WWF AFRICA COP31 POLICY POSITION PAPER: SHAPING AFRICA'S PRIORITIES FOR AN IMPLEMENTATION-FOCUSED COP31

1. Introduction: Context and Strategic Moment

COP31 comes at a pivotal point in the global climate process, with attention increasingly shifting from negotiating commitments to accelerating implementation and translating existing commitments into tangible outcomes. COP31 is widely framed as an "Implementation COP"; regardless of the label, the urgency of action is clear. As Parties were reminded in June at the SB64 in Bonn, climate finance is essential to making concrete climate action possible.

For Africa, where climate impacts place significant pressure on economies, forests, livelihoods, food and water systems, ecosystems and development gains, the credibility of the COP process and, more importantly, the Paris Agreement, will increasingly depend on whether commitments are translated into accessible finance, strengthened resilience, accelerated low-carbon development and increased strategic partnerships to facilitate tangible climate outcomes

Climate finance should be central to COP31. At COP29 in Baku, Parties agreed a new collective quantified goal of at least US$300 billion per year in climate finance to developing countries by 2035, while calling on all actors to work together to scale finance from public and private sources to US$1.3 trillion per year by 2035. The subsequent Baku-to-Belém process sought to translate this ambition into practical measures for mobilising and delivering finance, including greater access to concessional finance, addressing debt constraints, creating fiscal space and mobilising private capital.

COP30 in Belém further advanced the **adaptation agenda**. The COP30 outcome called for the tripling of adaptation finance by 2035, while the Belém Adaptation Indicators established a framework for assessing progress towards the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA). The challenge for COP31 is to ensure that these commitments translate into resources and implementation that respond to the realities and priorities of vulnerable developing countries, including those across Africa.

Against this backdrop, COP31 presents Africa with an opportunity not only to advocate for greater climate ambition and finance, but also to position the continent as a source of **solutions, innovation, investment and leadership** in the global climate transition. Africa can leverage its natural and human assets, including its growing and youthful population, to demonstrate how investment in climate action can unlock jobs, innovation, resilience, and new markets.

This WWF Africa Expectations Paper sets out Africa's priorities and identifies opportunities to amplify African voices in global climate decisions, position nature, forests, biodiversity and ecosystem-based solutions at the centre of Africa's climate and development agenda, and strengthen strategic partnerships with governments, regional institutions, civil society, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, development and financial institutions, the private sector and other stakeholders. COP31 should therefore be used not simply as a moment for advocacy, but as a strategic opportunity to translate African priorities into stronger policy influence, increased finance, meaningful partnerships and measurable action beyond the COP.

Africa's Strategic Principles for Climate Action

Africa's engagement at COP31 should continue to be guided by principles that have shaped the continent's participation in the UNFCCC process:

- Equity and climate justice, recognising Africa's particular vulnerability to climate change impacts and the continent's development needs and priorities.
- Development-responsive climate action, ensuring that climate policies support rather than constrain sustainable economic growth, energy access, food security, job creation and poverty eradication.
- Adequate means of implementation, particularly climate finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity building, as essential enablers of Africa's ability to implement its climate commitments and respond to climate impacts.
- Recognition of Africa's special needs and circumstances in the international climate regime, including the vulnerability recognized in Article 4.1(e) of the UNFCCC.

Taken together, these principles provide the foundation for Africa's engagement at COP31: climate action should be equitable, development-responsive and supported by adequate means of implementation, while recognising Africa's particular vulnerability and circumstances. They should inform both negotiating priorities and broader engagement with Parties and other stakeholders.

2. Africa's Priorities for COP31

2.1. Adaptation and Resilience

COP31 should mark a decisive shift from adaptation commitments to financed, measurable, and locally grounded implementation. With Africa's adaptation needs continuing to significantly exceed available support, COP31 should strengthen implementation of the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA), scale accessible adaptation finance, and ensure that national and local priorities translate into tangible resilience outcomes for people, nature and economies. The UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2025 notes that the required amount for adaptation needed by developing countries as per their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) is at an estimated US$365 billion per year, while as of 2023, international public adaptation finance flows to developing countries stood at a meagre US$26 billion[1].

WWF Africa expects COP31 to:

- Operationalise and mobilise adequate support for the implementation of the Belem Adaptation Indicators particularly for developing countries and ensuring that reporting requirements remain voluntary, facilitative and non-punitive and do not become prerequisites for accessing adaptation finance. Scale and improve access to adaptation finance, including more grant-based and highly concessional finance, and establish a credible pathway with early milestones towards the COP30 commitment to triple adaptation finance by 2035. Finance should be predictable, accessible, and responsive to the needs of vulnerable countries, communities, and ecosystems, including through simplified and direct-access mechanisms for local actors.
- Move National Adaptation Plans from planning to implementation by linking NAP priorities to investment pipelines, national budgets and climate funds; strengthening technical and institutional capacity; and improving coherence between NAPs, NDCs, and other relevant planning documents such as National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans (NBSAPs) and national development plans. NAPs

[1] United Nations Environment Programme (2025). Adaptation Gap Report 2025: Running on empty. The world is gearing up for climate resilience — without the money to get there [Neufeldt, H., Hammill, A., Leiter, T., Magnan, A., Watkiss, P., Bakhtiari, F., Bueno Rubial, P., Butera, B., Canales, N., Chapagain, D., Christiansen, L., Dale, T., Milford, F., Niles, K., Njuguna, L., Pauw, P., Singh, C. and Yang, G.]. Nairobi. https://wedocs.unep.org/20.500.11822/48798.

should also be linked to national Monitoring Evaluation and Learning systems, GGA reporting and subnational and local plans, so that implementation - not only planning - is tracked and resourced locally.

- Scale nature-based solutions (NbS) and ecosystem-based adaptation across forests, rangelands, freshwater, wetlands, coastal and marine ecosystems, recognising healthy ecosystems as critical infrastructure for climate resilience and the effective implementation of the Paris Agreement. Implementation should be locally led, inclusive, and supported by appropriate finance, knowledge, and evidence. NbS should be treated as a core delivery pathway for the GGA, rather than an optional co-benefit, and integrated across NAPs, NDCs and NBSAPs.
- It will be important to see how this COP can help to strengthen resilience across key sectors, particularly agriculture, freshwater, and health. Freshwater resilience should be integrated into adaptation planning, with greater investment in basin-scale approaches that combine climate-risk assessments, environmental flows, equitable water allocation, ecosystem restoration and climate-resilient infrastructure. This can be an opportunity to accelerate the implementation of the Freshwater Challenge.
- Ensure adaptation delivers for vulnerable people and communities by strengthening participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and local communities, recognising local and Indigenous knowledge, and tracking who benefits from adaptation finance and action.

Ultimately, COP31 should position climate adaptation as a core pillar of the climate and development agenda, moving from plans and commitments to finance, implementation and measurable resilience outcomes. With adaptation needs across Africa continuing to far exceed available support, the priority is to close the gap between ambition and delivery. COP31 should therefore be a milestone for accelerating implementation and laying the foundations for a stronger African adaptation agenda towards COP32, with Africa's adaptation needs, locally led action and freshwater resilience at the centre.

2.2. Climate Finance

Climate finance must remain central to COP31. The priority for Africa is to move from pledges to accessible, predictable, and implementation-oriented finance. Africa currently receives only about 2% of global climate finance. It is estimated that Africa needed approximately US$2.8 trillion between 2020 and 2030, about US$277 billion annually, to implement the previous generation of NDCs, compared with approximately US$30 billion received, much of it directed to mitigation and provided as loans, increasing debt burdens[2]. This situation is even made worse with the significant scaling back for climate finance especially from developed countries. At the GEF 9th replenishment, only US$3.9 billion was secured in pledges and from fewer donor countries and this has been considered the lowest replenishment of the GEF in the last 20 years. We have also seen donor countries like the UK cutting down on their pledge to the GCF. As Africa presses developed countries to fulfil their obligations under Article 9.1 of the Paris Agreement, WWF urges Parties, through the Two-Year Work Programme on Article 9, to clarify the roles of provision and mobilisation, the suitability of different finance types, and needs-based, implementation-oriented delivery. It will also be important that Africa together with other developing countries to exert pressure on the developed and donor countries to reconsider the risk of scaling back on funding for climate change.

Parties should also define the share of the US$300 billion New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG) to be delivered as direct public finance. It will also be important for parties to strengthen the quality, predictability, accessibility, transparency and accountability of climate finance, ensure finance can scale mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage while responding to country and community needs.

[2] CPI. 2024. Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa 2024. https://www.climatepolicyinitiative. org/publication/landscape-of-climate-finance-in-africa-2024/

COP31 should advance direct financing mechanisms that enable Indigenous Peoples, Local Communities to access climate finance without excessive intermediaries. Such approaches can improve effectiveness, accountability, and local ownership while ensuring resources reach those at the frontline of climate impacts and environmental stewardship.

2.3. Loss and Damage

The Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD) remains severely underfunded. Total pledges to July 2026 were US$822.7 billion[3], of which under 60% had been paid, and that no disbursements had yet been made following agreement on the Barbados Implementation Modalities. According to the FRLD, there are claims estimated to total about US$2.8 billion, of which African needs represent approximately US$1.4 billion.

The gap between available resources and current and projected needs is therefore substantial. The FRLD needs to be better resourced and begin disbursing finance in line with needs. Failure to provide loss-and-damage finance in line with the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities (CBDR-RC) risks undermining Africa's future adaptation capacity.

It is important to note that climate change impacts currently cost Africa roughly 1–1.5% of continental GDP, with impacts likely to increase. However, economic estimates should not obscure the human consequences of extreme events and long-term climate impacts on health, ecosystems and nature-dependent livelihoods.

In a year where climate extremes have featured prominently in the headlines around the world, African countries have faced devastating floods, prolonged droughts and record heat, exposing the growing adaptation gap and underscoring the urgent need for scaled-up support to build resilience. Across Africa, communities have faced both extremes simultaneously, with deadly flooding across Southern Africa occurring alongside worsening drought conditions in parts of East Africa, Angola and Madagascar.

2.4. Just Transition

The just transition agenda presents opportunities for Africa to advance green industrialisation, develop its critical minerals sector and strengthen participation in global value and supply chains. However, Africa expects the agenda to be grounded in climate justice, equity and fairness.

For Africa, a just transition must go beyond the shift to a low-carbon economy. It should address broader development priorities, including universal and affordable energy access, climate adaptation and resilience, sustainable industrialisation, economic diversification, decent and green jobs, and local value addition. The transition should enable African countries to advance sustainable development and reduce structural inequalities while pursuing climate action.

At COP31, Parties should advocate for a just transition framework that recognises these development realities and delivers equitable economic opportunities, increased investment and technology access, and greater local and regional value creation. The Just Energy Transition for Africa should be framed to unlock the potential of renewable energy to increase energy access.

There is no doubt that Just Energy Transition in Africa can easily be equated to the phasing out of fossil fuels looking at the South Africa Just Energy Transition Partnership (JET-P) but the Senegal JET-P provide another pathway which is about renewable energy deployment, strengthening the grid and clean cooking. COP31 will therefore need to build on the progress made by the COP30 Presidency through the Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels (TAFF) Roadmap and the Santa Marta Process. WWF calls on countries under the TAFF Roadmap to aim to reach 100% sustainable renewable energy well before 2050, prioritizing wind and solar, and establish clear benchmarks to replace fossil fuels in the energy mix. It also insist that electrification must be a central strategy to cut emissions in the energy sector, enabling renewable energy to displace fossil fuels. It is also

[3] Third report of the Board of the Fund for responding to Loss and Damage (2026)

essential to ensure that developing countries have secure energy access and can leapfrog directly to renewables without relying on fossil gas as a transitional fuel.

The target of 35 by 35 on electrification is welcomed, but in Africa should involve both electrification to drive green industrialisation and energy access for those populations without access to modern energy services. Climate finance must be made available to finance this transition.

2.5. NDC 3.0 for implementation

As of September 2026, 19 African countries had submitted or updated their third generation Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC 3.0). NDCs are central to the implementation architecture of the Paris Agreement and provide a framework for translating climate commitments into national action.

The first Global Stocktake confirmed that the world remains off track to limit warming to 1.5°C. For many African countries, its outcomes have informed the revision and strengthening of NDCs.

Africa's NDCs should therefore serve not only as frameworks for climate action, but also as strategic instruments for financial advocacy. They can help countries articulate investment needs, strengthen the case for international climate finance and align financial resources with national climate priorities. WWF looks to COP31 for important signals on how NDC Implementation in Africa will be supported through the Action Agenda and presidency initiatives, including the NDC Partnership, the Global Implementation Accelerator and the Climate Implementation Bridge.

2.6. Scaling Forest Action and Integrated Nature–Climate Solutions

Forests are critical to Africa's climate, biodiversity, development and land degradation objectives and should remain central to implementation of the Paris Agreement, the Global Biodiversity Framework, and the Land Degradation Neutrality Targets. COP31 should build on and accelerate the COP30 Roadmap for Halting and Reversing Deforestation and Forest Degradation by 2030 through greater ambition, stronger implementation, increased certification and increased finance to halt deforestation and forest degradation, protecting high-integrity forests, restoring degraded landscapes and supporting forest-dependent communities. WWF at COP31 \calls on African and Congo Basin countries in particular to:

- endorse the COP30 Forest Roadmap and announce enhanced national forest action towards 2030, including stronger policies and implementation plans, ambitious restoration commitments, domestic climate-finance measures and increased forest finance,
- strengthen integration of forests, climate and nature priorities across sustainable food systems, nature-based solutions, ecosystem restoration and equitable access to climate and biodiversity finance;
- Support the uptake of responsible forestry, notably by ensuring that logging companies achieve forest certification; promote incentives for ecosystem services in responsible forest management (PES) to promote carbon sequestration; and translate these linkages into coherent policies, increased regional collaboration and investment delivery of greater benefits for people, nature and climate.

COP31 should also be an opportunity for Africa to weigh in strongly on forests and carbon-related conversations. This includes invoking Article 5 of the Paris Agreement to ensure that parties are not only focused on results-based payment aimed at restoration but to also recognize and reward efforts towards sustainable forest management and conservation. This is evident for instance, in the Congo Basin, where countries have maintained historically low deforestation rates. In line with Article 5 of the Paris Agreement, financing mechanisms should fairly and equitably reward these efforts, recognizing the global value of standing forests in safeguarding carbon stocks and biodiversity.

2.7. *Ocean–Climate Nexus: From Commitments to Action*

Africa's ocean and coastal ecosystems are fundamental to climate resilience, food security, livelihoods, trade and sustainable blue-economy ambitions. At COP31, WWF Africa expects Parties to move from recognition to coordinated implementation by embedding ocean priorities across NDCs, NAPs and national biodiversity and ocean planning.

Priority areas should include ecosystem-based adaptation, blue-carbon protection and restoration, sustainable fisheries, climate-resilient coral reefs, resilient coastal communities and responsible offshore renewable energy. COP31 should also strengthen access to accountable climate finance, technology transfer, capacity building and ocean science; improve coherence among the UNFCCC, CBD, BBNJ Agreement, United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) and regional ocean governance frameworks; support equitable and effective 30x30 implementation; and promote sustainable and regenerative blue-economy pathways that benefit climate, nature and people.

WWF Africa also expects a precautionary approach to emerging ocean activities with potentially irreversible impacts, including deep seabed mining and marine geoengineering, alongside stronger ocean observation, knowledge and monitoring and meaningful participation of Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

2.8. Cross-Cutting and Emerging Issues

Africa's engagement at COP31 should also address issues that cut across the substantive priorities above, including technology, capacity and knowledge transfer, gender, youth, and Indigenous Peoples and local communities.

Gender has become increasingly integrated into the UNFCCC process, and the adoption of the Belém Gender Action Plan at COP30 provides an opportunity to align gender considerations with broader climate priorities. Adaptation and resilience provide a strong entry point for gender-responsive approaches because many adaptation interventions are community-based and livelihood-focused. Africa should therefore embed gender considerations across workstreams including agriculture, just transition and oceans.

The role and rights of Indigenous Peoples and local communities should likewise be reflected across COP31 outcomes and implementation. Their knowledge of local realities, risks, governance challenges and opportunities makes their meaningful participation essential to effective and equitable climate action. Africa should build on progress at COP30 and ensure that IP&LCs are recognised as partners and knowledge holders in climate implementation.

4. COP31 Presidency Priorities: Opportunities to Accelerate Implementation in Africa

The COP31 Presidency's ten priority themes offer opportunities to accelerate climate action and implementation in Africa. The Clean Energy Transition, for example, aligns with Africa's energy-access ambitions, including Mission 300, while supporting the expansion of renewable energy, electrification, mini-grids, standalone solutions and clean cooking. The Rio Synergies agenda also provides an opportunity to better integrate climate, biodiversity and land priorities and strengthen alignment across NDCs, NAPs, NBSAPs and Land Degradation Neutrality targets.

Realising these opportunities will depend on accessible finance, appropriate technology, capacity, and effective partnerships that respond to Africa's priorities and national circumstances. Africa should therefore use COP31 Presidency initiatives to reinforce its core priorities and secure practical pathways for implementation.

What Would Success at COP31 Mean for Africa?

For Africa, success at COP31 should be measured by the extent to which the conference closes the gap between climate commitments and implementation. This means securing more accessible, predictable and appropriate finance; advancing adaptation and resilience; strengthening support for loss and damage; and ensuring that NDCs, NAPs, forest and ocean priorities translate into investable, locally grounded action.

Success should also mean that Africa's development priorities are reflected in a just transition, that nature and climate action are better integrated, and that women, youth, Indigenous Peoples and local communities are meaningfully involved in implementation. Above all, COP31 should strengthen Africa's policy influence, partnerships and access to resources so that commitments made internationally result in measurable benefits for people, nature and climate across the continent.

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