

# COP27 Climate Change Conference: Urgent Action Needed for Africa and The World

Gregory E. Erhabor,<sup>1</sup> Aiah A. Gbakima,<sup>2</sup> Abraham Haileamlak,<sup>3</sup> Jean-Marie Kayembe Ntumba,<sup>4</sup> James Kigera,<sup>5</sup> Bob Mash,<sup>6</sup> Joy Muhia,<sup>7</sup> Fhumulani Mavis Mulaudzi,<sup>8</sup> David Ofori-Adjei,<sup>9</sup> Friday Okonofua,<sup>10</sup> Arash Rashidian,<sup>11</sup> Siaka Sidibé,<sup>12</sup> Abdelmadjid Snouber,<sup>13</sup> James Tumwine,<sup>14</sup> Mohammad Sahar Yassien,<sup>15</sup> Paul Yonga,<sup>16</sup> Lilia Zakhama,<sup>17</sup> Chris Zielinski.<sup>18</sup>

*Wealthy nations must step up support for Africa and vulnerable countries in addressing past, present, and future impacts of climate change.*

The 2022 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) paints a dark picture of the future of life on Earth, characterised by ecosystem collapse, species extinction, and climate hazards such as heatwaves and floods.<sup>1</sup> These are all linked to physical and mental health problems, with direct and indirect consequences of increased morbidity and mortality. To avoid these catastrophic health effects across all regions of the globe, there is broad agreement—as 231 health journals argued together in 2021—that the rise in global temperatures must be limited to less than 1.5°C compared with pre-industrial levels.

While the Paris Agreement of 2015 outlines a global action framework that incorporates providing climate finance to developing countries, this support has yet to materialize.<sup>2</sup> COP27 is the fifth Conference of the Parties (COP) to be organised in Africa since its inception in 1995. Ahead of this meeting, we—as health journal editors from across the continent—call for urgent action to ensure that the COP finally delivers climate justice for Africa and vulnerable countries. This is essential, not just for the general health of those countries, but for the health of the whole world.

## Africa has Suffered Disproportionately Although it has Done Little to Cause the Crisis

The climate crisis has had an impact on the environmental and social determinants of health across Africa, leading to devastating health effects.<sup>3</sup> Impacts on health can result directly from

environmental shocks and indirectly through socially mediated effects.<sup>4</sup> Climate change-related risks in Africa include flooding, drought, heatwaves, reduced food production, and reduced labour productivity.<sup>6</sup>

Droughts in sub-Saharan Africa have tripled between 1970-79 and 2010-2019.<sup>7</sup> In 2018, devastating cyclones impacted three million people in Malawi, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe.<sup>7</sup> In West and Central Africa, severe flooding resulted in mortality and forced migration from loss of shelter, cultivated land, and livestock.<sup>5</sup> Changes in vector ecology brought about by floods and damage to environmental hygiene has led to increases in diseases across sub-Saharan Africa, with rises in cases of malaria, dengue fever, Lassa fever, Rift Valley fever, Lyme disease, Ebola virus, West Nile virus, and other infections.<sup>8,9</sup> Rising sea levels reduce water quality, leading to water-borne diseases, including diarrhoeal diseases, a leading cause of mortality in Africa.<sup>8</sup> Extreme weather damages water and food supplies, increasing food insecurity and malnutrition, which causes 1.7 million deaths annually in Africa.<sup>10</sup> According to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, malnutrition has increased by almost 50% since 2012, owing to the central role that agriculture plays in African economies.<sup>11</sup> Environmental shocks and their knock-on effects also cause severe harm to mental health.<sup>12</sup> In all, it is estimated that the climate crisis has destroyed a fifth of the gross domestic product (GDP) of the countries that are most vulnerable to climate shocks.<sup>13</sup>

The damage to Africa should be of supreme concern to all nations. This is partly for moral reasons. It is highly unjust that the most impacted nations have contributed the least to global

<sup>1</sup> Editor-in-Chief, West African Journal of Medicine.

<sup>2</sup> Editor-in-Chief, Sierra Leone Journal of Biomedical Research.

<sup>3</sup> Editor-in-Chief, Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences.

<sup>4</sup> Chief Editor, Annales Africaines de Medecine.

<sup>5</sup> Editor-in-Chief, Annals of African Surgery; Laurie Laybourn-Langton, University of Exeter

<sup>6</sup> Editor-in-Chief, African Journal of Primary Health Care & Family Medicine

<sup>7</sup> London School of Medicine and Tropical Hygiene.

<sup>8</sup> Editor-in-Chief, Curationis.

<sup>9</sup> Editor-in-Chief, Ghana Medical Journal.

<sup>10</sup> Editor-in-Chief, African Journal of Reproductive Health.

<sup>11</sup> Executive Editor, and Maha El-Adawy, Director of Health Promotion, Eastern Mediterranean Health Journal.

<sup>12</sup> Director of Publication, Mali Médical.

<sup>13</sup> Managing Editor, Journal de la Faculté de Médecine d'Oran.

<sup>14</sup> Editor-in-Chief, African Health Sciences.

<sup>15</sup> Editor-in-Chief, Evidence-Based Nursing Research.

<sup>16</sup> Editor-in-Chief, East African Medical Journal.

<sup>17</sup> Editor-in-Chief, La Tunisie Médicale.

<sup>18</sup> University of Winchester.

### Correspondence:

Chris Zielinski

Address: Sparkford Rd, Winchester SO22 4NR, United Kingdom Email: [chris.zielinski@ukhealthalliance.org](mailto:chris.zielinski@ukhealthalliance.org)

cumulative emissions, which are driving the climate crisis and its increasingly severe effects. North America and Europe have contributed 62% of carbon dioxide emissions since the Industrial Revolution, whereas Africa has contributed only 3%.<sup>15</sup>

**The Fight Against the Climate Crisis Needs All Hands on Deck**

It is not just for moral reasons that all nations should be concerned for Africa. The acute and chronic impacts of the climate crisis create problems like poverty, infectious diseases, forced migration, and conflict that spread through globalised systems.<sup>6,14</sup> These knock-on impacts affect all nations. COVID-19 served as a wake-up call to these global dynamics and it is no coincidence that health professionals have been active in identifying and responding to the consequences of growing systemic risks to health. But, the lessons of the COVID-19 pandemic should not be limited to pandemic risk.<sup>16,17</sup> Instead, it is imperative that the suffering of frontline nations, including those in Africa, be the core consideration at COP27: in an interconnected world, leaving countries to the mercy of environmental shocks creates instability that has severe consequences for all nations.

The primary focus of climate summits remains to rapidly reduce emissions so that global temperatures rises are kept to below 1.5 °C. This will limit the harm. But, for Africa and other vulnerable regions, this harm is already severe. Achieving the promised target of providing \$100bn of climate finance a year is now globally critical, if we are to forestall the systemic risks of leaving societies in crisis. This can be done by ensuring that these resources focus on increasing resilience to the existing and inevitable future impacts of the climate crisis, as well as on supporting vulnerable nations to reduce their greenhouse gas

emissions: a parity of esteem between adaptation and mitigation. These resources should come through grants, not loans, and be urgently scaled up before the current review period of 2025. They must put health system resilience at the forefront, as the compounding crises caused by the climate crisis often manifest in acute health problems. Financing adaptation will be more cost-effective than relying on disaster relief.

Some progress has been made on adaptation in Africa and around the world, including early warning systems and infrastructure to defend against extremes. But, frontline nations are not compensated for impacts from a crisis they did not cause. This is not only unfair, but also drives the spiral of global destabilisation, as nations pour money into responding to disasters, but can no longer afford to pay for greater resilience or to reduce the root problem through emissions reductions. A financing facility for loss and damage must now be introduced, providing additional resources beyond those given for mitigation and adaptation. This must go beyond the failures of COP26 where the suggestion of such a facility was downgraded to "a dialogue".<sup>18</sup>

The climate crisis is a product of global inaction, and comes at great cost not only to disproportionately impacted African countries, but to the whole world. Africa is united with other frontline regions in urging wealthy nations to finally step up, if for no other reason than that the crises in Africa will sooner, rather than later, spread and engulf all corners of the globe, and at that time it may be too late to effectively respond. If, so far, they have failed to be persuaded by moral arguments, then hopefully, their self-interest will now prevail

**References**

1. IPCC. Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Working Group II Contribution to the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report; 2022.
2. UN. The Paris Agreement: United Nations; 2022 [Available from: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/paris-agreement>.
3. Climate change and Health in Sub-saharan Africa: The Case of Uganda. Climate Investment Funds; 2020.
4. WHO. Strengthening Health Resilience to Climate Change 2016.
5. Opoku SK, Leal Filho W, Hubert F, Adejumo O. Climate Change and Health Preparedness in Africa: Analysing Trends in Six African Countries. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021;18(9):4672.
6. Trisos CH, I.O. Adelekan, E. Totin, A. Ayanlade, J. Efitre, A. Gemed, et al. Africa. In: *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation, and Vulnerability*. . 2022.
7. Climate Change Adaptation and Economic Transformation in Sub-Saharan Africa. World Bank; 2021.
8. Evans M, Munslow B. Climate change, health, and conflict in Africa's arc of instability. *Perspectives in Public Health*. 2021;141(6):338-41.
9. S. P. Stawicki, T. J. Papadimos, S. C. Galwankar, A. C. Miller, Firstenberg MS. Reflections on Climate Change and Public Health in Africa in an Era of Global Pandemic. *Contemporary Developments and Perspectives in International Health Security*. 2: Intechopen; 2021.
10. Climate change and Health in Africa: Issues and Options: African Climate Policy Centre 2013 [Available from: [https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/policy\\_brief\\_12\\_climate\\_change\\_and\\_health\\_in\\_africa\\_issues\\_and\\_options.pdf](https://archive.uneca.org/sites/default/files/PublicationFiles/policy_brief_12_climate_change_and_health_in_africa_issues_and_options.pdf).
11. Climate change is an increasing threat to Africa2020. Available from: <https://unfccc.int/news/climate-change-is-an-increasing-threat-to-africa>.
12. Atwoli L, Muhia J, Merali Z. Mental health and climate change in Africa. *BJPsych International*. 2022;1-4.
13. Climate Vulnerable Economies Loss report. Switzerland: Vulnerable twenty group; 2020.
14. Bilotta N, Botti F. Paving the Way for Greener Central Banks. *Current Trends and Future Developments around the Globe*. Rome: Edizioni Nuova Cultura for Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI); 2022.
15. Ritchie H. Who has contributed most to global CO2 emissions? *Our World in Data*. <https://ourworldindata.org/contributed-most-global-co2>
16. WHO. COP26 special report on climate change and health: the health argument for climate action. . Geneva: World Health Organization; 2021.
17. Al-Mandhari A; Al-Yousfi A; Malkawi M; El-Adawy M. "Our planet, our health": saving lives, promoting health and attaining well-being by

protecting the planet – the Eastern Mediterranean perspectives. East Mediterr Health J. 2022;28(4):247–248. <https://doi.org/10.26719/2022.28.4.247>

18. Simon Evans, Josh Gabbatiss, Robert McSweeney, Aruna Chandrasekhar, Ayesha Tandon, Giuliana Viglione, et al. COP26: Key outcomes agreed at

the UN climate talks in Glasgow. Carbon Brief [Internet]. 2021. Available from: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/cop26-key-outcomes-agreed-at-the-un-climate-talks-in-glasgow/>.

---

### Conflict of Interest Statement & Funding

The Authors have no funding, financial relationships or conflicts of interest to disclose.

### Cite as

Erhabor GE, Gbakima AA, Haileamlak A, Kayembe Ntumba JM, Kigera J, Mash B, et al. COP27 Climate Change Conference: Urgent Action Needed for Africa and The World. Int J Med Stud. 2022 Oct-Dec;10(4):344-46.

*This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)*

ISSN 2076-6327

This journal is published by [Pitt Open Library Publishing](https://pittopenlibrarypublishing.com/)

**Pitt** Open  
Library  
Publishing