

Building Resilience for Youth Climate Mobility in Africa

Brian Kithinji, Naomi Mainye, Peter Thini, Paul David, and Irene Nyamu

Key Highlights

Climate mobility, which is the movement or displacement of people, communities, or populations due to adverse weather-related events threatens social and economic development. These ever-growing impacts of climate change point to a pressing need for policy interventions that can build resilience, prevent mass displacement, and support the safe and orderly movement of affected persons. This policy brief examines the strategies for tackling climate mobility while analyzing the contributing factors. The key highlights include:

- (i) Climate change is emerging as a primary driver for global mobility. It is displacing nearly 21.9 million people annually in Africa, the majority of whom are youth. Climate change therefore increases the probability of African youth seeking to migrate from high-risk areas to safe areas, whether by regular or irregular means.
- (ii) Limited access to knowledge, inadequate legal frameworks protecting climate migrants, absence of viable livelihood alternatives, low levels of land ownership by youth, and lack of access to climate financing impede climate mobility interventions.
- (iii) Policy interventions towards addressing climate mobility include integration of climate literacy into national education systems, and the use of creative approaches to providing information to citizens, instituting legal frameworks recognizing and safeguarding climate migrants including the youth, land tenure reforms, and reforms in the global financial architecture, including actualizing the Loss and Damage Fund to ensure equitable access to climate finance and compensation for vulnerable populations and communities.

Introduction

The movement or displacement of people, communities, or populations due to adverse weather-related events such as floods, prolonged droughts, rising sea levels, and increased prevalence of invasive species (Boas, 2021; Clement et al., 2021) have made climate mobility an emerging issue within the climate change discourse. These human movements can be forced or voluntary migration and relocations, but may also be temporary or permanent, internal or cross-border. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) observes that without concrete climate action by 2050, about 90 million people in North Africa will become internal climate migrants, another 86 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa will migrate within their own countries due to climate change, and an additional 32 million intra-regional migrants will be recorded in West and East African countries (IOM, 2022).

Nearly 21.9 million people were displaced annually in the last 10 years due to climate change, meaning that climate-induced disasters account for twice as many displacements as those attributed to non-climatic events (International Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2021). In Africa, the leading causes of human mobility vary from region to region. In North and West Africa, political upheavals indirectly linked to climate change are the leading contributors of human mobility, while in East and Southern Africa, prolonged droughts and frequent cyclones, respectively, are to blame. Island nations such as Cabo Verde, Comoros, Madagascar, Mauritius, Sao Tome and Principe, Seychelles, and countries in the Sahel region are at a higher risk of climate-induced migrations resulting from rising sea levels and expanding desertification.

Between 1963 and 2013, Lake Chad, the largest freshwater lake in the Sahel region, lost 90 per cent of its water mass, displacing at least 5 million people

in Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria (Brookings Institution, 2017). These displacements have in turn contributed to a significant number of youths joining Boko Haram, a radical Islamist terrorist group that has led to death of tens of thousands and disrupted socio-economic life in the Lake Chad Basin region (Badewa, 2022). Consequently, it is apparent that both direct and indirect impacts of climate change can be catastrophic and cause a major threat to national security. Additionally, rising sea levels also cause displacements from coastal areas to inland cities (Global Centre for Climate Mobility and Africa Climate Mobility Centre, n.d). For instance, it is estimated that 4.2 million people will leave major African coastal cities such as Casablanca, Accra, Alexandria, and Lagos by 2050 if current climatic conditions are maintained. Most climate migrants are likely to settle in overcrowded informal settlements in urban areas, with the likelihood that their social and economic prospects and overall well-being are further compromised.

To mitigate and respond to displacements caused by intensifying erratic weather patterns, Africa will need drastic actions to address climate mobility. The call for action is therefore to understand the key drivers of climate-induced disasters, the threats they pose on people and national development, and subsequently, design and implement evidence-informed climate mobility interventions. These three areas are discussed in detail in the remaining sections of this policy brief.

Climate Change-induced Displacements in Africa and their Effects on Youth

Climate mobility has contributed to rural-urban migration, which strains the capacity of urban authorities to provide decent housing, sustainable public infrastructure, and social amenities. The proportion of urban population has accelerated from 8 per cent in 1970 to 21 per cent in 2021, driven by prolonged droughts and increasing levels of poverty in rural areas (NCPD, 2021). Generally, most African cities are projected to continue expanding as more people escape the rural areas due to extreme climatic events. Declining natural resource levels will also make life uninhabitable, thus leading to higher rates of both voluntary and forced migrations.

Kenya's location in the arid savannah belt means the country is exposed to, and experiences multiple effects of climate change. Most of the savannah grassland is inhabited by pastoral communities. The communities experience disproportionately worse effects of climate change due to heavy dependence of their socio-economic lifestyles on natural resources, especially water and pasturelands for their livestock. The 2010 National Climate Change Response Strategy (NCCRS) shows that nearly 60 per cent of all livestock in Kenya are found in fragile

ecosystems, which include the savannah grasslands, and the Arid and Semi-Arid Lands (ASALs). These two ecosystems constitute about 80 per cent of the country's land mass and are most susceptible to seasonal rainfall patterns and drought. At the same time, low-lying areas at the base of the Rift Valley risk being submerged. Estimates show that over 75,000 households have been directly affected by the rising water levels of Lake Baringo and Bogoria and another 376,000 people are at risk of the same (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP, 2022).

Moreover, an estimated 286,000 people were forced to leave their homes due to extreme drought in 2022. Most of these victims are youths, who make up 28.47 per cent of the labour force in the agricultural sector, and who lack the capacity to handle the economic damages of prolonged droughts or sudden floods (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, 2017). Climate migrants are likely to suffer from loss and damage and would require resources to purchase new land for settlement, establish new businesses, or transport costs to migrate safely, which resources are often lacking. A key decision made at COP27 was the establishment of a Loss and Damage Fund, which many developing countries had been pushing for decades. Developed nations, who are the highest polluters, are expected to support developing countries who bear the greatest burden of climate change to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies to cope with damages caused by climate change effects. The fund would offer vital resources that could support and respond to the needs of climate migrants. But until the eve of COP28, operationalization of the Loss and Damage Fund had been pending, but a draft proposal has been prepared for consideration at COP28 .

The ever-increasing and intensifying impact of climate change demands analytical efforts to first understand the factors limiting climate mobility interventions targeted at the youth. Among these are access to information, viable livelihood alternatives, land ownership, protection of climate migrants and access to climate finance.

Access to knowledge and information

Despite the technological advancements that have enhanced connectivity, there is still limited access to education, information and knowledge on climate change and its effects. Across the African continent, national climate literacy rates range from 23 per cent to 66 per cent, with women being 12 per cent less likely to be aware about climate change than men (Simpson et al., 2021). In the buildup to the "African COP", COP27 in Sharm El-Sheik, Egypt, the African Union launched several initiatives to champion awareness on this topic by involving youth groups to develop the messaging, but large gaps remain. Information on climate change, its causes, and

impacts, has yet to reach large segments of the population both in urban and rural areas.

Even communities at high risk of displacement due to prolonged droughts and irregular floods have limited awareness of what climate mobility entails. During the Africa Climate Summit (2023), climate mobility did not take centre stage, with conversations mainly focusing on innovative models of climate financing and adaptation. Participants did not therefore robustly engage on the topic of climate mobility, nor did it feature prominently in the Nairobi Climate Declaration of 2023.

Equally, research on climate mobility particularly in relation to youths has received limited attention, hence there is equally limited evidence to drive the conversations. The worldwide focus on climate mobility earnestly began with the endorsement of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration by the United Nations General Assembly in 2018. Since then, state parties have begun collecting data on climate refugees and identifying possible interventions to alleviate their situations, but such efforts are still at a nascent stage, which limits evidence informed policy-development in the area and makes it difficult for youths to actively engage in defining strategies that can address challenges associated with climate mobility. Environmental awareness and climate literacy is vital in promoting policy action and stimulate the attitude change required to comprehensively address climate mobility.

Inadequate legal frameworks

There is emerging debate at the international community level whether people displaced by climatic events should be classified as migrants or refugees. This is because the definition of climate mobility is still not anchored in international law, thus preventing targeted interventions from being implemented. According to the 1951 Refugee Convention, a refugee is “someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion” (See the 1951 Refugee Convention, Art. 1(a)). However, climate-related disasters are not classified as one of the protection areas, and hence people who move due to floods or droughts are not eligible to receive refugee protection and privileges. In addition, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is not mandated to work on climate migrant issues (UNHCR, 1951). Similarly, the Kenya’s Refugee Act of 2021 does not recognize or include protections for climate migrants (Republic of Kenya, 2021).

Nonetheless, several new refugee protection frameworks are starting to emerge. For example, in 2018, the United Nations General Assembly approved

the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. While the legal instrument embeds climate migrants as a people befitting special protections under the law, it is a non-binding instrument. In Africa, some countries have passed the Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment, and Climate Change (KMECC-AFRICA). KMECC-Africa calls upon sovereign countries to resettle climate migrants and provide targeted financial and material assistance to them (IOM, 2023). Notably, young people had a youth engagement and had a chance to address the ministerial panel, hence the KDMECC-Africa has accounted for the voice of youth. All the same, more action is needed to fast-track interventions on climate mobility and, thus, it is crucial that existing legal lacunas on climate mobility are addressed.

Limited viable livelihood alternatives

Access to secure and sustainable livelihood opportunities is part and parcel of the social and economic rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ESCR) of 1976 (UN, 1976). The same is also reiterated in national constitutions of most African countries who are members of the African Union. Therefore, securing support for people who have been displaced from their homes due to floods or droughts facilitates the enjoyment of those rights. This makes policies that support humane resettlement of migrants a crucial step towards facilitating safe, regular, and orderly migration. Not only are climate mobility strategies critical and necessary for effective responses to climate change events (IOM, 2023), but they also present new opportunities with positive outcomes if they are considered an adaptation strategy (Sakdapolrak et al., 2019). The African Climate Mobility Initiative report (n.d) notes that climate mobility as a response to climate change is often the last resort to many people in the African continent because Africans tend to have a strong attachment to their ancestral land and home, and a large majority of the affected communities remain optimistic and hopeful of prospects despite experiencing extreme climatic distractions. Moreover, moving is a costly affair which many poor people will avoid unless forced, hence they may choose to remain in disaster prone areas or to return home after any forceful or temporary climatic evacuations because their livelihoods are dependent on their place of origin.

To address some of the challenges associated with limited livelihood opportunities in drought-prone parts of the Horn of Africa, the African Development Bank launched a 10-year project called Drought Resilience and Sustainable Livelihoods Programme (DRSLP) in the Horn of Africa in 2015. The project supports adaptation projects for vulnerable communities at high-risk of climate mobility and

builds on the existing policy framework on Africa Climate Mobility Agenda for Action, which was developed to guide stakeholders, policy makers, and international partners in addressing climate mobility (Global Centre for Climate Mobility and Africa Climate Mobility Initiative (n.d)). The agenda for action notes that addressing climate mobility begins with mapping out what it refers to as spatial dynamics and profiles of the affected communities in terms of who are vulnerable classes, which are the hot spots, what are the warning systems, and the mobilizing support and participation of affected communities (Global Centre for Climate Mobility and Africa Climate Mobility Initiative, n.d). Consequently, a threefold strategy of mobility planning, community empowerment and transforming development to make it inclusive and sustainable is suggested. In this way, Africa can harness climate mobility as a climate adaptation strategy, thus minimizing damage to people's livelihoods but, to succeed it must involve the affected communities and actions that are locally anchored and informed by community priorities.

An important imperative in climate mobility interventions is recognition that youth in Africa, just like those in other regions have high aspirations to improve their living conditions, and that with growing climate-related risks, youth tend to be the first to move in search of alternative livelihood opportunities (Global Centre for Climate Mobility and Africa Climate Mobility Initiative (n.d)). Such climate mobility efforts should consider the needs of specific groups and the associated vulnerabilities so as not to further disenfranchise youth who are already too often excluded (and adaptive capacities and foster a participatory and transparent process or decision-making.

Insecure land tenure regimes

In Africa, land ownership intersects very closely with livelihood opportunities particularly in rural areas, and with youth migration (International Fund for Agricultural Development -IFAD). As the African youth population continues to grow, the projection is that the agricultural sector, which is the backbone of most African economies, will continue to be an important source of employment for a vast majority of the 11 million African entering the labour force annually (IFAD, 2019). Concomitantly, demand for agricultural land will also grow. In the traditional Africa society, youth mainly acquired land through inheritance, but this access option is changing rapidly as land becomes scarce. Part of the scarcity is closely linked to colonial land legacies of mass appropriation and confiscation of native land and the subsequent displacement of communities from communal lands they had owned for generations (Akinola, 2019).

Since gaining independence, successive governments across countries in the continent

have not undertaken comprehensive reforms that address historical land injustices and promote equitable allocations. Given that land is a key factor of production and symbol of wealth across Africa, youth in the rural areas will bear the greatest brunt of land scarcity and the effects of reduced agricultural productivity amidst increasing rural poverty. The combination of declining agricultural sector earnings, climate variability, limited land ownership and access, and lack of security of tenure has led to increased youth migration (International Land Coalition, 2023; IFAD, 2019). Moreover, only 10 per cent of total land in Sub-Saharan Africa is formally documented while 90 per cent remains undocumented and under customary land tenure systems that are often unrecognized. This situation limits access to credit facilities for farmers and greatly hampers adoption of interventions linked to agricultural activities that address climate mobility (International Land Coalition, 2023).

Mounting evidence shows that pastoralist communities are the most disproportionately affected by climate mobility because their socio-economic lifestyle is susceptible to slight changes (UNDP and The Life & Peace Institute, 2023; International Land Coalition, 2023). Moreover, youth are disenfranchised in terms of land ownership due to its increasing scarcity, prohibitive costs of obtaining land, and discriminatory colonial land tenure policies that pushed some communities away from ancestral lands and thus limiting opportunities that successive generations of those communities will have land. Pastoral communities such as the Maasai in Kenya have disproportionately suffered from climate mobility because of such historical displacements from homelands in the colonial era, which forced them to settle in the arid savannah grasslands. While the grasslands are susceptible to drastic weather variabilities associated with climate change, these areas have also suffered from encroachment due to urbanization. These challenges constrain adequate sustenance of nomadic pastoralism and render large sections of the community climate migrants (International Land Coalition, 2023).

Cognizant of the urgent need for land reforms in Africa, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa has established a land policy framework to support African countries with land tenure initiatives. The initiative aligns with the World Bank's goal of expanding land ownership and rights by 2030. Additionally, the African Development Bank is working with governments to facilitate land registration and titling processes, particularly in countries that are yet to fully address historical and colonial land injustices, such as South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Kenya. However, progress has been slow, as only 4 per cent of African countries have managed to fully document land in their capital cities (Atlantic Council, 2020). Without a comprehensive and just

solution to the land question, it is difficult to stem climate mobility or design effective interventions in response to climate mobility.

Access to climate financing

Nansambu and Sugden (2017) noted that increased farm-input costs, limited access to capital/finances and credit facilities forces majority of youths and men in rural settings to relocate particularly to look for income to finance non-agricultural projects or off-farm employment in the urban areas. Most youth migrants looking for alternative earnings cannot fund climate-resilient projects such as climate smart agriculture, which can help communities adapt well to climate change. At the same time, migration is capital-intensive and requires finances and social connections. Frequent loss and damage affect people's assets and capital, therefore impacting their ability to relocate and bounce back rapidly (Global Centre for Climate Mobility and Africa Climate Mobility Initiative, n.d). Consequently, households with fewer economic resources, limited access to credit facilities, low capacities to accumulate savings or take insurance for crops and animals, have limited alternatives to undertake investments that enable them to build resilience to current and future climate-related impacts (Adelekan et al., 2022).

Allocation of adequate funding to resettle people and communities occasioned by climate change impacts is therefore crucial (Tadgell et al., 2018), yet many organizations and entities dealing with refugees, such as the UNHCR, do not recognize climate-forced immigrants in their mandate (Tadgell, Doberstein and Mortsch, 2018). Local legal frameworks such as the Kenya Refugee Act of 2021 do not include any provisions for recognition and resettlement of climate-forced refugees. And, as argued by Wilmsen and Webber, 2015; and Walelign and Lujala, 2022), most climate-related programmes are treated as ad hoc responses without any long-term or more permanent relocation and resettlement possibilities. The Migration Policy Institute (MPI) mapped and identified 54 climate mobility projects with lifespans of one-year and above and budgets of between US\$ 200,000 to US\$ 200 million which were funded by multilateral development banks for climate adaptation and resilience projects and focused on climate migrants in African cities. The assessment found that only a few components of the projects specifically focused on migration, but also noted a dearth of reliable and up to date data on financing of climate mobility projects (Huang, 2023). The call to action is therefore to make resources available for climate mobility programmes targeting climate migrants whose needs are not fully addressed in mainstream humanitarian aid.

Policy Recommendations

Investing in climate change literacy

- (i) African governments could mainstream climate mobility into their national educational curriculum and accelerate investments in research, development, and dissemination of timely and accurate data on climate-induced migrations.
- (ii) Related to (a) above, governments in African could also mobilize media to disseminate up-to date climate information based on research that addressed unique problems in the continent and through documentaries and feature stories that uncover the impacts on daily livelihoods, and news bulletins that educate the public on the link between extreme weather events and climate mobility.
- (iii) African states can mobilize development partners such as the African Development Bank to support increased invests in awareness programmes working with youth groups that represent frontline communities.

Developing legal frameworks to address climate migration.

- (i) More action is needed to fast-track interventions on climate mobility. The humanitarian aid community led by the United Nations High commission for Refugees (UNHCR) can facilitate safe and orderly climate migration by addressing the current legal lacunas on recognition and protection on climate mobility in the 1951 refugee convention. Similarly, there is a call for action to African states to also review their national policies and laws to enhance protection of climate migrants. In tandem with clear legal protections of climate migrants, resourcing of actions around climate mobility will also be essential.
- (ii) More African governments could consider ratification of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration and the Kampala Ministerial Declaration on Migration, Environment and Climate Change (KDMECC-Africa), which had only 16 countries involved. These new frameworks offer important pathways for long-term humanitarian assistance to climate migrants.
- (iii) Climate mobility interventions being developed could adopt a threefold strategy of mobility planning, community empowerment and inclusive development options. The intervention options could be specific to the needs of different social groups.

Investing in viable and sustainable youth-targeted livelihood options

- (i) The multilateral development banks and other development partners could work closely

with humanitarian organizations to provide incentives to youths in vulnerable communities to adapt to sustainable livelihoods, and foster engagement and collaboration with all stakeholders, including community elders, faith groups, local governments, and humanitarian groups.

- (ii) African governments supported by various development partners could consider scaling up research and development programmes addressing new livelihood opportunities in arid and semi-arid lands and the Horn of Africa to enhance drought resilience and protect the livelihoods of pastoralist communities. Research work could target collaborative action and participatory research with youth on viable economic activities in high climate-risk areas and ways to scale-up successful pilot projects sustainably.

Accelerating land reform efforts to enhance land access and ownership among African youth

- (i) Land is an important factor of production, which many African youth have limited access to. Acknowledgement and redressing past land injustices by African governments through comprehensive land reforms such as issuing title deeds, documentation, and surveying, can expand formal land access and ownership opportunities by young people who can then engage in climate smart agriculture or other green economy initiatives as a climate mobility intervention.

Ensuring access to climate finance to address climate mobility

- (i) By supporting the current advocacy efforts to reform the global financial architecture, African governments and development partners could contribute to ensuring equitable access to climate finance for vulnerable and excluded social groups and communities, among these being youth who are more likely to engage in climate migration.
- (ii) To address timely and effective responses to victims of climate-related disasters, development organizations and African governments will require efficient ways of providing relief aid, which should also include financial resources to offset relocation costs. For this, climate mobility actors can promote greater utilization of mobile money transfer mechanisms since they have deepened financial inclusion of the poor and shown resilience against collapsing infrastructure in the event of disasters.
- (iii) Additionally, increasing funding and allocation for resettlement of climate migrants and

insurance against loss of livestock among pastoralists can ensure easy access to financial resources, and cushion the poor against devastating losses.

- (iv) Operationalizing and adequately financing the Loss and Damage Fund. It is imperative that states that are party of the Paris Agreement accelerate establishment of the fund to ensure compensation, effective response, protection, and resilience building capacity of communities and developing countries that are impacted or are vulnerable to the disruptions caused by climate change. Operationalization efforts should address the design of the fund, responsibility for financing, benefits, and the mechanisms for accessing the funds.

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For More Information Contact:

Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis
Bishops Road, Bishops Garden Towers

P.O. Box 56445-00200, Nairobi

Tel: 2719933/4, Cell: 0736712724, 0724256078

Email: admin@kippra.or.ke

Website: <http://www.kippra.or.ke>

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