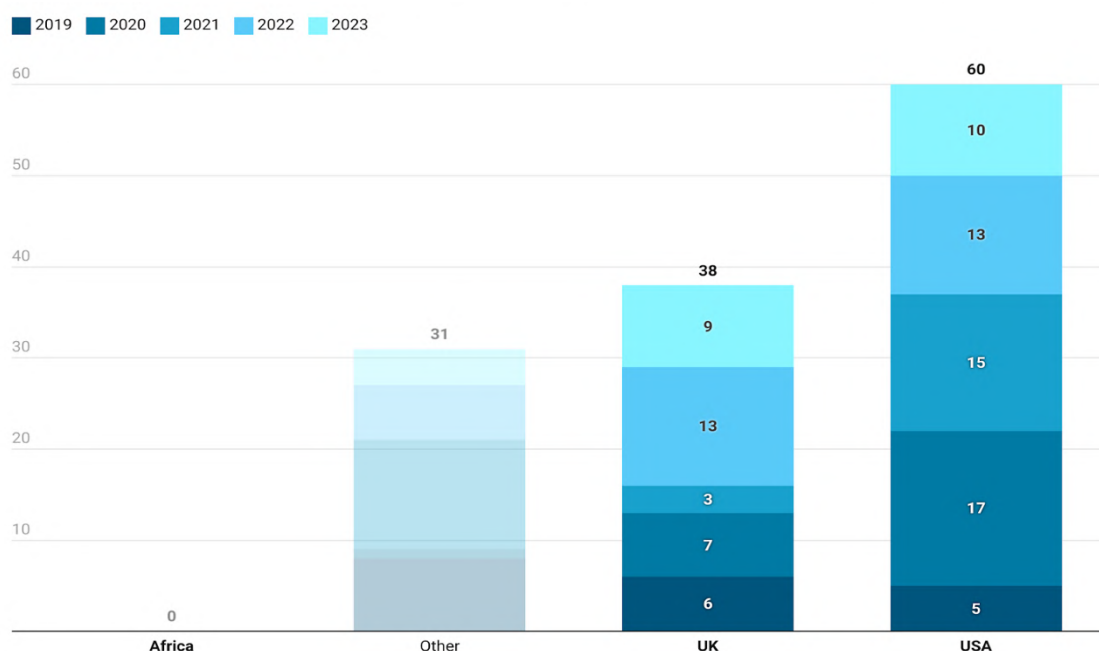
FIG. 3: NUMBER OF ARTICLES FOCUSED ON A SPECIFIC REGION BETWEEN 2019 AND 2023.



Note: The "Other" category contains countries from the Middle East, Asia and South America
 Chart: PARI • Created with Datawrapper

Note: Figure design by Micaela Rosadio (APRI) with data from 84 articles compiled in Sandler Clarke, J., Jordan, L., Ross, A. (2019-2023). The best of environmental journalism. *Greenpeace Unearthed*.

FIG 4: NUMBER OF JOURNALISTS NATIVE TO THEIR REPORTING AREA BETWEEN 2019 AND 2023.



Note: The category "Other" contains countries from the Middle East, Asia and South America.
 Chart: APRI • Created with Datawrapper

Note: Figure design by Micaela Rosadio (APRI) with data from 84 articles compiled in Sandler Clarke, J., Jordan, L., Ross, A. (2019-2023). *The best of environmental journalism*. *Greenpeace Unearthed*.

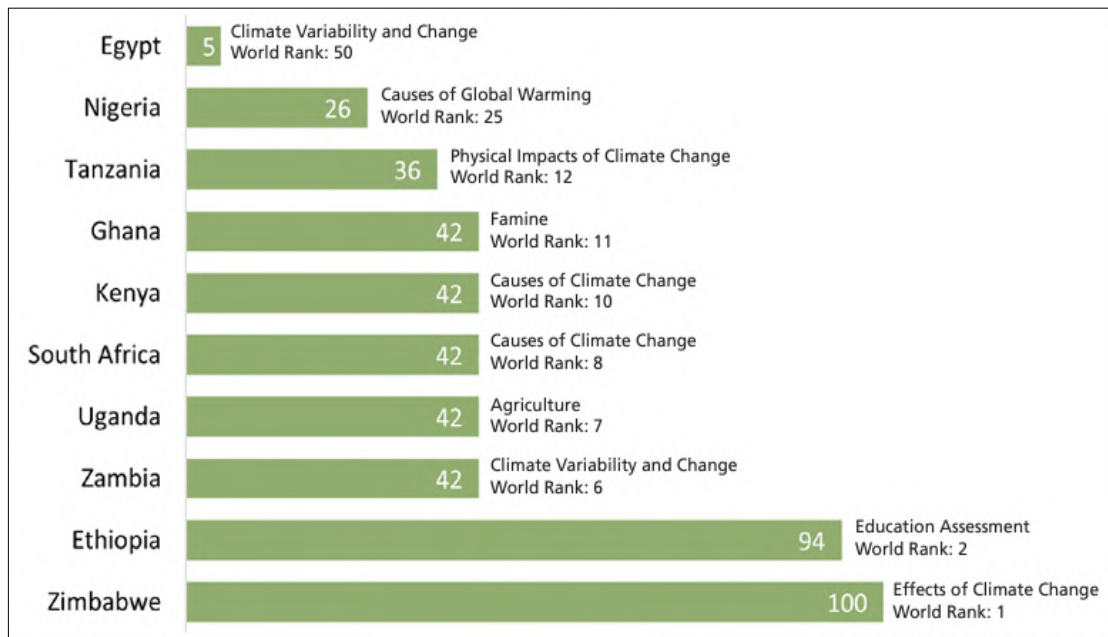
Reporting Has a Tendency Towards Crisis Reporting

Climate change reporting in and on Africa prioritizes crises and is dominated by catastrophic events (see Fig. 2) alongside framings of Africa as a victim needing rescue from the international community.¹⁵ Mary Kasoka, a Zambian journalist, referred to these framings as *'charity case.'* As shown in Figure 5, the most common climate change-related Google searches per country in Africa focused on climate change impacts and causes rather than mitigation measures or available solutions. This indicates that "Africans still want to understand the problem of climate change, rather than showing agency around solutions"¹⁶ and firmly places climate change mitigation and adaptation in the sphere of activists and government rather than grassroots, community action where solutions should be anchored.



Photo credit: jcomp

FIG. 5: TOP GOOGLE SEARCH TOPICS BY AFRICAN COUNTRY, 1 OCTOBER 2020 TO 20 SEPTEMBER 2021.



Note: From Pointer, R., & Matsiko, S. (2022, March). [Climate Change in Africa: Are Africans sleepwalking to disaster? Africa No Filter.](#)



Importance of Local Climate Change Reporting and Storytelling

All members of society need to know about climate change to adapt, build resilience, and limit further impacts. From our discussions with the participating journalists, it was clear that they play a crucial role in shaping beliefs, behaviors, and public policy through the dissemination of vital information that holds those in power accountable and places important issues on the policy agenda. More broadly, the media shapes perceptions and exerts influence beyond mere information. They also help their audiences create meaning, set priorities, and generate urgency.

For example, local journalists reporting on climate change can help provide early warnings on climate change risks, empowering people to make informed choices that save lives and preserve livelihoods. Through accurate and informed reporting, local journalists can shine a light on Indigenous knowledge and nature-based solutions that aid the cultivation of effective adaptation, mitigation, and resilience strategies and policies at national and local levels. Internationally, reports by local journalists help contextualize and humanize climate change, encouraging national policymakers and those in charge of international actions to develop a more granular understanding of climate change and its impacts without leaving anyone behind. Moreover, local climate journalism can bring local stories to global audiences, create awareness, and encourage the global community to act in solidarity with climate-vulnerable communities.

In Africa, local journalists are uniquely positioned to:

- **Highlight context-specific examples of climate-related impacts and actions:** The people of Africa need to be informed to seize opportunities to reduce the risks of climate change. Local journalists are critical for raising awareness and encouraging engagement by local organizations, funders, and the public and private sectors. Improved reporting can also help generate interest within broader society, adding more African voices and perspectives to climate change narratives and discourse at national and global levels.
- **Support informed and targeted climate action by both local and international actors:** Without the understanding of key political, social, economic, cultural, and contextual realities in diverse geographical contexts in Africa's rural, urban, coastal, and arid or semi-arid areas, even well-intentioned climate efforts are likely to miss the mark or cause harm. This could result in rejection, unsustainable processes, costly delays, and social unrest.
- **Hold leaders and powerful actors to account:** Accountability comes from local journalists investigating their governments, social actors, and businesses. Local journalists can maintain climate, environmental, and human rights accountability and support the pursuit of justice.
- **Address climate misinformation:** Building the capacity of local climate journalists can help counter the threats posed by climate change misinformation, which has become a major global threat.
- **Provide context-specific perspectives and insights on solutions to climate change:** Local journalists can bring essential

perspectives on climate impacts. Their understanding of local social and cultural values is an added asset in preserving human dignity and rights in climate change reporting.

- **Move climate change information from scientific and policy bubbles to the mainstream:** Despite advancements in knowledge on climate change and the lived experiences of its impacts, climate change remains abstract to a large part of society, which has been slow to catch up with the gravity of its challenges. By highlighting the connection between climate change and people's day-to-day lives, local journalists can bring climate information and solutions closer to people.
- **Humanize climate change and highlight blind spots:** Local journalists are often physically closer to the situations and people they are reporting, generating critical first-hand information that humanizes climate change stories and information. Moreover, their reporting can identify blind spots and generate nuanced local scale analyses to produce accurate and actionable information for decision-makers at home and abroad.



Photo credit: jcomp

Examples of Climate Change Reporting and Storytelling by Local Journalists on and in Africa

Despite mounting challenges, local journalists have engaged in various initiatives and activities to bring climate change issues to the attention of policymakers and society more broadly, as well as highlighting solutions. Below are some examples:

Name of Presenter	Andiswa Matikinca
Country of Origin	South Africa
Affiliated Organization(s)	Oxpeckers Investigative Environmental Journalism
Project/Activity	<u>#PowerTracker: Reporting the Renewables Revolution in Sub-Saharan Africa</u>
Main Issue Addressed	Investigating the human cost of the energy transition in Africa.
Description	Launched in 2022 in collaboration with the Center for Investigative Journalism, #PowerTracker gained traction in 2023 with the launch of the #PowerTracker mapping tool. The tool maps and tracks renewable energy projects and the decommissioning plans of coal-fired power stations across the Mpumalanga province, South Africa's energy heartland. The initiative was recognized in the Green Finance category of the 2023 Mail and Guardian Greening the Future awards. Investigations by #PowerTracker reporters showed that while projects like solar electricity in Mozambique showcased potential benefits, skepticism persisted among citizens, particularly regarding green hydrogen initiatives in Namibia.
Links and Images	<u>https://oxpeckers.org/powertracker/</u>

Name of Presenter	Happy Mulolani
Country of Origin	Zambia
Affiliated Organization(s)	National Agriculture and Information Services, Ministry of Agriculture, Zambia
Project/Activity	<u>Interconnection of Climate Change, Biodiversity and Conservation</u>
Main Issue Addressed	The importance of biodiversity and conservation in agriculture to address climate change impacts.
Description	Despite agriculture contributing 20% to Zambian GDP, farmers are producing significantly less than the desired standard due to challenges like soil degradation and desertification. Over 2 million farmers are affected by drought, which has prompted the president to declare a national disaster. Maintaining crop biodiversity and conserving soil health are key to sustainable farming. GIZ is aiding by building biomass through livestock health and promoting alternative livelihoods, including banning charcoal trading in three districts. Happy highlighted the need to share local and Indigenous knowledge through media and to translate climate change concepts into local languages, ensuring that women's and youth's voices are amplified to avoid a male-dominated narrative in farming.

Name of Presenter	Justice Baidoo
Country of Origin	Ghana
Affiliated Organization(s)	Journalist
Project/Activity	<u>Dangerous Storytelling: The Risks in Climate Journalism in Africa</u>
Main Issue Addressed	Journalists face risks to health and safety by reporting on climate change.
Description	Baidoo presents his experience reporting from the e-waste dumping site at Agbogbloshie. He elucidates that, due to the perceived proximity to the state, journalists are often treated with passive-aggressive sentiment and maltreatment, putting them in a precarious position. Moreover, reporting on pollutants in Agbogbloshie exposes journalists to toxic fumes and other harmful pollutants. Baidoo advocated for improved regulation and sustainable e-waste management strategies.

Name of Presenter	Mary Kasoka-Mwiikisa
Country of Origin	Zambia
Affiliated Organization(s)	Journalist
Project/Activity	<u>Climate Justice: Solution Journalism in Climate Change</u>
Main Issue Addressed	The importance of showcasing urgency and solutions in the face of the climate crisis to promote action for social change.
Description	Individual actions have a meaningful impact on reducing climate change impacts. Kasoka-Mwiikisa highlights that solution journalism amplifies underrepresented voices and local perspectives that have crucial information about the effects of climate change on a local scale.
Links and Images	<u>https://youtu.be/QTy3w-4rrVg?si=DEYEQD1OpocVjQp8</u>

Name of Presenter	Marthe Akissi
Country of Origin	Côte d'Ivoire
Affiliated Organization(s)	Radio Journalist
Project/Activity	<u>Outlooks and Partnerships for Better Climate Information in Africa</u>
Main Issue Addressed	How partnerships between scientists, NGOs, and media on climate change topics create comprehensive and accurate reporting.
Description	Akissi identifies some limitations in climate change reporting, such as confusion between climate and environmental issues, lack of interest in newsrooms, language barriers, and limited financial resources. She highlights how partnerships across civil society and academia can help overcome them and increase capacity. The Terra Africa project is an example of a partnership that supports francophone and lusophone African journalists in dealing with environmental issues.

Name of Presenter	Bernard Mwinzi
Country of Origin	Kenya
Affiliated Organization(s)	Nation Media Group
Project/Activity	<u>Together as One: The Interconnection of Climate Change, Biodiversity, and Conservation</u>
Main Issue Addressed	Human dependence on healthy ecosystems.
Description	Mwinzi highlights the key role that climate change reporting plays in strengthening connections between people and their environment. He delves into three stories that showcase how biodiverse systems work and the necessity of healthy ecosystems for human life. The stories emphasize the interdependence of humans and nature, showing that harmony is required for each to flourish.

Challenges to Climate Change Reporting by Local Journalists in Africa

Informed by the inputs of participating journalists, this section below highlights the key challenges and barriers limiting the capacity of local journalists in Africa.

Lack of Sufficient and Sustainable Funding for Climate Change Reporting

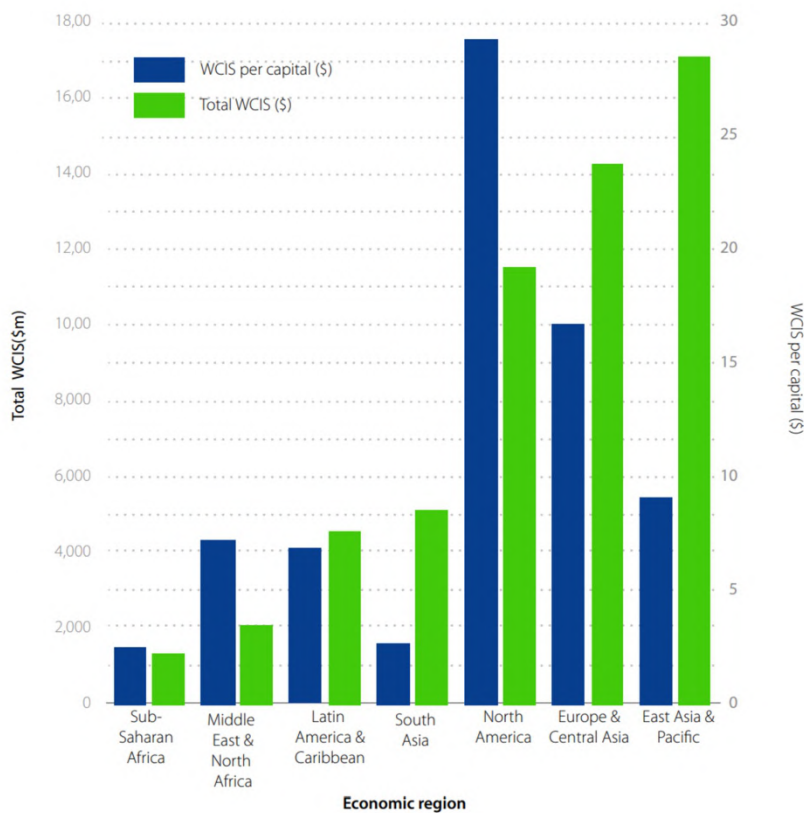
The biggest challenge to climate change reporting in Africa is access to finance. Many African journalists and media organizations

face financial constraints that hinder their ability to develop sustainable and independent models to provide timely and quality reporting.¹⁷

Figure 6 shows the financial resources available for weather and climate information services, with Sub-Saharan Africa having lower amounts than any other region in the world.¹⁸

According to contributing journalists, the lack of sufficient and sustainable finance constrains institutional capacity, infrastructure development, equipment purchasing, capacity building for editors and journalists, access to data and information, and fair compensation, restricting in-depth investigative journalism and limiting its audience. Many criticized the current project-donor funding models for their unsustainable, time-sensitive nature.

FIG. 6: PER CAPITA SPENDING (IN USD) AND TOTAL SPENDING (IN MILLIONS USD) ON WEATHER AND CLIMATE



Note: From Georgeson, L., M. Maslin and M. Poessinow. (2017). Global disparity in the supply of commercial weather and climate information services. *Science Advances*, 3(5):1-9. Accessed 14 June 2020.

Access to Climate Change Data and Information

There is limited access to public information and climate change science due to limited documentation, deliberate withholding of information, and/or bureaucratic handles. Speaking of the lack of transparency with climate change data, Afy Malungu Bobyondo, a journalist from the Democratic Republic of Congo, noted: *"It is very difficult to get experts to talk to you in a straightforward manner. So, you won't be able to get exactly what you want."*

Moreover, most print publications and websites require subscription fees to gain access. This hinders access to critical information for a significant portion of the global population, including local journalists. Climate change scientific concepts are also often complex and abstract, requiring adequate training to effectively understand and communicate. This not only undermines society-wide climate change awareness but also deprives policymakers of important information to guide climate policy and action equitably.

Threats and Risks to Life and General Well-Being

The security of climate-focused journalists is another major threat to climate reporting in Africa, and many journalists operate in hazardous environments, including regions affected by extreme weather events, environmental degradation, and political instability, all the while under threat of intimidation and violence from political interest groups and powerful entities invested in environmentally harmful practices.¹⁹ This has cost some journalists their lives.²⁰ They are also exposed to the numerous environmental air and water pollutants experienced by the vulnerable populations they document. A case in point is e-waste pollution in the urban coastal region of Agbogboshie, Ghana. In his bid to expose the injustices and advocate for

better e-waste management practices, Justice Baidoo, an investigative journalist from Ghana, was exposed to toxic fumes and other environmental hazards. The lack of protective gear and security personnel exacerbates these risks.

Limited Impact of African Journalists in International Climate Change Negotiations and Agenda-Setting

The perspectives of African journalists are rarely present in avenues where climate change narratives, actions, and policies are shaped, limiting their inclusion of accurate and timely information. For example, the Conference of Parties (COP), which acts as a meeting ground for countries to negotiate their climate change policies and priorities, has often been an area of struggle for African and other developing countries to influence outcomes. Africa's presence at COP has been in the form of negotiating with individual states and collectively through the Africa Group bloc, allowing smaller states to leverage their voices through the political capital of larger and more developed ones like Nigeria, South Africa, and Egypt.²¹ Since the start of COP in 1995, African delegations have grown faster than delegations from other regions, and many involve civil society, such as youth groups, NGO's, and journalists.²² However, larger delegations do not directly translate to greater influence over COP's outcomes, as demonstrated by the Global North's continuous deferral of its promises made to the Global South. African journalists also face a series of barriers to attending COP, particularly in the form of financial support and access to travel visas.

Negative and Crisis Narratives and Framing

Reporting with sufficient sensitivity and context is crucial for humanizing climate change in a way that preserves the human rights and dignity of the people in focus.

However, there is a tendency towards “crisis-centered framing” and the contextless portrayal of extreme suffering when it comes to reporting on climate change in Africa. This exploits the vulnerability of affected communities and strips them of their dignity. Madagascar provides a climate change communication case study in Figure 7. Word choices like ‘crisis,’ ‘brink,’ ‘insecurity,’ and ‘edge of starvation’ were used more often than hopeful language in reporting. With such framing, climate change mitigation efforts become understood as an attempt to keep the world from reaching a rapidly approaching but unavoidable point of no return.²³ Sensationalized reporting inadvertently portrays mitigation efforts as futile attempts to prevent an inevitable catastrophe, thereby fostering eco-anxiety and a sense of climate doomism. This undermines proactive measures and paralyzes necessary action.

Africa is home to 9 of the 10 most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts: Chad, the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Eritrea, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Sudan, Niger, Zimbabwe, and Liberia.²⁴ This necessitates urgent and decisive action involving balanced communication of both impacts and available solutions.

FIG. 7: COMMONLY OCCURRING PHRASES IN MEDIA ARTICLES ABOUT CLIMATE CHANGE IN MADAGASCAR, 1 OCTOBER 2020 TO 30 SEPTEMBER 2021

Key phrase	Times mentioned
contributed to Madagascar food crisis	17
Madagascar on the brink of	16
million people in Madagascar to	10
and COVID causing food insecurity	9
brink of climate change induced	9
edge of starvation UN says	9
silent says Madagascar climate activist	7
climate change and alleviating poverty	5
urges tougher action on climate	3
WFP says as millions globally	3
become routine worse warn climate	2

Note: From Pointer, R., & Matsiko, S. (2022, March). [Climate Change in Africa: Are Africans sleepwalking to disaster? Africa No Filter](#).

This framing also obscures the actions and solutions being implemented by policymakers and everyday citizens in Africa. It also masks the disproportionate responsibility of the main polluters in addressing climate change, denies African countries credit for their roles and contributions in addressing it, and makes it difficult for local journalists to provide balanced reporting.

Building a Culture of Effective Climate Change Reporting and Storytelling in Africa

The barriers and challenges underscored above have drastic implications for climate change awareness and action at local, national, and global levels. Given the scale and scope of needs, the future of climate change reporting in Africa will not be determined by any single action but will require the deployment of collaborative, multidimensional approaches between multiple actors. Informed by the inputs of contributing journalists, we propose several actions to support effective climate change reporting in Africa.

Sufficient and Sustainable Finance

Financing without strings attached is instrumental in building a culture of free, fair, and independent reporting on climate change. Sustainable funding should come from grants and core funding from the local public and private funders, international organizations such as philanthropies, foundations, or individuals, as well as partnerships with global media and publishing houses. Financing should also target investigative reporting over the long term and be used to assist delegations with training to participate in COP and other themed events. To address this, organizations like the Danida Fellowship Centre,²⁵ The African Development Bank, and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa²⁶ offer support for African journalists to attend and report on COP.

Institutional Support and Development

Journalists and editors do not exist in a vacuum, and their work is only made

possible through collaboration between experts and support staff. Funding and financial support alone are insufficient to build the institutional capacity to bring timely and accurate climate information and data to the wider public. Strong institutions are also critical for the safety of climate change journalists to ensure that they are provided with proper training in risk assessment and management, as well as providing them with equipment and support from local networks and security personnel. By prioritizing the health and safety of climate reporters, we can ensure that they continue to play a crucial role in raising awareness and driving action on climate issues across Africa.

Access to Data and Climate Information

Local journalists need access to science-based information about climate change, its connection to everyday life, and the actions that people and communities can take to reduce risks and increase resilience. All relevant parties, including policymakers, scientists, implementers, and funders of climate change actions, should strive to create environments where it is easier for journalists to access and use information and data. For example, many research and policy organizations provide open-access services and summarize their findings into policy briefs. These should also be provided to journalists in the form of 'journalist briefs,' consolidating climate concepts into useful concepts that journalists can easily communicate to the broader public. Additionally, support for data centers and hubs, such as the Africa Data Hub,²⁷ is crucial for enabling easier access to accurate data on climate change to journalists.

Capacity Building for Journalists and Editors

Building capacity and knowledge on climate change within African climate journalism is vital for producing accurate and impactful reporting. Journalists need training and

resources to effectively cover the complex and evolving issues related to climate change. Activities such as training programs, workshops, fellowships, mentoring programs with established media houses and research institutions, and fair partnerships with international journalists were mentioned by participating journalists as potential areas of action. Furthermore, creating networks for African journalists to collaborate and exchange knowledge internally or with international journalists can foster a supportive community of practice. Special attention should be given to historically marginalized and excluded groups such as Indigenous communities, women, and people with disabilities.

Localization of Climate Change Knowledge and Reporting

To educate the public about the causes and consequences of climate change, as well as possible remedies, it is imperative to provide efficient, captivating, transparent, and easily understandable information grounded in evidence and local realities. Countries in Africa exhibit a wide range of cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Successful communication regarding climate change involves acknowledging local languages, traditions, and context-specific climate effects. Tailored messages that resonate with cultural and social values increase involvement and aid comprehension, leading to the adoption of eco-friendly behaviors within communities. This also reduces the psychological distance of climate change, encouraging greater engagement with the topic. The inclusion of climate change in the school curriculum, training for citizen journalism, and building a culture of leadership around climate change issues were also underscored by participating journalists as critical areas for generating societal-wide visions and sustained action. As Happy Mulolani, a journalist from Zambia, noted: *"Oftentimes we come up with nice things, but they don't always succeed because people don't understand or own the process."*

Prioritization of Local Solutions & Indigenous Knowledge

Rooting climate change reporting in local experiences enables people to see their role in climate action. Accounts from local communities, Indigenous groups, farmers, and activists directly affected by climate in media reports can provide firsthand experiences, local knowledge, and perspectives on adaptation, mitigation, and resilience-building efforts. This allows for a more creative and authentic narrative of climate impacts and solutions that people can emulate in their day-to-day lives. Factoring in partnerships with community leaders and activists can also increase trust in climate information. Furthermore, striking a balance between the positive and negative framings of climate information is more approachable and productive.

Key Messages

Climate change reporting and communication are key pillars of climate action.

The volume of available knowledge about climate change is not commensurate with actions taken against it. Climate change science, alongside policy and technological options, must move to mainstream society and build momentum. Securing sustainable funding for journalism in Africa will play a crucial role in raising awareness, influencing policy, and pushing for action to tackle climate change issues within the continent. If local policymakers or the international community is looking for a strategic way to demonstrate leadership and equitable climate change action, support for climate change reporting and storytelling is a high-impact area.

Local climate journalists and media institutions must be empowered and protected to participate effectively in climate change reporting and storytelling.

Africa has the youngest population in the world, a vibrant and innovative youth, minerals, and a wealth of renewable resources to power the energy transition, not to mention the enduring power of Indigenous knowledge and contextual practices that have guided the relationship between humans and nature for centuries. Therefore, it is a mistake to disregard the role of local African journalists. Local journalists play an important role in projecting these opportunities and shaping a narrative of Africa as a global player in the fight against climate change locally and internationally.

Local and international journalists must resist oversimplification and sensational climate change information and action.

Journalists reporting on climate change in Africa must resist overemphasizing a crisis narrative and overlooking the links between the climate crisis and the role of past and present exploitative and extractive practices, inequalities, and the historical injustice of colonialism. Such narratives generate an inaccurate understanding of climate change and shield historical polluters from being implicated. They, in turn, showcase African countries as "needy," overshadowing and distracting from the constant action undertaken by communities in Africa to address the climate crisis. As Mary Kasoka, a journalist from Zambia, noted: "*It matters how we tell the stories.*"

Improving climate reporting in Africa requires international collaboration, partnerships, and support.

Climate change poses a global challenge that demands collaborative action and requires the support of the international community. Financial resources and capacity building are critical to the quality of climate change reporting in Africa. Although this can help to produce more empowered local journalists, more international collaboration is needed. Local and international journalists and media houses can form networks to exchange data, provide tips for better climate change reporting, share equipment, and co-author stories and articles. These partnerships can enhance the quality of climate reporting and bring a comprehensive understanding of Africa to the global community to encourage informed global discussions and actions on climate change.

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About the Organizations

About APRI - Africa Policy Research Institute

APRI - Africa Policy Research Institute is an independent and nonpartisan African think tank. It researches key policy issues affecting African countries and the African continent. APRI provides insights into the German and European Union policy-making processes on Africa. In addition, APRI provides policy options to African policymakers and civil society actors.

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