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“Decolonize our Climate”: Voices of the Global South & the Diaspora

African Cultural Foundation/Organization Wien

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ACF Publikations

The African Cultural Foundation (formerly African Cultural Promotion) was founded in 1997 and is a leading organization committed to providing educational, political, and participatory opportunities for people of African descent both in the diaspora and across the African continent. Our work is based on the belief that preserving culture, strengthening civil rights, and ensuring equal access to education and employment are essential for building inclusive societies.

Through all our initiatives, we seek to combine research, community action, and cultural identity to combat structural inequality and strengthen African perspectives.

This publication is part of our comprehensive commitment to promoting the political and social participation of Black people (BPoC) in Europe. It identifies the systemic and structural barriers that continue to exclude BPoC people from formal political spaces, while highlighting best practices, community initiatives, and policy innovations that are working to change this situation.

Non-governmental Organization publications

**Curtesy of the African Cultural Foundation/
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In the digital age, information and communication technologies (ICTs) have revolutionized access to knowledge, civic participation, and economic empowerment. However, they have also given rise to new and insidious forms of gender-based violence, often referred to as ICT-facilitated gender-based violence (ICT-GBV). This form of violence involves the use of digital tools and platforms—such as mobile phones, social media, and messaging applications—to harass, stalk, intimidate, exploit, or harm individuals based on their gender. While ICTs can serve as powerful tools for liberation and inclusion, their weaponization against women and girls has become a major barrier to digital inclusion, education, and political participation.

Defined by UN Women and the Association for Progressive Communications, ICT-GBV includes a broad array of behaviors such as cyberstalking, online harassment, non-consensual image sharing, sextortion, doxing, gendered disinformation, and online surveillance. These forms of abuse not only mirror existing offline inequalities but often amplify them through the anonymity, speed, and reach afforded by digital technologies. Women, girls, and gender-diverse individuals, particularly those from marginalized communities, are disproportionately targeted, facing psychological trauma, reputational damage, economic exclusion, and withdrawal from public and virtual spaces. As a result, the digital environment—intended to be a space for innovation and opportunity—becomes a hostile arena for many women in Nigeria and across the Global South.

This report focuses on Nigeria, where ICT-GBV is becoming increasingly pervasive and is directly undermining women's and girls' capacity to benefit from online education and participate meaningfully in politics. With internet penetration now reaching approximately 45% nationally, stark regional and gender disparities remain. Women in Northern Nigeria face even greater exclusion due to patriarchal norms, limited infrastructure, and low digital literacy. Furthermore, many Nigerian women who do access digital platforms are deterred from engaging due to online harassment, sexual threats, or cyberbullying, which have become common deterrents to their continued presence in digital education platforms and political discourse.

The implications of ICT-GBV are far-reaching. In education, it deters women from enrolling in or completing online courses, with fear of harassment or image-based abuse driving many to withdraw altogether. In politics, ICT-GBV silences female voices, curtails digital campaigning, and discourages participation by subjecting women candidates and public figures to sexualized disinformation and targeted abuse. Notably, high-profile figures such as Senator Natasha Akpoti-Uduaghan and activists like Aisha Yesufu and Dorothy Njemanze have faced sustained online abuse, further exemplifying how digital spaces in Nigeria are often weaponized to marginalize and silence women.

Despite the growing visibility of these issues, Nigeria's legal and institutional frameworks remain insufficient. While the Cybercrimes Act (2015) criminalizes some forms of online abuse, it lacks explicit provisions on gendered digital violence. Enforcement is weak, reporting mechanisms are underdeveloped, and victims often face stigma or are blamed for their victimization. This institutional vacuum exacerbates a climate of impunity, allowing perpetrators to act without fear of consequences and leaving women with few avenues for redress.

In this context, addressing ICT-GBV is not only a matter of personal safety but a prerequisite for achieving broader goals of gender equality, digital inclusion, and democratic participation. This report explores the forms, prevalence, and impact of ICT-GBV on Nigerian women and girls—particularly with respect to educational attainment and political participation. Drawing on both quantitative data and qualitative case studies, it also highlights promising interventions such as the World Bank's "Gina Mata, Gina Al-Umma" digital skills program in Northern Nigeria, and the efforts of civil society organizations that are pushing for safer digital environments. Ultimately, the report advocates for a rights-based, gender-sensitive digital policy framework that addresses not only access but safety, inclusion, and empowerment for all women and girls in Nigeria.

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LUCÍA MURIEL

DIPLOM-PSYCHOLOGIN, PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIN

Lucía Muriel is a psychologist and psychotherapist specializing in trauma, migration, and experiences of exclusion. She emigrated to the GDR with her mother and sister in 1963. After completing her Abitur, she moved to West Berlin in 1976. She is involved in anti-racist and decolonial educational work, holds lectures and workshops, and initiated



the founding of several migrant organisations and clubs. Her current publications are about decolonial perspectives on climate and mental health. Muriel lives and works in Berlin.

MORE ON LUCIAS WORK HERE

[Lucia Muriel](#)

[Haus der Kulturen der Welt](#)

[Salzkammergut 2024](#)

PATO KELESITSE

CLIMATE JUSTICE ADVOCATE

Born in Kanye, Botswana, Pato Kelesitse is a climate justice advocate, feminist, and policy leader working at the intersection of governance, gender equality, and environmental sustainability. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Accounting and Finance and is currently pursuing a Master of Arts in Development Studies at the University of Botswana.



Pato serves as a delegate of the Government of Botswana to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), where she contributes to regional and global negotiations on climate policy. In 2019, she was recognized among the “40 Under 40 African Leaders for Climate Resilience” by Wilton Park, an executive agency of the UK Foreign Office.

As the former coordinator of Resilient40—a network of more than 60 young climate leaders from 29 African countries—she has been instrumental in fostering youth collaboration on climate resilience and sustainable development. Pato is also a member of the World Economic Forum’s Global Shapers Community (Gaborone Hub), where she continues to mentor and engage young changemakers.

Her extensive experience in advocacy spans youth and community organizing, project coordination, capacity building, and documentation.

MORE ON PATOS WORK HERE

[Entwicklungstagung](#)

[Climate Justice Resilience Fund](#)

[SDG Conference](#)

NOEMI ZENK-AGYEI

CLIMATE JUSTICE ADVOCATE AND LEGAL RESEARCHER

Noemi Zenk-Agyei is a climate justice advocate and legal researcher whose work bridges environmental law, human rights, and international development. Her expertise lies in understanding how global trade, environmental policy, and social justice intersect — and how law can be used as a tool for climate accountability.

Noemi currently works with



World's Youth for Climate Justice (WYCJ), a youth-led movement that successfully mobilized support from more than 130 countries for the United Nations General Assembly resolution requesting an Advisory Opinion from the International Court of Justice (ICJ) on states' obligations regarding climate change. This historic achievement represents a landmark moment in international environmental law, advancing the recognition of climate change as not only an environmental issue but also a matter of human rights and intergenerational justice.

In her role at WYCJ, Noemi has contributed to legal research and advocacy on climate litigation, climate finance, and environmental peacebuilding, exploring how international law can better protect vulnerable communities and ecosystems.

MORE ON NOEMIE'S WORK HERE

[Just Peace](#)

[Wolfsburger Nachrichten](#)

[Worlds Youth for Climate Justice](#)

ADAORA OFOEDU

EDUCATOR, COMMUNITY ORGANIZER, AND ADVOCATE FOR RACIAL JUSTICE

Adaora Ofoedu is the co-founder of the African Cultural Foundation Vienna and the Black Women Community (Schwarze Frauen Community), two initiatives that work to strengthen the visibility, solidarity, and empowerment of Black communities in Austria and beyond.

As a trainer in adult education, Adaora specializes in STEM



World education (MINT-Bildung), environmental awareness, and anti-racism, combining these disciplines to create inclusive learning environments that challenge structural inequality. Her work emphasizes how education can serve as a bridge between personal empowerment and social transformation — particularly for women, youth, and marginalized groups.

One of the central pillars of Adaora's practice is linking climate justice with anti-discrimination and empowerment. She develops and facilitates workshops that raise awareness within diaspora and migrant communities about environmental issues, sustainability, and the global connections between colonialism, racism, and ecological degradation. In doing so, she highlights how the historical exploitation of the African continent and its peoples continues to shape today's climate crisis — and how recognizing this connection is key to building a fairer and more sustainable future.

MORE ON ADAORA'S WORK HERE

[Schwarze Frauen Community](#)

[VIDC: 60 years of cooperation and dialogue](#)

[Österreichischer Integrationsfond](#)

individual, often causing emotional distress or fear for safety. Cyberstalking frequently targets women in leadership positions, activists, or former intimate partners and may involve the use of spyware or GPS tracking. This includes the use of threatening, degrading, or sexually explicit messages directed at individuals, especially women and gender minorities, via email, social media, or forums. Such harassment is often sustained and coordinated, sometimes involving large-scale attacks (e.g., “dogpiling”) that silence victims through volume and intensity.

SEEING PEOPLE AND THEIR HUMANITY

Pato Kelesitse set the tone with a simple but profound reminder: “See people and their humanity — and respect it.” Her message underscores that we must stop separating environmental protection from the people most affected by ecological breakdown. Pato argues that communities on the frontlines of this breakdown (often in the Global South) need to be at the center of climate solutions. Notably, about 88% of the world’s population lives in the Global South, yet these countries hold a disproportionately small share of global wealth and power ([conference-board.org](https://www.conference-board.org)). This imbalance is central to climate justice: those who did the least to cause climate change are often the ones suffering its worst effects.

“Climate solutions cannot be built on human rights violations,” Pato emphasized, highlighting a key principle of climate justice. She insists that truly sustainable solutions must address social and economic needs alongside environmental goals. In practical terms, she listed several interrelated areas that must be integrated into climate action:

- Democracy: inclusive decision-making and respect for the voices of local communities and marginalized groups in climate policy.
- Employment: green solutions that create fair jobs and livelihoods, rather than forcing people into poverty.

WHAT DOES THE TERM GLOBAL NORTH AND SOUTH MEAN

The Global North – shorthand for the wealthy, industrialized countries in Europe, North America, and similar regions – must recognize the humanity of Global South populations (Latin America, Africa, Asia, Oceania) beyond just their own (globaljustice.org.uk/conference-board.org).

- Feminism: gender equality and women's leadership in climate action, recognizing that patriarchal structures worsen climate vulnerability (theecologist.org).
- Food Security: protecting the right to food through sustainable agriculture and resilient food systems, since climate change threatens crops and access to food.
- Solidarity: a spirit of global cooperation and support, rather than each nation or group only protecting itself.

Integrating these realities recognizes that the climate crisis is "intersectional." Intersectionality, a term popularized by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, describes how different forms of oppression like racism, sexism, classism, colonialism) overlap and intensify each other (sustainability.yale.edu). Applying an intersectional lens to climate change means understanding that environmental issues are bound up with social justice issues – for example, a poor rural woman of color will likely experience climate impacts differently (and more severely) than a wealthy urban man

ECOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN EXPLAINED

Ecological breakdown refers to the severe, accelerating damage to ecosystems and climate – for example, extreme floods, droughts, and habitat loss driven by human-induced climate change (unep.org).

As Pato notes, only by addressing these interconnected realities can we protect both people and the planet. In other words, environmental protection and human rights must go hand in hand.

Pato Kelesitse also warned against the "performative integration" of BIPOC people in climate spaces. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous, and People of Color – groups historically marginalized in global decision-making. Performative integration means token inclusion without real power-sharing (for example, inviting a few speakers of color for appearance's sake, but not truly valuing their input). Pato argues that to avoid such tokenism, certain deeply ingrained biases need to be unlearned.

As one stark example, she exposed racial and colonial biases in notions of climate expertise. She noted a list of the world's top 1,000 climate scientists published a few years ago: "all five representing Africa were white."

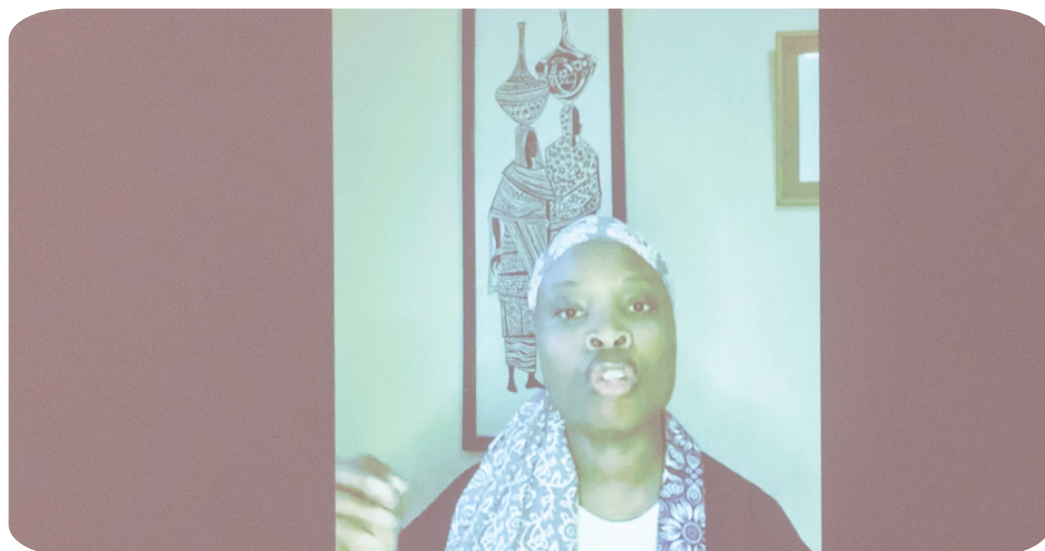
A Reuters “Hot List” of climate scientists contained only five Africa-based experts, despite Africa’s huge population, reflecting a skew where expertise is too often equated with being white and from the Global North ([qz.com](#)). “We’ve decided that the standard of expertise is white and male,” Pato observed. This imbalance is not just about representation, but about whose knowledge counts.

Climate research and policy have historically been dominated by the Global North, missing insights from the Global South ([qz.com](#)[qz.com](#)). Pato’s call is to redefine expertise – to value lived experiences and local knowledge alongside formal academic credentials. People with lived experience of climate impacts can be just as much experts, if not more so, than those with decades of formal study.

As climate justice advocates often say, the people living through the crisis have critical knowledge. “Frontline communities are just as much of an expert on the intersections between the climate crisis as any academic,” as one Yale environmental fellow put it ([sustainability.yale.edu](#)). Recognizing this means reconsidering who gets to be called an “expert” in climate debates.

Pato also challenges us to ask: how much injustice are our societies ready to accept for the sake of day-to-day convenience? For instance, consider the example she gave of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the production of mobile phones. The DRC is rich in minerals like cobalt and coltan, which are essential for the batteries and components in smartphones and other electronics. But the mining of these minerals often involves child labor, horrendous working conditions, environmental degradation, and the fueling of armed conflict over resource-rich land.

Photo: Minitts Kandlbauer



In effect, the convenience of a smartphone for consumers in the Global North may be built on the exploitation of children and communities in the Global South. Investigations have documented children and adults digging in toxic pits for cobalt, risking their health and lives to feed the supply chains of tech companies (earth.org).

The mining boom has led to deforestation and pollution in the DRC – for example, entire landscapes of the Congo rainforest cleared for mines, rivers contaminated with mining waste, and local people suffering health problems (earth.org). Activists dub this “blood cobalt” in parallel to “blood diamonds,” because of the human rights abuses and conflict linked to these minerals (earth.org). Pato’s point is that we in wealthier societies must confront these uncomfortable connections. Our day-to-day convenience – a smartphone, an electric car battery – can carry a hidden cost of injustice elsewhere. Climate justice means cleaning up these supply chains and ensuring that the green economy does not continue exploitative patterns of the past.

Photo: Minifits Kandlbauer



She further pointed to Mozambique as an example of how extractivism (a model of economic growth based on extracting natural resources, often by foreign companies) leaves communities doubly vulnerable. Mozambique has seen multinational corporations exploit its fossil fuels (like natural gas in the Cabo Delgado region) and other resources, often displacing local people and damaging local environments (africasacountry.com).

The irony is painful: the country's natural wealth is extracted in ways that violate human rights and harm the environment (africasacountry.com), yet the profits flow out of the country, leaving local communities impoverished and less able to cope with climate shocks. When floods and storms hit, those communities have fewer resources to rebuild, meaning extractivism has undermined their climate resilience. This is why Pato and others advocate strongly for climate reparations and funds to address loss and damage.

At the 2022 UN climate conference (COP27), developing countries won a historic decision to establish a Loss and Damage Fund aimed at providing financial assistance to nations most vulnerable to climate change impacts (unep.org). Pato stressed that a fully functioning Loss and Damage Fund could be a first step toward genuine climate reparations. Climate reparations is the idea that the rich, high-emitting nations owe a "climate debt" to poorer nations for the decades of unchecked pollution and environmental harm they have caused (globaljustice.org.uk). In fact, studies show the Global North (with its long history of industrial emissions) is responsible for about 92% of excess global CO₂ emissions driving climate change (ban.org).

Yet it is countries in the Global South suffering the most from floods, droughts, and rising seas. The Loss and Damage Fund is meant to start addressing this injustice by channeling finance from wealthy countries to hard-hit regions for recovery and rebuilding. While establishing the fund was a major victory (unep.org), much work remains to actually fill it with money and make it operational.

Still, as Pato indicates, it represents progress toward acknowledging and compensating the harm to frontline communities – a concrete move toward global solidarity. "Humanity is not solidarity – it's protecting yourself. They will be the first, but not the last," Pato

LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND (DEFINITION)

The Loss and Damage Fund is a financial mechanism established under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to support countries that are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

It aims to provide funding for irreversible losses – such as the destruction of homes, infrastructure, livelihoods, and cultural heritage – that cannot be prevented or adapted to.

cautioned, suggesting that true solidarity means acting before climate devastation spreads further.

In other words, the countries and communities hit first (like Mozambique, or low-lying Pacific islands) may be the canary in the coal mine – if we do not act in solidarity to help them and curb the crisis, many others will soon face the same fate. Protecting only oneself is short-sighted; protecting others ultimately protects us all.

LOSS AND DAMAGE FUND (DEFINITION) CONTINUED

Agreed upon at the COP27 climate conference in 2022, the fund represents a historic acknowledgment that wealthy, high-emitting countries (mostly in the Global North) have a responsibility to assist poorer nations (largely in the Global South) suffering the worst effects of a crisis they did not cause.

The goal of the Loss and Damage Fund is to deliver climate reparations and solidarity, ensuring that communities devastated by floods, droughts, cyclones, or rising seas receive financial support to rebuild and recover with dignity.

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LEARNING FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Noemie Zenk-Agyei highlighted how climate movements from the Global South – particularly the Pacific – are reshaping the global climate dialogue. She spoke about the Pacific Islands’ groundbreaking initiative to bring climate justice to the International Court of Justice (ICJ). Specifically, she supports the Pacific Students Fighting Climate Change initiative, a youth-led effort from Vanuatu that successfully urged the United Nations General Assembly to seek an advisory opinion from the ICJ on states’ responsibilities for climate harm (passblue.com). This campaign began with law students from Pacific island nations who felt their pleas were not being heard in traditional climate negotiations. They turned to international law as a new avenue for climate justice.

After years of organizing, in March 2023 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution (co-sponsored by over 100 countries) requesting the ICJ to clarify what international law obliges countries to do about climate change (passblue.com). By 2025, the ICJ was holding hearings on this question – essentially, can countries be held accountable under law for failing to act on climate change, and what do they owe to nations suffering the consequences?

It’s a historic effort to codify climate justice in legal terms, and it was driven by the voices of the global South. Noemie’s point is that these Pacific youth are changing the conversation, asserting that vulnerable nations do have agency and can use tools like international law to hold big polluters to account (pisfcc.org). Importantly, Noemie Zenk-Agyei put this legal initiative in the context of colonialism. She explained that colonialism – the historical conquest and exploitation of lands and peoples by European powers – and the occupation of Indigenous lands were never criminalized on the global stage.

Unlike other atrocities (e.g. genocide) that have been clearly labeled crimes, the violent dispossession and extraction of colonialism did not result in international trials or reparations. This left the world without legal tools to fully address its ongoing impact. Former colonies were often forced to start their independent life deeply impoverished, while colonizers kept the wealth. The legacy persists in trade systems, corporate practices, and even in climate vulnerability. Many of the countries most affected by climate change today (for example in Africa, Asia, Latin America) are former colonies whose resources were pillaged and whose development was stunted by colonial rule (globaljustice.org.uk).

At the same time, the industrialization and wealth accumulated by colonial powers came with huge carbon emissions and environmental damage – essentially, colonialism powered the climate crisis (globaljustice.org.uk).

Yet, as Noemie Zenk-Agyei notes, there has been no legal reckoning for these historical wrongs. This is a gap climate justice must confront head-on. Part of the push for an ICJ advisory opinion is to illuminate principles like historical responsibility – to affirm that states which “have contributed the most to climate change and benefited from colonial exploitation” bear the greatest obligations to act and to assist those now sufferin (globaljustice.org.uk). Climate justice, in this sense, calls for what can be seen as modern reparations for “atmospheric colonization” (ban.org). In the words of climate activists, “colonialism is a historic and ongoing driver of the climate crisis” (globaljustice.org.uk). Any real solution must address that ongoing legacy – whether through financial transfers, technology sharing, debt relief, legal accountability, or all of the above.



Noemie Zenk-Agyei also reminded the audience that 88% of the world's population lives in the Global South (conference-board.org). In other words, the vast majority of humanity lives in regions that have contributed the least to climate change but are facing its gravest dangers. For people in these communities, climate activism is not a trendy or abstract pursuit – it is literally a fight for survival. “The climate movement is not cute,” she said. “For many, it’s about defending their land, their communities, their right to live.” When your island is sinking from sea-level rise, or your farmlands have turned to desert, climate activism becomes self-defense. This contrasts with how the climate movement sometimes appeared in the Global North, especially in its early mainstream rise around 2018–2019 (think of school climate strikes, etc.).

In wealthier countries, more people were joining climate protests – which is good – but sometimes the urgency and framing differed. Noemie observed from personal experience that when the climate movement finally gained broad attention in the Global North in 2019, she (as a young climate advocate) was invited to many speaking engagements. However, once she began speaking about the intersectionality of climate with colonialism and other “-isms” (like racism, capitalism, patriarchy), those invitations dried up.

This reveals a discomfort in the Northern climate space with confronting deeper systemic issues. The mainstream narrative was more palatable when it focused on carbon emissions in isolation; it became contentious when activists like Noemie connected the dots to inequality, historical injustice, and economic systems.

A striking example she gave was Greta Thunberg – arguably the poster child of the youth climate movement – and how she was treated once she broadened her message. Greta initially rallied millions by speaking about the urgency of cutting emissions. But over time, she too started emphasizing that climate change is intertwined with capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy – essentially that our entire system of exploitation needs addressing for true climate action. After making these connections, Greta found herself sidelined by some in the movement and media who preferred a narrower message.

(In fact, Greta herself has acknowledged this dynamic, once stating “Climate justice is not just about the environment... If we don’t include social justice and equity in this fight, then it will never be sustainable” – underlining that climate justice and human rights are inseparable.) The takeaway from Noemie’s perspective is that linking climate justice to human rights, anti-capitalism, and anti-racism is essential, even if it’s uncomfortable.



Activists in the Global South have long understood that you cannot solve climate change without also challenging the global inequalities and power structures that caused it (theecologist.org). Increasingly, they are leading with this holistic vision. By connecting issues of economic exploitation, gender inequality, and racial oppression to climate activism, they show that climate justice is about dismantling multiple layers of injustice simultaneously.

As Noemie put it, climate justice is inseparable from human rights – the fight for a stable climate is also a fight for dignity, equity, and survival of marginalized peoples. And given the global South makes up the global majority, their vision of climate action – one that is bold, justice-oriented, and rooted in lived experience – is redefining what effective climate solutions mean.

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CHALLENGING WHITENESS AND PRIVILEGE IN THE CLIMATE MOVEMENT

Lucia Muriel brought the discussion closer to home (Europe), examining the internal dynamics of the climate movement in Germany and the broader European context. She observed that these movements have largely been shaped by white, middle-class actors, often to the exclusion of people of color and those from less privileged backgrounds. This critique is an invitation to look at who leads and defines the agenda of climate activism in the Global North.



Many high-profile European climate organizations and campaigns have been started by, and are most comfortable for, college-educated, middle-class white people. The result is that BIPOC voices often remain at the margins of the movement, even in issues that directly affect them (for example, air pollution in immigrant neighborhoods, or extreme heat affecting African and South Asian diaspora communities).

Lucia Muriel stressed a powerful truth: “There is no climate justice without social justice.” This slogan means that we cannot achieve climate justice if we ignore social inequalities; the two are deeply interlinked (greenangelsyndicate.com). Achieving climate goals requires addressing racism, classism, and other forms of injustice. If a climate policy or movement only benefits the already privileged, it’s neither truly just nor ultimately effective.

Through her work, Lucia Muriel strives to connect BIPOC activists and broaden the movement’s consciousness about race, class, and privilege. By gathering testimonies from the diaspora (communities of people with heritage in Africa, Asia, Latin America living in Europe), her group uncovered a shared experience: exclusion that is not accidental but structural. In other words, it’s not just a matter of a few biased individuals or oversights – there are structural reasons why BIPOC activists have felt unwelcome or unheard in European climate spaces.

This can include everything from the language and tone used (maybe very academic or full of jargon), to organizational cultures that fail to address internal biases, to lack of outreach in minority communities, and even outright instances of discrimination. One vivid illustration of this structural bias is how media and institutions tend to celebrate white climate activists while overlooking activists of color.

Recall the example of Ugandan youth activist Vanessa Nakate, who was cropped out of a news photo at an international climate event, leaving only the white activists visible (duurzamestudent.nl). Such incidents send a subtle message about whose image and voice is valued – and they happen far too often to be mere mistakes (duurzamestudent.nl). Lucia’s findings echo that these patterns of exclusion are systemic. BIPOC activists in Europe have reported feeling that their contributions are tokenized or their perspectives sidelined, leading some to disengage from mainstream groups.

Lucia Muriel also called attention to white saviorism in the climate movement. White saviorism refers to a pattern where well-meaning white people approach activism with a self-appointed “hero” mentality toward non-white communities, rather than as equal partners.

It's when privileged individuals or NGOs from, say, Europe or the U.S. go to "help" a community but do so in a paternalistic way - without listening to local knowledge, and with an implicit attitude that the saviors know best. In the environmental movement, this often manifests as big international organizations (largely run by those from the Global North) setting the agenda in Global South countries, or speaking for affected people rather than



amplifying those people's own voices (duurzamestudent.nl). As Lucia noted, this allows privileged activists to feel like heroes rather than engaging in true solidarity. The problem is not the activism per se, but centering the wrong voices. There's nothing wrong with recognizing the work of any dedicated activist, as one commentary put it, but it's problematic if white voices are always centered as the saviors of the planet (duurzamestudent.nl).

It can erase the decades of work BIPOC communities have done on the frontlines of environmental justice (duurzamestudent.nl). Moreover, saviorism frames the issue as one of charity rather than justice - it can imply that the Global South needs rescuing by the North, rather than acknowledging that the Global North actually caused much of the problem and owes a debt (which is a very different power dynamic).

Lucia Muriel's critique here aligns with a growing call within the movement: European and North American activists must move beyond paternalism. Instead of "saving" the Global South, they should support empowerment - acting in partnership, following the leadership of frontline communities, and fighting the root causes of climate injustice (like trade policies, corporate practices, and yes, our own consumer lifestyles that drive exploitation).

Additionally, Lucia Muriel examined how classism and even biases around queerness play out in the climate movement. Many European climate groups unintentionally cater to those who have the time and resources to volunteer or protest – often middle-class students or professionals. But working-class people, or those facing economic insecurity, might find it harder to participate (they may not be able to risk arrest at a protest, or they might prioritize immediate economic needs).

If movements don't actively include and speak to working-class and low-income communities, they risk being a club for the privileged. This is a class justice issue within climate activism. Likewise, LGBTQ+ individuals (the "queerness" Lucia mentioned) bring perspectives on how climate impacts and solutions affect their community (for instance, queer and trans people often face housing and job discrimination, which can compound climate vulnerability). A truly inclusive climate movement has to embrace these perspectives and fight all forms of oppression together.

Lucia Muriel's work in gathering diaspora testimonies revealed how, for example, African and Asian diaspora in Europe often have knowledge of living with climate impacts back in their countries of origin, or have insight into sustainable practices from their cultures – but they may not feel comfortable sharing these in predominantly white, Eurocentric green groups. By highlighting these stories, Lucia emphasized that the exclusion BIPOC activists feel is not random; it reflects historical and structural power imbalances. The encouraging aspect is that once this truth is recognized, movements can consciously work to change – to decolonize their approach, embrace intersectional activism, and make sure everyone has a seat at the table.

In sum, Lucia Muriel's contributions are a wake-up call to predominantly white climate movements in the Global North to examine their own privilege. As she said, "exclusion is not accidental – it is structural." Building an effective coalition for climate justice requires self-critique and change: listening to marginalized voices, sharing leadership, and rejecting any savior complex. It also means adopting an approach of global solidarity instead of Eurocentric paternalism. European activism can move beyond a charity mentality – where, for instance, a group in Germany thinks they are "helping the poor Africans" – toward genuine collaboration, where activists across continents strategize together as equals.

Climate justice and social justice are inextricably linked, and recognizing that strengthens the movement. In practical terms, that could involve things like funding grassroots projects led by Indigenous people, ensuring translation and accessibility in climate events for diverse communities, confronting racism or sexism within green organizations, and making sure policy demands include social protections (jobs, healthcare, etc.) so that climate policies don't hurt the vulnerable.

The bottom line is that climate justice must be inclusive: as many activists say, there can be no climate justice without social justice, and that means climate activism must actively fight racism, class inequality, and other injustices, not ignore them (duurzamestudent.nl) (greenangelsyndicate.com).



individual, often causing emotional distress or fear for safety. Cyberstalking frequently targets women in leadership positions, activists, or former intimate partners and may involve the use of spyware or GPS tracking. This includes the use of threatening, degrading, or sexually explicit messages directed at individuals, especially women and gender minorities, via email, social media, or forums. Such harassment is often sustained and coordinated, sometimes involving large-scale attacks (e.g., “dogpiling”) that silence victims through volume and intensity.

RECLAIMING BLACK NARRATIVES AND EMPOWERMENT

Adaora Ofoedu’s contribution centered on fostering racial awareness and empowerment within Austria’s Black community, especially among children and women. She works to help Black Austrians recognize and celebrate their heritage, while also confronting the lingering legacies of colonialism in European institutions. Adaora noted a glaring issue in Austria (and similarly in many European countries): the lack of representation of Black excellence in public life. In the environmental sphere, for example, most well-known climate activists in European media are white – even though, as discussed, the Global North (which includes Austria and other wealthy nations) is responsible for the vast majority of environmental destruction and emissions driving the climate crisis (ban.org).

This disconnect can send a discouraging message to young Black people: it suggests that climate leadership is a “white” domain, and it ignores the fact that people of color around the world (and within Europe) are doing crucial environmental work.

Adaora addresses this by reclaiming Black narratives in the context of environmentalism and climate action. She ensures that in her trainings and educational programs, Black children and women learn about heroes and role models who look like them and have made impactful contributions. She paid tribute to several Black and Indigenous activists whose courage and sacrifice have paved the way for new generations. These names might not always feature in European textbooks or media, but they are giants in the climate and environmental justice movement. For instance:

- Wangari Maathai (Kenya): An environmentalist and the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize (2004). She founded the Green Belt Movement, which has planted tens of millions of trees across Africa, empowering rural women in the process. Maathai showed how grassroots action can tackle deforestation and poverty simultaneously (straughanenvironmental.com).



She faced down a dictatorial regime in Kenya and endured arrests and beatings, but ultimately helped restore forests and inspired global environmental justice efforts.

- Vanessa Nakate (Uganda): A young climate activist who has been a leading voice for African climate justice. She began the Youth for Future Africa initiative and has spoken passionately about how climate change is devastating her region (with droughts, floods, etc.), despite Africa contributing the least to the problem. After being cropped out of a news photo in 2020 (an incident that highlighted racial bias in media_(duurzamestudent.nl), Vanessa gained even more prominence. She now advocates internationally for inclusive climate action and founded the Rise Up Movement to elevate African voices.
- Berta Cáceres (Honduras): An Indigenous Lenca environmental leader who fought against the construction of a hydroelectric dam that threatened her people's land and river. She co-founded the Council of Popular and Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). Berta was assassinated in 2016 for her activism_(theguardian.com) - a martyr in the fight against environmentally destructive projects imposed on Indigenous communities. Her death drew worldwide attention to the dangers environmental defenders face and galvanized efforts to protect Indigenous rights.

By highlighting figures like these, Adaora helps European audiences (and Black Europeans in particular) realize that climate activism is not just white, and never has been. Black and Indigenous people have always been at the forefront of defending land and nature – from Kenyan women planting trees, to Pacific islanders fighting for their sinking homelands, to Amazonian tribes guarding the rainforest. Their excellence and expertise deserve recognition. Adaora’s racial awareness trainings often reveal that many inequalities observed abroad (such as impoverished African villages or deforested lands) are rooted in Europe’s own colonial past.

This can be eye-opening for Europeans who might not have learned much about colonialism in school. For example, Austria (like other European powers) benefited indirectly from colonial trade networks and now benefits from global systems that often still disadvantage the Global South. She reminds people that “The African continent is not poor. It creates wealth worldwide – especially for the Global North.” This turns on its head the common narrative of Africa as a place of poverty needing charity.

The reality, as development scholars often note, is that Africa’s resources – its minerals, timber, oil, agricultural products, and even human talent – have for centuries been extracted to enrich others, from colonial empires to modern multinational corporations (africasacountry.com).

Today, African countries collectively lose more wealth to things like unfair trade, debt interest, tax avoidance by foreign companies, and illicit financial flows than they receive in aid. In that sense, Africa is a net creditor to the world, not a debtor. European colonialism set up many of these exploitative patterns: colonizers took land and labor, restructured economies to export raw materials, and accumulated immense wealth. For example, European industries grew rich from resources taken in Africa and Asia, while the colonies were often left underdeveloped (africasacountry.com).

Those patterns did not fully disappear after independence – they morphed into neo-colonial arrangements. To this day, when we see hunger or poverty in an African country rich in minerals or fertile soil, it’s usually not because the land lacks wealth; it’s because the wealth is being diverted elsewhere or controlled by a small elite. By teaching these realities, Adaora empowers Black Europeans to understand that their ancestral lands are rich and that the problem lies in where the wealth goes. This knowledge fosters pride in heritage and a clearer diagnosis of global injustice.

Adaora also underscores that Black people have every right to be in environmental and climate spaces in Europe and to speak up about what needs to change. Environmentalism is sometimes seen as a luxury issue or a “white folks thing” in Europe, but Adaora challenges that notion. Given that 92% of global CO₂ emissions in excess of safe limits have been caused by the wealthy countries and elites (ban.org), it is vital that Black and other marginalized communities in those wealthy countries are part of the conversation on how to fix the problem. They bring perspectives on equity and historical accountability that are often missing.

Adaora helps organizations in Europe understand that the injustices they might sympathize with abroad (like villages flooded by climate change or farmers losing crops) are linked to injustices at home and in history. Europe’s colonial legacy isn’t just a past story – it lives on in institutional biases and in the structure of the global economy.

For example, if a European NGO wonders why deforestation in the Congo continues, Adaora might point them to how European consumer demand and companies are implicated, and how racist stereotypes have long painted Africans as incapable of managing their resources when in truth foreign exploitation is a major driver. By making these connections, her trainings aim to dismantle the us/them mindset and replace it with a sense of shared responsibility and the need for reparative action.

In essence, Adaora Ofoedu’s work is about empowerment and representation. She’s ensuring that Black narratives in climate activism are reclaimed –



that Black kids in Austria can grow up knowing about Wangari Maathai or Vanessa Nakate as environmental champions, not just white figures like Greta Thunberg or David Attenborough. She's pushing institutions to confront the colonial roots of today's climate disparities, which can be uncomfortable but is ultimately liberating.

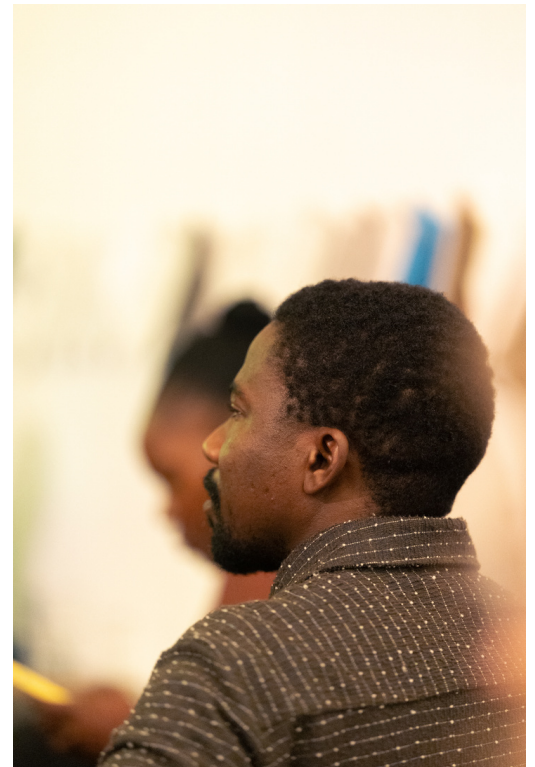
As she stated, "We are allowed to be in these spaces and we have the right to speak about what needs to change." This is a powerful affirmation that climate action spaces belong to everyone, and that those who have been historically excluded or silenced have not only a right but often a duty to raise their voices – because they often speak from lived experience of injustice and resilience.

From Pato's call for human-centered climate policy, to Noemie's fight for legal and historical accountability, to Lucia's critique of movement politics, to Adaora's work on narrative and empowerment – all these insights coalesce into a single theme: climate justice. Climate justice means more than reducing emissions; it means reimagining our relationships with each other and the planet, rooting out oppression, and building a future where protecting the Earth also protects all people.

Each speaker from the Global South and marginalized communities is urging the world to widen its lens: to see the humanity in those most affected, to learn from those on the frontlines, to challenge the biases in our own movements, and to honor the knowledge and leadership of Black and Indigenous peoples. Only by doing these can we craft solutions that are not only effective but fair.

The climate crisis is a global threat that demands solidarity across borders and identities – as the saying goes, “we are not all in the same boat, but we are in the same storm.” Those with sturdier boats (resources and power) must help those in flimsy boats, and fundamentally, we need to build a new ship altogether, one that doesn’t run on exploitation.

The voices highlighted here show us the way: see people’s humanity, learn from the Global South, confront privilege, and uplift those historically pushed aside. That is how we will protect both people and the planet, together.



This section provides an overview of two workshops that explored the intersections of climate justice, decolonial perspectives, and everyday action. Led by Lucía Muriel and Téclaire Ngo-Tam, the sessions invited participants to critically reflect on global inequalities, privilege, and power structures shaping the climate crisis. Through interactive exercises, historical reflection, and practical examples — from the politics of food production to the visibility of activists from the Global South.

LEARNING HOW TO IMPLEMENT CLIMATE ACTION EVERYDAY

In the first workshop with Lucía Muriel, we explored issues of whitewashing, privilege, white saviourism, and the different forms that decolonial (climate) activism can take.

After a short round of introductions, Lucía led an exercise to show how present and pervasive whitewashing is within climate activism. Participants were asked to list, within two minutes, all the organizations and activists they could think of from the Global North working on climate and environmental issues. Then, they repeated the same exercise for the Global South. As expected, most participants noted that their first list was much longer.

Using examples such as the case of Vanessa Nakate (who was cropped out of a photo with Greta Thunberg and two white activists, and was not mentioned in related media coverage), Lucía demonstrated how much the climate movement has been appropriated and dominated by the Global North, and what consequences this has for representation and justice.

This led to a discussion about privilege and motivation: while activism in the Global North is often voluntary and motivated by “goodwill,” in the Global South it is frequently a matter of survival — about protecting one’s own living spaces. As one participant noted: If the most famous climate activist in the Global North decided to quit tomorrow, their daily life would likely remain unchanged. But if any activist in the Global South did the same, it could have severe consequences for their life and community.



As a closing exercise, participants reflected on the personal journeys and stories of climate activists and movements from the Global South, using materials from the KlimaDeSol project coordinated by Lucía Muriel.

CLIMATE & FOOD SYSTEMS

The second workshop, led by Téclaire Ngo-Tam, focused on the connections between power, climate, and our everyday lives, especially through the lens of food and consumption. To begin, Téclaire introduced the group to a global-historical perspective on colonialism, industrialization, and climate through an interactive exercise. It wasn't just about historical facts — it was about shifting perspectives: What happens to global statistics when we represent continents and countries according to their actual land size or population?

Next, participants engaged in a quiz about chocolate production — tracing its journey from cacao harvest to the chocolate bar in a supermarket. The discussion highlighted the inhumane working conditions in cacao farming (including child and forced labour), the dependency on intermediaries, and the fact that most of the profitable processing takes place outside of Africa. The group also examined various certification labels, critically questioning what they truly guarantee.

To conclude, Téclaire led an interactive exercise where participants, working in small groups, had to guess how many bathtubs of water are needed to produce different foods — from steak and cheese to rice, tomatoes, and carrots. The game vividly illustrated the global impact of individual consumption choices and raised awareness of the growing issue of global water scarcity.



On the final day of our three-day event, Sunday, 5 October, we screened the documentary *The Great Green Wall*. The film follows Malian musician and activist Inna Modja on a journey across Africa, tracing the ambitious African Union-led initiative to plant a wall of trees stretching from Senegal to Ethiopia – a project aimed at combating desertification, restoring degraded land, and improving livelihoods across the Sahel region. Through music, personal stories, and encounters with communities affected by climate change, the film highlights the human dimension of the climate crisis.

A CRITICAL REFLECTION ON THE MOVIE SCREENING: THE GREAT GREEN WALL

The post-screening discussion brought together Valentina Cardozo, an engineer and data analyst specializing in energy transition and extractivism, and Johannes Gmierzinger, who contributed a political and reparative justice perspective. Moderated around themes of climate justice and decoloniality, the panel explored the film's message in relation to broader socio-political realities in Africa and Europe.

Valentina connected the documentary's focus on education and community engagement with her own climate activism in Vienna, which often targets large corporations responsible for environmental harm. She contrasted this with the film's approach of grassroots collaboration and expressed that the movie inspired hope through its portrayal of African-led climate action, even though she found certain Western portrayals – particularly in the film's conclusion – frustrating and paternalistic.

Johannes emphasized the importance of discussing climate reparations and climate debt, noting that while the film provided an empowering narrative, it lacked sufficient attention to the root causes of the crisis and the political economy behind extractive industries. He highlighted the ongoing displacement caused by environmentally damaging projects, such as the Ugandan oil pipeline, and called for stronger accountability for the global North's role in these dynamics.

The panelists agreed that the film's African perspective was refreshing but questioned its limited scope, as there are numerous ongoing projects in West Africa — both climate-positive and destructive — that remain unacknowledged. They discussed how colonial legacies and new geopolitical actors (Russia, China, Latin America) continue to shape resource use and climate policy in the region.

A recurring theme was the need to decolonize Western views of development and labor, moving away from the assumption that African nations should follow European models. The conversation also addressed how development aid is often instrumentalized to control migration, rather than empower local agency.

Finally, the panel encouraged more direct action and critical engagement from privileged European audiences, urging a rethinking of whose voices are represented in climate discourse. Despite its shortcomings, *The Great Green Wall* sparked meaningful reflection on hope, self-determination, and the complexity of climate justice from African perspectives.



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