

Forging a Sustainable Future for Africa:

Key Takeaways and Recommendations from the
Sustainability Summit on Climate Resilience and
Preparedness.

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Foreword

It is a pleasure to introduce this policy brief, an outcome of the inaugural Sustainability Summit on Climate Resilience and Preparedness, co-convened by the Center for Law and Innovation (CLI) and the Norrsken Foundation in September of 2024 (the Summit). The Summit brought together a distinguished group of leaders, experts, and innovators from across the continent and beyond, unified by a commitment to chart a path toward a more sustainable, resilient Africa.

Africa finds itself at the forefront of a global crisis for which it bears an outsized burden, although it is responsible for a mere fraction of global greenhouse gas emissions. Severe droughts, extreme heat, coastal erosion, and unpredictable rainfall patterns are not merely academic concerns for this continent; they represent existential threats to livelihoods, biodiversity, public health and infrastructure, food security, and human lives.

The Summit highlighted the need for African voices and perspectives in the global sustainability dialogue. It offered a platform to promote Africa-contextualized innovative solutions, community-led empowerment, and existing local knowledge on sustainable practices and adaptation strategies.

This policy brief underscores the urgency for action in four critical areas: sustainable business practices, community empowerment, innovative technology, and gender equity. Adopting sustainable business models that prioritize environmental stewardship alongside economic growth is essential. Likewise, empowering communities to be active participants in climate resilience efforts ensures that solutions are equitable and grounded in local realities.

Technological innovation is another powerful tool in our arsenal—Africa’s young population and growing tech ecosystem position it to pioneer solutions that can be scaled across the continent and beyond. Finally, we cannot overlook the vital role of gender equity. Women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change, and their inclusion is fundamental to building resilient communities.

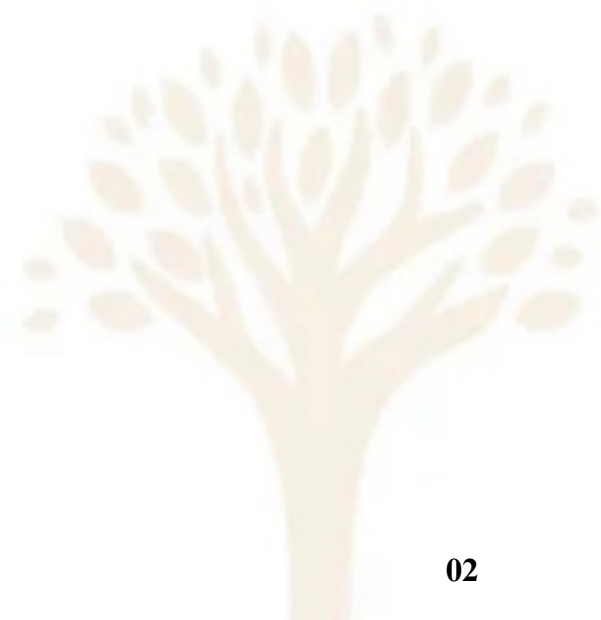
The Summit concluded with a collective call to action, urging governments, businesses, civil society, and international partners to prioritize climate resilience and adaptation as central components of their development agendas. We hope its recommendations will catalyze policy changes and inspire tangible deliverables advancing climate resilience across Africa.

We envision this event as the first of many annual gatherings dedicated to addressing Africa’s unique challenges and opportunities in climate resilience and sustainability. We hope to see you in Kigali in September 2025 as we reflect on progress.

I extend my deepest gratitude to everyone who contributed to the success of this summit, our co-convenor Norrsken Foundation, our strategic partners, the Development Bank of Rwanda (BRD) and GSMA, our distinguished speakers, and all participants whose contributions and insights enriched our discussions and laid the foundation for actionable outcomes, ensuring a sustainable and resilient future for Africa.

Thank you.

Isobel Acquah
Executive Director
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Introduction

Africa stands at a critical juncture, facing the urgent need to balance economic development with environmental sustainability. Despite contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, the continent is disproportionately vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. Extreme weather events, land degradation, and resource scarcity threaten livelihoods, food security, and overall well-being. Drawn from the conversations and insights delivered at the Summit, this policy brief aims to drive collaborative action and meaningful progress towards a more sustainable and resilient future for Africa. It highlights key themes, challenges, and opportunities identified during the summit, providing valuable insights and actionable recommendations for policymakers, businesses, and communities.

Problem Statement

The Summit highlighted the urgent need to address multifaceted challenges hindering Africa's sustainable development. These challenges extend beyond environmental concerns to encompass social, economic, and governance aspects, particularly gender inequality, which exacerbates vulnerabilities to climate change. Sustainability encompasses environmental protection, social equity, economic development, and good governance. It recognizes the interconnectedness of these dimensions and emphasizes the need for holistic solutions that address the root causes of poverty, inequality, and environmental degradation.

The Summit identified several obstacles to sustainability:

- Climate change disproportionately impacts the most vulnerable, particularly women in Africa, who often rely on climate-sensitive sectors like agriculture for their livelihoods. Limited access to land ownership, financial credit, technology, and infrastructure further exacerbates their vulnerability.
- Specific environmental challenges, such as illegal mining, rapid urbanization, and deforestation, pose significant threats to sustainability. For instance, illegal miners often operate without regard for environmental protection, unlike established mining companies. This necessitates targeted solutions that involve community engagement, understanding local needs, and empowering communities to protect their environment.
- The high cost of new technologies, limited accessibility in underserved areas, and the need for appropriate regulatory frameworks hinder the adoption of technologies crucial for sustainable development.
- Deeply ingrained gender norms, limited access to resources for women, and the disproportionate impact of climate change on women and girls hinder progress towards gender equity and social inclusion.

- Limited access to technology and information, inadequate financing for climate adaptation, vulnerability of traditional energy sources, and complexities in assessing legal liabilities for environmental damage pose significant obstacles to building climate resilience.
- Complex global supply chains, the need for robust legal frameworks, the evolving landscape of ESG compliance, and a lack of familiarity with ESG integration among legal practitioners all challenge businesses in pursuing sustainability. Furthermore, insufficient enforcement of existing environmental and social regulations undermines efforts to hold companies accountable and ensure responsible business conduct. This lack of enforcement can lead to environmental damage, social injustices, and unfair competition, ultimately hindering progress towards a sustainable future.
- The lack of unity among African countries in negotiating global environmental agreements and the historical exploitation of Africa's resources necessitate stronger regional cooperation and equitable partnerships.

Policy Recommendations

Drawing upon the rich discussions and insights shared throughout the Summit, this policy presents actionable recommendations for policymakers, businesses, and communities. These recommendations provide a roadmap for collaborative action to translate the Summit's vision into tangible progress towards Africa's more sustainable and resilient future.

Policymakers and Government

- Develop and enforce robust legal frameworks that promote sustainable practices, protect the environment, and ensure equitable access to resources. This includes strengthening climate laws, enforcing environmental regulations, and promoting transparency and accountability in resource management, particularly in extractive industries. Crucially, ensure effective enforcement of these regulations to hold violators accountable and deter unsustainable practices.
- Create an enabling environment for sustainable finance by developing innovative financial instruments, incentivizing green investments, and promoting access to climate finance for local communities and businesses. This includes supporting the development of carbon markets, green bonds, and other sustainable finance mechanisms, ensuring that funding is accessible to women-led initiatives and community-based projects that promote climate resilience and sustainable agriculture.
- Prioritize investments in climate-resilient infrastructure, including sustainable transportation, renewable energy systems, and water management solutions. Integrate nature-based solutions and incorporate traditional knowledge in infrastructure planning and development.

- Implement targeted policies and programs to empower women and youth in the agricultural sector and beyond. This includes promoting gender equality in land ownership, providing access to resources and training, and supporting women-led initiatives in environmental conservation and sustainable development. Specifically, address the barriers women face in accessing land ownership, financial credit, technology, and infrastructure.
- Recognize and integrate traditional knowledge and practices into climate policies and sustainable development strategies. This involves actively engaging with local communities and indigenous groups to incorporate their knowledge and practices into climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.
- Facilitate greater cooperation and knowledge sharing among African countries on climate change. This could involve establishing regional platforms for sharing best practices, coordinating negotiation strategies in international forums, and developing collaborative projects on transboundary environmental issues.

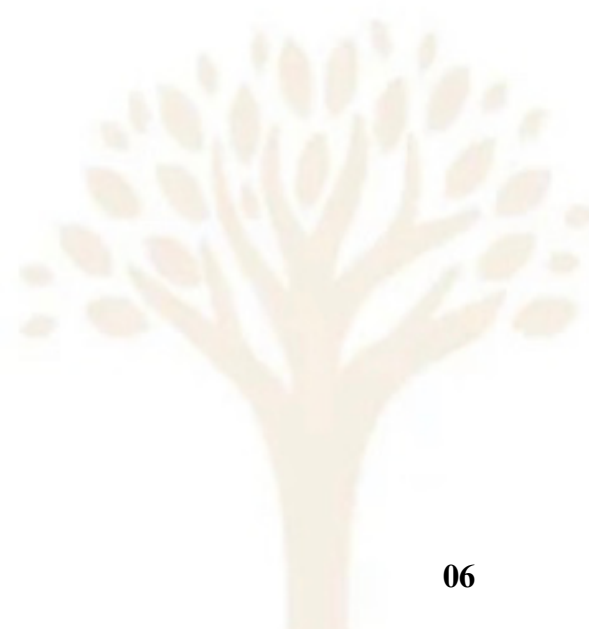
Businesses

- Integrate Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) principles into core strategies, operations, and supply chains. This includes conducting due diligence, engaging with stakeholders, and transparently reporting on environmental and social performance. Specifically, focus on gender equity in leadership and supply chains and actively contribute to community development and climate resilience initiatives.
- Explore and adopt circular economy models that promote resource efficiency, waste reduction, and sustainable consumption patterns. This includes implementing closed-loop systems, promoting recycling and reuse, designing products focusing on durability and recyclability, and collaborating with local communities and stakeholders to create sustainable value chains.
- Invest in green technologies and innovations that minimize environmental footprints, promote energy efficiency, and enhance resource productivity. This includes adopting renewable energy sources, implementing sustainable waste management practices, and leveraging data-driven solutions for environmental monitoring and risk management.
- Prioritize sustainability throughout their supply chains, ensuring that environmental and social standards are upheld at every stage. This includes engaging with suppliers, promoting ethical sourcing practices, and ensuring transparency and traceability in supply chain operations.
- Invest in training and capacity building for legal practitioners and other professionals on ESG integration, risk management, and sustainable business practices to enhance compliance and promote responsible business conduct.

- Adopt inclusive business models that empower marginalized groups, including women, youth, and people with disabilities, by providing access to training, employment opportunities, and equitable participation in value chains.

Communities

- Actively participate in climate action and sustainable development initiatives, leveraging their knowledge and resources to build resilience and promote environmental stewardship. This includes engaging in community-led conservation efforts, adopting sustainable agricultural practices, participating in local decision-making processes, and ensuring that women and youth are actively involved and their voices are heard.
- Embrace and leverage technological solutions that enhance climate resilience, promote sustainable practices, and improve livelihoods. This includes adopting climate-smart agriculture techniques, using renewable energy sources, and participating in data-driven environmental monitoring and resource management initiatives.
- Promote women's leadership in environmental conservation and sustainable development, recognizing their vital role as stewards of the environment and agents of change. This includes supporting women-led initiatives, providing access to resources and training, and ensuring women's participation in community decision-making, particularly in areas related to natural resource management and climate change adaptation.
- Actively participate in sustainable resource management practices, such as community forestry, water conservation, and waste management initiatives, to protect local ecosystems and build resilience to climate change.
- Facilitate the transfer of traditional knowledge and practices between generations to ensure the preservation of valuable cultural heritage and its integration into modern sustainable development strategies. This includes documenting traditional knowledge, establishing mentorship programs, and incorporating traditional practices into community-based conservation and climate adaptation initiatives.



Conclusion

The summit served as a powerful reminder of the urgent need for collective action to address the complex challenges facing Africa in its pursuit of a sustainable future. It underscored the interconnectedness of environmental protection, economic development, social equity, and technological innovation in building a resilient and sustainable future for the continent. The time for complacency is over.

Stakeholders across all sectors can contribute to a future where environmental stewardship, economic prosperity, and social equity are intertwined by working together and implementing the recommendations outlined in this brief. The journey towards a sustainable future for Africa requires courage, innovation, and unwavering commitment. But the rewards are immense – a thriving continent where communities flourish, economies prosper, and the environment is protected for generations to come.

