

## Africa boasts examples of ecological resilience

*Despite its low pollution levels, the black continent is much more committed to ecological transition than many other territories tied to their old patterns of industrial production.*

Johari Gautier Carmona

**I**t is no longer news. In recent years, Africa has emerged as the region most affected by global warming. There is a wealth of evidence to support this assertion: temperature rises of more than 1.5°C since pre-industrial times in various regions, creeping desertification in the interior, coastal erosion along the entire western coastline, increasing droughts in the east, floods and hurricanes - all linked to a disrupted hydrological

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cycle that is pushing the continent to its environmental,

human, social, economic and political limits.



Women working in a seedbed in Senegal

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This context becomes even more painful when we consider that Africa is not the least responsible for the climate change we are denouncing: the warming caused by human activity and the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. Indeed, it is estimated that African countries account for only 3.8% of total emissions, very little compared to China, the United States or Europe, which account for 23%, 19% and 13%, respectively, of global emissions.

As a direct consequence, the idea of an Africa lost and disoriented in the face of disaster has been generally reinforced, a continent stunned by the overwhelming impact of the climate chaos ahead. Images of fields overrun by locusts, dry and cracked soil, cities without water, or conflicts and forced displacements fuelled by all these phenomena have naturally taken over the communication space because of their visual impact and warning message.

In this journey in which we are all immersed, it is undeniable that the African reality is more urgent than the others. Yet behind this tsunami of dizzying news lies an Africa working hard to mitigate climate change and ecological transition. These efforts are often made quietly, doggedly, relentlessly and despite the constraints that hinder action on the ground.

Africa is not waiting for the industrialised world to react. There is no time for this any more. On the contrary, it is quite possible that, despite its low pollution levels, the black continent is much more committed to ecological transition than many other territories tied to their old patterns of industrial production. It is this idea that I try to highlight in [\*África: cambio climático y resiliencia \(Publicaciones UAB, 2022\)\*](#).

First, it is essential to understand what has happened at the global diplomatic level since the signing of the Kyoto protocols in 1997. From the outset, African countries faced terrifying loneliness and incomprehension. They struggled to break out of extreme isolation to expose their legitimate concerns about climate drift and the visible effects on their geography. The increase in droughts and floods was already noticeable then, but it had to be commented on, exposed, documented and confirmed with figures and statistics above all. They then concentrated their actions on raising awareness among the more developed countries - the cause of most of the global warming - and insisted they see the need to jointly curb and combat a phenomenon that is now accepted as humanity's greatest challenge.

The voice of the African continent was unified and consolidated in 2009 with the creation of the African Climate Platform in Libya: an organisation of states that made it possible to give visibility to major climate disasters, but

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above all, to highlight the historical responsibility of developed countries for climate change and to commit them to help the most vulnerable countries (whether for climatic, social or economic reasons). From that moment on, African diplomacy won. Its impact was greater, more visible and more understandable. It is no exaggeration to say that without African pressure at successive climate summits, countries such as China, the United States, Russia and Europe would not have sat down to negotiate and seek long-term solutions.

The role of African diplomacy was crucial to the signing of the Paris Agreement in 2015. It was also fundamental to developing mechanisms such as the Green Fund and implementing major cooperation projects. The commitment of the most powerful to the most vulnerable nations was not born of magic but was the result of an exhausting exercise of "I give you and you give me" or "you help me with this and I give you something else in return", a kind of bargaining market with intense haggling, often shameful when one considers that what is at stake is the survival of the planet and millions of animal and plant species.

In terms of action, Africa is not lagging behind. Efforts to modernise agriculture and introduce sustainable mechanisation are among the priorities: the efficiency and productivity of the countryside must be increased in the

face of possible famines and also to cope with the population growth of a continent in full bloom. Africa is the population explosion of the 21st century, which inevitably exacerbates the challenges of climate change.

In terms of energy, the African continent is still 40% dependent on coal, but the International Renewable Energy

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Agency (Irena) projects an increase in the capacity of renewable alternatives in Africa of 290% between 2015 and 2030 (exceeding 161% in Asia and 43% in Iberian America). This optimism is reflected in projects such as that of Morocco, which, with the inauguration of the 135 square kilometre Noor

Ouarzazate IV power plant, one of the largest in the world, has managed to increase the incidence of renewable energy sources by 42%. By 2030, the Maghreb country aims to supply 52% of its total consumption with clean energy.

While it is true that Morocco has demonstrated a desire for green leadership, other African nations, such as Senegal and Benin, are not lagging either. Benin has excelled with programmes developed at the Songhai research centre in Porto Novo that enable biogas production from animal and vegetable waste. The country of Teranga, for its part, has advanced an innovative project that allows the transformation of peanut shells into charcoal, thus using 7,000 tonnes of waste per year.

The example of the Great Wall of Africa is the most visible and striking when it comes to environmental conservation and reforestation. This 11-country project aims to create the largest living monument on the planet, erecting an 8,000-kilometre strip of trees to halt the advance of the Sahara Desert and to encourage job creation around this new green habitat.

This mega-project, led by Senegal and Ethiopia - which crosses the entire continent from west to east - has already enabled the recovery of five million hectares thanks to the impetus of the African Union and other international support (such as that of Ireland and France in Europe). Yet, it is only in its first phase. It is estimated that \$36 billion in funding and a more rigorous involvement of each state at the organisational and social level are required to move forward and transform this arid region.

Finally, in terms of climate management and planning, the African continent is home to the best-performing country in the world in recent years. The example of The Gambia, highlighted in the 2021 Climate Action Tracker study, shows the efforts of this small country to meet its commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Gambia's consistency and coherence are a source of pride. The country has reaffirmed its ambition to reduce its

*If the rest of the world followed Gambia's commitment, it would prevent the earth's temperature from rising more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels by 2050.*

emissions by 44.4% by 2025. One of the pillars of its strategy to achieve this goal is to increase its renewable energy capacity through solar photovoltaic projects, partly funded by the World Bank and the European Union.

According to the Climate Action Tracker, if the rest of the world's countries were to make commitments comparable to Gambia's, the human race could prevent the earth's temperature from rising more than 2°C above pre-industrial levels by 2050.

Thus, even if they do so with more limited means, African countries have fully taken up the fight against climate change. And it is not just any fight. It is a fierce fight involving big questions about how budgets are constructed, the need to achieve the commitments made, and the urgency of involving every sector of society.

The effort of resilience is unquestionable, but any transformation requires a revolution of the gaze and the senses. Any lasting change requires understanding why change is being undertaken and a philosophy to sustain that change over time.

In conclusion, it is essential to emphasise that Africa can assume a green leadership role and that climate change can be an opportunity for favourable change for the continent. The resilience effort must go beyond the technical and material realm to move in this direction, which is largely focused on agriculture and energy - and take different forms, such as demographic, economic, institutional and psychic, so that the break with established models and paradigms is complete. It is necessary to reorder priorities and integrate the environment as the central axis of any action programme because, as the Senegalese professor Felwine Sarr rightly emphasises in his work *Afrotopia*: "The challenge is to get out of the dictatorship of urgencies".

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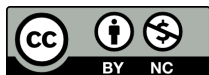


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