Why COP27 global climate conference is a pivotal moment for Africa

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Despite accounting for roughly only 4% of global emissions, Africa is one of the regions that is most vulnerable to and the least able to protect itself from the adverse impacts of climate change.

Currently estimated to be warming 1.5 times faster than the global mean, the region is also experiencing disproportionate exposure to climate risks, which will worsen if ambitious commitments are not followed up by urgent implementation.

Already, the continent is increasingly devastated by severe droughts, flooding, sea level rise, heat waves and other extreme events. Since the beginning of 2022, Africa has experienced a string of severe and occasionally unprecedented extreme weather events, from devastating floods in Nigeria to severe drought in Somalia including most parts of the Horn of Africa.

As a result of unavoidable climatic impacts, African countries are already spending a substantial amount of money and incurring losses on both an economic and non-economic level. In the coming decades, the costs of climate impacts are expected to be too high for most African states.

For more than ten years, Africa has prioritised loss and damage in United Nations climate negotiations, but little progress has been made, especially around how to pay for it.

Without immediate and scaled up climate action, including sharply reducing our dependence on fossil fuels, the world will exceed the 1.5°C of global warming, and head into uncharted territory with global warming heading to 2.7°C.

Already, half of the assessed African species are expected to lose more than 30% of their population or area of suitable habitat due to global warming. In addition, between 108 and 116 million people will be exposed to sea level rise, 17 to 40 million people could be forced to migrate, staple crops and fish harvest with fisheries catch are expected to decline by up to 40% and transmission of vector-borne diseases will increase.

The next few years will be very critical for the continent. The time to act to secure a resilient and safe future for Africa is now.

This makes the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, not just a high-level policy event but a critical moment to mount an effective response on a path to make Africa resilient to climate vagaries.

The COP27 WWF Africa Expectation paper outlines the key asks and outcomes for the negotiations to achieve a Climate Resilient Africa by 2030.
At COP27, African negotiators and stakeholders should advance for a well-developed and clear position on loss and damage in order to move the topic up the negotiation's priority list and get support for the recommended Loss and Damage Finance Facility.

Paramount is securing the requisite financial resources to address adaptation needs, reduce greenhouse gas emissions, account for climate change related loss and damage and secure climate finance.

Only 4% to 8% of all climate finance has been allocated to adaptation investments. Based on an assessment of the climate finance needs of African countries, it is estimated that collectively, the cost of implementing Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) set by African countries represents more than 93% of the continent’s GDP and that it will cost around USD 2.8 trillion between 2020 and 2030 to implement them.

Africa also needs to secure resources to ensure access and just transition to renewable energy by exploiting its vast wind, sunshine, hydropower and geothermal resources.

This is because more than 600 million people in Africa still lack basic access to affordable, reliable, clean energy while over one billion people in 54 countries assessed lack access to cooling, which is crucial to food security, medical supplies, livelihoods and the prevention of heat-related deaths.

Nature-positive food production systems that provide sustainable and nutritious food for all while addressing emissions related to agricultural production will also go a long way in reducing emissions.

Across Africa, nature-based solutions remain unexploited. These include restoring degraded ecosystems and effectively and equitably conserving 30% of our land, freshwater and ocean habitats to boost nature’s capacity to absorb and store carbon, as we accelerate progress towards sustainable development.

This is, however, hinged on developed countries delivering on their promises to mobilise US$100 billion per year for climate action in developing countries to support adaptation and mitigation. Even more financing will be required to address climate urgency beyond 2025.

Individual states will also need to honour their commitments to progressively reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2030, and support implementing capacity within developing nations, particularly in Africa where institutional capacity remains weak. Encouragingly, more than 40 African countries have revised their national climate plans, and most are in the process of creating strategies that are more ambitious and make significant commitments to climate adaptation and mitigation.

The contribution of the continent towards global climate regulation, for example by the Congo Basin as a carbon sink, needs to be recognised and commensurate resources allocated towards its protection.
Global financial support is paramount because Africa has special needs and circumstances owing to high levels of poverty, unemployment, and underdevelopment.

It is vital for the global community to unlock the necessary financial flows to Africa as it embarks on a just transition to a future powered by renewable energy expansion and implements other commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.