Cotonou Roadmap on the Development of Renewable Energies in Africa

The African continent, on the front line of the climate crisis, can make renewable energies the foundation of its future.

Access to sufficient and affordable energy is a major issue for the development of the African continent. It is also an issue of social and territorial justice, at the heart of the Sustainable Development Goals and the fight against energy poverty. The phase-out of fossil fuels and the preservation of CO_2 storage capacities in major forest basins are also major challenges in the fight against global warming, reaffirmed by all States during COP 28. These require just, coordinated and locally adapted transitions.

Supporting African countries in accelerating their transition towards low-environmental-impact energy production is crucial to guarantee the continent the development it needs, whose benefits will be shared by Africans themselves and the global community as a whole in the broader effort to stabilize the climate. The goal is to transform vulnerability into opportunity: Africa is not only a victim of climate change, but a key actor in a sustainable future. Africa can and must chart its own energy trajectory, building on its resources, innovations, and communities.

We, non-state actors gathered in Cotonou for the 6th Climate Chance African Summit dedicated to the development of renewable energies, affirm in this declaration our commitment to this challenge, and place our mobilization in the continuity of the declaration of African Union member states, adopted in Addis Ababa in September 2025, calling for a just transition.

« *We affirm that Africa's pathway to decarbonization and resilience must be rooted in equity and justice. We declare that a just transition is not limited to technology or markets, but must*

aim to protect livelihoods, ensure inclusion, create decent jobs, and guarantee human and labor rights for all. We further affirm that a just transition requires intersectional approaches enabling strong participation of women, youth, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized community groups whose voices and needs have too often been excluded from traditional policy processes, grounded in constructive social dialogue.» - Addis Ababa Declaration adopted during the preparatory forum of the second African Climate Summit, on 7 September 2025.

We emphasize that only integrated policies, involving all territorial actors—local governments, businesses, and civil society organizations—will be able to meet quantitative objectives, reconcile economic development needs, and support the most vulnerable populations. Renewable energies are a central tool for adaptation: they must secure energy access for vulnerable communities, strengthen food resilience, and improve health. They must also promote local capacity building, active participation, and the empowerment of youth and women. The priorities outlined in this declaration must be implemented with this perspective in mind..

This roadmap, nourished by discussions held during the Cotonou Summit workshops, therefore presents a series of priorities, without claiming to be exhaustive.

A) Developing Financial Mobilization Commensurate with the Challenges

We first regret the substantial decreases in Official Development Assistance (ODA) budgets. These setbacks weaken mitigation and adaptation efforts and contradict the spirit of international solidarity underpinning the Paris Agreement and the specific responsibility of the highest-emitting countries, both historical and recent. Yet these funds often have a direct impact on reducing greenhouse gas emissions far greater—per dollar or euro invested—than equivalent investments in developed countries. By scaling back their interventions, these countries must also consider the consequences they themselves will face from a more severe warming, with adaptation costs far exceeding what ODA investments would have covered.

International financing and trade agreements must also help correct an unacceptable situation. Without African minerals, it is impossible to develop renewable energy capacities globally at the needed scale. Yet the continent currently struggles to acquire renewable energy equipment manufactured elsewhere, equipment that often relies on rare earths extracted in Africa. This injustice must be addressed.

1) We therefore call for maintaining a high level of public investment from developed countries—both long-standing and recent emitters—towards the African continent, with priority given to climate issues and renewable energy development. We call on them to establish new revenue mechanisms, which may be based on the polluter-pays principle.

Many developed countries, notably European Union members, have implemented domestic carbon markets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. With the adoption of Article 6 of the

Paris Agreement, it is now possible to establish complementary mechanisms between countries on carbon credits and revenues from domestic markets—mechanisms that must include strong human rights and environmental protection safeguards.

2) We propose that a share of revenues from domestic carbon markets (e.g., the EU Emissions Trading System) be reinvested in African projects with positive carbon impacts.

3)We also highlight the need for vigilance regarding carbon credit exchanges between countries under Article 6. These mechanisms must not become, for the highest-emitting countries, a way to avoid their own responsibilities or to fund projects that fail to respect local populations and Indigenous communities, including their right to free, prior and informed consent. Any supported project must contribute to development and social justice; in this regard, supporting renewable energy and sustainable, biodiversity-friendly biomass development appears essential.

Voluntary carbon markets, based on a contribution logic, are developing and can allow private actors to go beyond regulatory obligations. They too must comply with free, prior and informed consent mechanisms.

4) We encourage African States to create an incentive-based and harmonized framework for the voluntary carbon market, to facilitate private investment in carbon sequestration projects that respect local rights and traditional knowledge. This market must serve as a complementary tool to compliance mechanisms, directing additional funding towards local initiatives, particularly in agroforestry, soil restoration, and sustainable forest management.

The decline in ODA volumes and the evolving economic models of energy production also lead us to advocate for other uses of available funds. Renewable energy projects often have viable investment return models, but access to credit remains difficult in many African countries, due to high borrowing rates, limiting project deployment. A 1% increase in borrowing costs represents a 7% increase in the price per kWh produced.

5) We highlight the value of using available public funds more in the form of guarantees (de-risking) than direct investments. Public financing alone will not be sufficient given the scale of needs. Mobilizing private finance and savings—including African savings—is essential to reach expected results. Reinforcing de-risking instruments can greatly increase private investment. This shift must rely on robust reporting mechanisms.

Moreover, while concessionary financing is needed to reduce risks, we must also free up public funds for social development—facilitating universal access to education, health, water and sanitation, and public transport—which is essential to strengthening climate resilience.

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6) We welcome major initiatives established in recent years to support renewable energy development, including the most recent ones: the Africa Climate Innovation Compact, Scaling Up Renewables in Africa (under the EU's Global Gateway), the Accelerated Partnership for Renewables in Africa (APRA), and the Africa Green Industrialisation Initiative (AGII), alongside earlier initiatives such as the Africa Renewable Energy Initiative (AREI) and Sustainable Energy for All (SEforALL). We call for their strengthening and long-term establishment.

7) We nevertheless stress the importance of closely involving all non-state actors in these dynamics, as they carry expertise and understand territorial specificities. Their involvement from the onset conditions, the efficiency and local anchoring of programmes..

8) Likewise, we recall the role of local governments in project development. They must have direct access to financing to facilitate decentralized projects.

9) Faced with the multitude of funds and initiatives, we also advocate for clear portals, accessible in multiple languages, to present existing opportunities to project developers.

10) We stress the importance of financing that supports both large-scale and small-scale projects tailored to community needs, in rural and urban areas. Financial mechanisms must include instruments specifically dedicated to micro-projects and small local businesses, often excluded from traditional financing. These projects must not stop at building micro-grids (generation/distribution); supporting local economic actors in developing new activities enabled by energy access is equally essential. Finally, investments should primarily benefit community-driven, co-created and inclusive projects, ensuring better ownership and direct benefits for local populations.

11) We stress the importance of fostering a shared culture among all financial actors and intermediaries, who must be encouraged to "green" their portfolios—requiring awareness-raising and training.

B) Building a Favorable Economic Ecosystem

Whether for large industrial projects or small local ones, multiplying projects requires a solid ecosystem, in addition to a favorable financial environment. We need strategic public policies aligning energy system evolution with broader socioeconomic and environmental objectives through integrated planning across ministries and relevant sectors.

12) We particularly emphasize the importance of training engineers and technicians—ensuring gender equality—for both construction and maintenance of installations. These training programmes must include entrepreneurial skills, sustainable resource management, and highlight innovations adapted to African contexts. They must be properly planned, sized according to needs, supported by cooperation between States and territorial actors, prioritized in international collaborations, and backed by global renewable energy companies.

We are concerned that some of the world's leading energy companies are turning away from Africa, considering it a risky investment environment, when it is in fact a land of opportunity where renewable energy growth can be particularly rapid. We urge them to reinvest in the continent.

Access to the grid is often a major difficulty for project developers, with network management structures having diverse governance cultures. Without guaranteed access, many projects cannot proceed or secure adequate financing. It is also necessary to upgrade these networks to manage the intermittency of renewable energies.

13) We stress the importance of equitable and facilitated grid access for project developers, without excessive administrative burdens. We recommend the establishment of clear grid-access rules, including mechanisms for renewable electricity transit and proportionate transmission tariffs. These rules must also enable the integration of decentralized and mini-grid projects. We also note the need to upgrade networks to prepare for the medium-term shift from thermal mobility to sustainable energy sources.

14) We call for stable and transparent regulatory frameworks, including national renewable energy roadmaps, simplified authorization procedures, and one-stop shops for project developers, to reduce delays and transaction costs.

15) We encourage the adoption of harmonized technical standards, development of storage and system flexibility, and incentives for connecting demand-side management capabilities, ensuring grid stability and integration of variable renewable energy.

Sharing best practices and knowledge of solutions adopted by various operators is crucial to strengthening economic dynamics and accelerating deployment. A true community of actors must now be established

16) We propose setting up exchange tools (digital platforms, thematic meetings, online trainings, etc.) to reinforce a shared technical culture. These tools could be coordinated by a pan-African alliance of sustainable energy actors, promoting networking, capitalizing on best practices, and fostering South-South cooperation.

Digital tools are vital for renewable energy development, as shown by mobile-payment solutions (PayGo), which supported the deployment of domestic solar PV systems. Strengthening such systems is crucial to accelerating electricity access in Africa.

17) We stress the importance of these systems by strengthening technological and industrial cooperation between digital and telecommunications actors and energy operators. These partnerships should be supported by development and commercial banks, particularly in implementing public-private partnerships, and must include components for local capacity building and technology transfer. Access to reliable and shared data is also a major challenge.

C) Affirming the Strategic Role of Territories

Alongside large energy installations (hydropower dams, large wind or solar farms, etc.), renewable energy development also depends on decentralized installations based on mini-grids and self-consumption, tailored to community needs. Local governments play an important role here, supporting project developers and addressing the needs of residents.

Recognizing the role of territories is essential: national policies cannot succeed without local implementation. African local governments are already mobilized around climate issues through several initiatives, including the Covenant of Mayors (supported by the EU) and the Alliance of Francophone Cities for Climate. These networks have proven useful, particularly in building a shared culture among local elected officials, and must be supported.

18) We emphasize the importance of collective initiatives uniting African local authorities for exchanges of good practices and joint advocacy. They also help strengthen accountability and visibility of local actions internationally. We therefore call on international actors to strengthen their support for these initiatives by equipping them with effective exchange platforms.

19) We call on States to strengthen dialogue with local authorities to explore all renewable energy development opportunities, benefit from their field experience, and support their projects. They must also be granted easier access to climate finance.

We recognize the importance of planning for sustainable urban development, as highlighted at the last World Urban Forum in Cairo. Energy issues, like mobility issues, must be integrated into long-term plans. In line with the Yaoundé Declaration on Sustainable Housing in Africa (adopted at the 2023 Climate Chance Summit), we underline the need to integrate informal settlements into energy access and self-consumption programmes. The evolution of these neighborhoods and the improvement of daily life for their inhabitants—particularly women—could be supported by renewable energy development.

20) We highlight the importance of including energy issues and potential local renewable energy production opportunities in African cities' planning documents and programmes.

21) We advocate for better integration of actions led by local governments and territorial actors into national strategies and nationally determined contributions (NDCs), as foreseen in the Paris Agreement.

22) We insist on the need to integrate informal settlements into energy-planning strategies. The challenge includes access to electricity but also the development of renewable hot water production using solar thermal panels.

D) Biomass: A Major Renewable Energy Issue

Renewable energy challenges extend beyond electricity production. Woodfuel remains today the primary energy source in Africa, particularly for cooking. Properly managed, woodfuel—including plant waste—is a genuine renewable energy with a neutral carbon balance; but in cases of overexploitation or imbalance between needs and production, it becomes a driver of desertification, biodiversity loss, increased disaster risks (including floods), and contributes to global warming. Its development must not come at the expense of the environment or food security.

Sustainable woodfuel management initiatives exist but struggle to scale up, despite being an essential issue. We also stress the large energy potential represented by waste recovery within a circular economy logic. The development of biodigestion must be encouraged and supported.

23) We therefore call for increased research efforts on this major challenge, from both national African research bodies and international scientific cooperation organizations.

24) We propose creating a continental-scale platform for exchange and dialogue, as the most ambitious research programmes and initiatives too often remain isolated and little known beyond their local regions.

25) Sustainable biomass production requires local value chains strengthened through technical and financial support. We stress that sustainable biomass production—when technically and ecologically feasible—requires professionalized sectors including small producers and local communities. The voluntary carbon market could play a key role in channeling financing toward these sectors by remunerating ecosystem services (carbon storage, biodiversity protection) and supporting inclusive economic models.

26) We stress the importance of strong support from international donors and development banks for plantation-regeneration programmes aiming to structure the sector, ensuring regular production and soil regeneration. These programmes must include social and environmental safeguards and enhance local value chains.

27) We emphasize the benefits of improved cookstoves and solar solutions to reduce wood consumption and consider their widespread deployment urgent. Their dissemination must be accompanied by awareness-raising campaigns and micro-finance mechanisms accessible to households, while supporting alternatives (solar, biogas) where appropriate.

28) We draw attention to the definition of bioenergy such as biomass, which must not develop at the expense of the environment and food security, as seen in the case of biofuel expansion in Latin America.

29) We recall the importance of nature-based solutions to address climate adaptation challenges, highlighting the potential of such projects to produce biomass that can be sustainably managed by local communities. These represent an essential lever to reconcile adaptation, resilience and local economic development.

E) Participation and Accountability

30) We recommend the regular publication of open, disaggregated data on production, grid connections, and financial allocations, as well as shared performance indicators and independent evaluations, to strengthen transparency, citizen trust and policy effectiveness.

31) We call for the systematic inclusion of local governments, civil society organizations—with particular attention to the effective participation of women and youth—local and Indigenous communities, and the private sector in developing regulatory frameworks and grid plans, through structured and accessible consultations.

CONCLUSION

On the eve of COP 30 in Belém, this Declaration marks a key milestone: it must help amplify a strong African voice. The non-state actors gathered in Cotonou issue a collective call to global and national decision-makers to ensure that the deployment of renewable energies is recognized as a lever for climate adaptation and development benefiting local populations.

Here is our Cotonou Roadmap

28 october 2025

At the Climate Chance Africa 2025 Summit

<u>First signatories at the Cotonou Summit before the call for signature</u>