



EMPOWERING AFRICA'S YOUTH FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE ACTIVISM

A Stakeholder Consultations Report on Youth-Led Climate Justice Activism in Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda

By Dorah Muhanuuzi

**PREPARED FOR
THE LEF-CYP CLIMATE
JUSTICE FUND**, a joint
initiative of the Legal
Empowerment Fund and
the Children's and Youth
Rights Program at the Fund
for Global Human Rights

Pictured above: Two young
activists from grantee partner
Girls for Climate Action at the
LEF-CYP Climate Justice Fund
launch meeting in Uganda.

ABOUT THE FUND FOR GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS

The Fund for Global Human Rights is an international nonprofit that identifies and invests in the world's most innovative and effective human rights activists, organizations, and movements. Created in 2002 by a group of prominent activists and donors, the Fund connects grassroots human rights defenders with flexible funding, long-term strategic support, and a global network of allies. Since its founding, the Fund has raised and invested \$165 million into the work of more than 1,100 activists and organizations in countries around the globe. Activists supported by the Fund have overturned unjust laws, secured progressive policies, and improved millions of lives worldwide.

ABOUT THE LEGAL EMPOWERMENT FUND

Access to justice is a fundamental right, yet it remains inaccessible for over two-thirds of the global population. The Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF) was established in 2019 in partnership with Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Namati, and the International Development and Research Centre to support the growing legal empowerment movement and close the global justice gap. The LEF is a program hosted by the Fund for Global Human Rights.

The LEF empowers grassroots movements by offering unrestricted funding, fostering peer-led networks, and fueling sustainable lasting change. Since its launch in 2021, the LEF has awarded over \$10 million in flexible funding to 252 grassroots grantee partners across 68 countries around the world.

ABOUT THE CHILDREN'S AND YOUTH RIGHTS PROGRAM

The Children's and Youth Rights Program (CYP) is a global grantmaking initiative at the Fund for Global Human Rights that resources the power and agency of youth activists to expand their civic space and tackle violence, discrimination, and systemic injustices. Since 2006, CYP has invested in youth-led activism and movements to advance justice, dignity, and fundamental freedoms.

CYP provides targeted flexible and sustained funding and accompaniment to young people defending their rights and organizing for broader societal change, including climate justice, gender equality, democracy, and human rights. CYP's approach ensures that young activists have the resources, autonomy, and support they need to drive lasting change in their communities and beyond.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Dorah Muhanuuzi is a lawyer and a children's and youth rights specialist, working as a consultant with the Fund for Global Human Rights.



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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Climate change is an undeniable crisis that is reshaping our world with an unforgiving hand. But its impacts are anything but equal. While no one is untouched by climate change, the world's most vulnerable populations bear its fiercest blows. For them, climate change is not just an environmental threat—it is a force that magnifies existing inequalities and deepens the vulnerabilities they already face. As coastlines erode, ecosystems collapse, and extreme weather events grow more frequent and severe, the world's poorest nations find themselves least equipped to adapt or respond to these mounting threats. The consequences are dire: millions of people find themselves facing an uncertain future, struggling to secure basic human rights. To compound this crisis, climate migration is on the rise, as homes become uninhabitable and affected people move in search of safety and livelihoods. In Africa, the effects of climate change are particularly devastating. Vulnerable communities find themselves on the front lines, bearing the heaviest burden of an environmental crisis for which they are the least responsible. Unfortunately, government responses to these local and regional impacts often fall short of the just, effective solutions needed.

In response to the gaps left by governments, young people have taken matters into their own hands, organizing at the grassroots level to address the urgent challenges posed by climate change. From leading adaptation projects to providing aid and mobilizing communities, African youth are stepping up as climate advocates, bridging the gap where institutional support is lacking. Their efforts are not just reactive but visionary, focusing on building resilient, sustainable communities that can withstand the growing environmental pressures. Recognizing the importance of these grassroots efforts, the Legal Empowerment Fund (LEF) and the Children's and Youth Rights Program (CYP) at the Fund for Global Human Rights commissioned scoping studies across six African countries—Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda—to explore youth-led climate justice activism. These studies aimed to understand the funding needs of young climate activists on the ground and identify opportunities for collaboration and support that would help amplify their work and advance shared goals.

In this report, we:



Provide an overview of the youth-led climate justice ecosystem across the six countries, examining the structures, initiatives, strategies and networks that young activists have built to address climate challenges.



Provide qualitative insights into the needs of, and challenges faced by, young activists on the ground.



Evaluate the funding landscape for youth-led climate initiatives, identifying funding gaps and barriers faced by young people and civil society organizations.



Explore how the Legal Empowerment Fund and the Children's and Youth Rights Program can leverage their networks to become impactful funders of youth-led climate justice initiatives in Africa.



Identify the barriers and enablers hindering and facilitating the participation of youth in climate action both locally and internationally.

Pictured below: The LEF-CYP Climate Justice Fund launch meeting in Uganda.



This report has been specifically written for:

Grantmakers and funders in the youth sector: As a primary focus of this report, we aim to explore how collective support can empower young people to lead transformative climate justice efforts.

Grantmakers and funders in the climate, land, and environmental justice space who are interested in exploring the significance of bringing young people on board and providing targeted support to young people in this space.

The young people who participated in the scoping, for their invaluable contributions and as a way of closing the feedback loop, and to all young people dedicating their time and talents to this very important work.

Governmental, international, and development actors who are committed to youth leadership and sustainability, and who believe in the importance of empowering young people as key drivers of a resilient, sustainable future.

Overview

This report presents a synthesis of key findings from scoping studies on youth-led climate justice activism conducted across six African countries: Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda. It captures the diverse approaches to activism, explores their intersection with legal empowerment, and addresses the critical funding needs and challenges faced by young activists on the ground.

The scoping exercises were commissioned by the Legal Empowerment Fund and the Children's and Youth Rights Program at the Fund for Global Human Rights ahead of the launch of their joint initiative, the LEF-CYP Climate Justice Fund, which aims to fund youth-led climate action in these countries. The report aims to provide insights into effective strategies for enhancing support and resources for young people and their climate justice initiatives on the continent.

Purpose and Scope

This study was commissioned across six countries: three English-speaking countries (Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Uganda), two French-speaking countries (Benin and Senegal), and one Portuguese-speaking country (Guinea-Bissau). The Fund focused on piloting in countries where it already has a strong presence or deep connections, with the aim of leveraging existing relationships to facilitate meaningful engagement.

A critical aspect of these studies was probing the intersection between youth-led climate activism and legal empowerment—enabling grassroots communities to know, use, and shape the law. Specifically, the research explored how young people are employing legal empowerment approaches to address and mitigate the climate change crisis in their respective countries.

Each scoping study was designed to be inclusive of all key regions within the countries. This was to enable us to capture a comprehensive and representative view of the subject. With populations in these countries comprising significant proportions of young people—often exceeding 60 percent under the age of 35—this approach ensured that the diverse perspectives and experiences of youth activists are thoroughly reflected in the reports.

The purpose of this report is to aggregate and analyze the data to identify common trends, challenges, and opportunities. By doing so, it seeks to inform stakeholders—including funders, policymakers, and activists—about effective ways to support youth-led initiatives and drive meaningful progress in climate justice.

This report covers:

1. Key findings from each of the six countries, including forms of activism, funding sources, funding needs, and challenges.¹
2. Comparative analysis to identify commonalities and differences across countries.
3. Strategic recommendations for improving support systems and funding mechanisms.

¹ While many challenges are shared across all six countries, we have identified two to three issues in each country study that are especially prevalent within that context. Shared challenges are explored in more detail in the subsequent section on key findings.

2. INTRODUCTION

Climate change presents one of the most pressing challenges of our time, disproportionately affecting vulnerable communities across Africa. In response, a strong movement of young people is emerging across the continent, championing climate justice and advocating for sustainable solutions. Youth-led climate activism is characterized by diverse approaches, ranging from clean energy advocacy to disaster preparedness and waste management. Despite their impactful work, youth activists often face significant barriers, including limited funding and bureaucratic challenges.

Methodology

Each scoping study employed two broad approaches:

- a. A literature review
- b. A qualitative study

The twin approaches include four major phases:

PHASE I	Start-up of the assignment: This comprised the development of concepts and budgets as well as holding meetings to define the parameters of the work. It also included the development of survey tools and questions for the focus group discussions and key informant interviews.
PHASE II	Desk study to collect information on the key issues related to the scoping study: This review of existing documents included reports, news articles, and other previous publications that lay out the context of climate justice work in Africa in general as well as the youth-led climate justice work in particular.
PHASE III	Field visits and primary data collection: This included visits to field locations to meet with selected organizations to conduct focus group discussions and key informant interviews, which were the main methods of collecting primary data.
PHASE IV	Information synthesis, analysis, and reporting: This phase included collating and analyzing the data.

Literature Review

Our literature review involved a targeted, exploratory examination of articles published within the past 10 years that were available on online databases. The articles were obtained using a search string answering key research questions of the review that included: (1) What is the youth-led climate justice space in the six countries like? (2) How are young people in these countries organizing themselves to address/prevent the impacts of climate change? (3) Who is providing the resources that young people need to do this work? (4) What is the intersection between climate change and legal empowerment?

Rather than conducting an exhaustive literature review, this process served to identify key qualitative insights and themes pertinent to the research questions. Consequently, this report will concentrate on the qualitative data extracted from these findings, rather than an extensive analysis of existing literature.

Qualitative Interviews

Three methods were used to conduct qualitative interviews: individual in-depth interviews, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions.

INDIVIDUAL IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

These were conducted among leaders of youth-led groups working in the climate justice space who responded to our initial request for information. Interviews were arranged both virtually and in-person, accommodating the preferences of the interviewees and the researchers' ability to travel for face-to-face interviews.

KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

These were conducted among important stakeholders in the climate justice space. Notably, interviews were held with leading environmental rights advocates, founders of prominent nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), donor/funder organization representatives, and government/community leaders. Through cultivating their networks, the researchers identified and interviewed key actors, activists, and stakeholders actively engaged in climate justice work, ensuring a broad representation of voices across various regions and demographics.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS

These sessions were specifically designed to engage young people actively involved in climate justice activism. Prior consent was obtained from all participants before the commencement of the discussions.

Data Analysis Methods

The data collected from the scoping studies in the six countries was analyzed using two main approaches:

CROSS-COMPARISON AND SYNTHESIS

Data from different sources—desk reviews, surveys, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions—was compared and combined to give a clear understanding of youth-led climate justice activism in the select countries. By looking at the findings from various angles, the analysis confirmed key points, noted differences, and provided a better understanding of the factors enabling and hindering youth-led climate justice activism in each country.

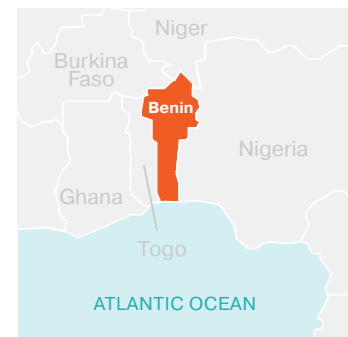
STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND VALIDATION

Throughout the analysis, it was important to re-involve stakeholders like youth organizations and civil society leaders that informed these studies. This was done through follow-up conversations to confirm findings, clarify issues, and gather more information. This process helped ensure that the analysis was accurate and relevant to those working directly in the sector.

3. COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS

Benin

Benin, with a population of approximately 14.2 million, serves as a geographic bridge between the tropical zone and the Sahel, with a diverse landscape that includes wetlands and lakes in the south and semi-arid areas in the north. The country's rich biological diversity, particularly its lakes and wetlands, is under severe threat from overexploitation, invasive plants, anarchic construction, and waste dumping. These environmental pressures are exacerbating the effects of climate change, impacting all layers of the population. In the northern regions, prolonged droughts are compromising agriculture and pastoral activities, while southern communities face habitat destruction from unpredictable floods and uncontrolled development on wetlands. Lake communities are particularly vulnerable, experiencing forced evictions that disrupt their ancestral way of life and undermine their access to essential resources. The enforcement of laws prohibiting the fishing of endangered species often fails to consider the unique circumstances of these lake populations, further complicating their situation. As climate impacts intensify, Benin's youth are increasingly engaged in advocating for sustainable practices and legal reforms to protect their environment and cultural heritage.



OVERVIEW OF YOUTH-LED CLIMATE ACTIVISM



Forms of activism: Youth-led initiatives in Benin include promoting sustainable agriculture, environmental education, and community-based climate adaptation projects.



Geographical distribution: Activity is prominent in urban areas and agricultural zones.

FUNDING SOURCES

Primary sources: Funding is provided by international development agencies and occasional local grants.

CHALLENGES



Funding access: Difficulty securing large grants and limited local funding opportunities are significant barriers.



Technical expertise: Youth-led groups often lack technical expertise in fundraising and project implementation.

Guinea-Bissau

Guinea-Bissau, with a population of approximately 2.1 million, is a fragile state with one of the lowest levels of development globally. It is ranked 179 out of 193 countries in the 2023/2024 UN Human Development Index. The country faces persistent political and institutional crises, marked by severe human rights violations, including restrictions on democratic processes, bans on demonstrations, and a decline in the rule of law. The Guinea-Bissau League for Human Rights has highlighted these issues in many reports, noting increased impunity and threats to peaceful coexistence. This instability severely impacts youth and children’s rights, as economic hardship and political paralysis have led to inadequate attention to essential services, leaving many children in precarious situations.

The country’s climate vulnerability disrupts crop growth, adding to the burden faced by households struggling with rising costs and limited savings for health and education. For children, Guinea-Bissau has a vulnerability score of 8.4 out of 10 according to UNICEF’s 2021 Children’s Climate Risk Index. Given its low human development index and the projected increase in extreme weather events, climate change poses an imminent threat to the well-being and rights of children in Guinea-Bissau.



OVERVIEW OF YOUTH-LED CLIMATE ACTIVISM



Forms of activism: Youth activists focus on coastal management, community-based advocacy, reforestation, and sustainable fishing practices. They are actively involved in protecting mangrove forests and advocating for sustainable resource management.



Geographical distribution: Activism is concentrated in coastal regions and areas prone to deforestation.

FUNDING SOURCES

Primary sources: Funds are obtained from international conservation organizations and occasional local contributions.

CHALLENGES



Resource constraints: Limited resources hinder the scale and effectiveness of climate initiatives.



Funding barriers: Challenges include limited local funding opportunities and competition for international grants.

Liberia

Liberia, a country on the West African coast with a population of about 5.5 million, is highly vulnerable to climate change. The country faces threats like rising sea levels, unpredictable weather, and extreme events such as floods and droughts. These changes have a direct impact on agriculture, water resources, and the livelihoods of its people. Most communities rely heavily on subsistence farming, and the burden of climate change falls hardest on vulnerable groups, especially women and children.



OVERVIEW OF YOUTH-LED CLIMATE ACTIVISM



Forms of activism: In Liberia, youth-led climate activism is primarily focused on reforestation projects, community education, and advocating for sustainable agricultural practices.



Geographical distribution: Activism is concentrated in urban areas such as Monrovia and surrounding rural communities where deforestation and soil erosion are prevalent.

FUNDING SOURCES

Primary sources: Funding predominantly comes as small grants from international actors, including the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), the European Union (EU), and other international organizations like ActionAid, the Global Fund for Children, and more. Some local NGOs also contribute.

CHALLENGES



Convoluted climate justice and legal empowerment language: Youth-led groups often face challenges in understanding and navigating complex legal and climate justice frameworks, hindering their ability to advocate effectively.



Funding challenges: Limited funding opportunities, bureaucratic hurdles, and donor skepticism about the capacity of youth-led organizations are significant barriers.



Legal and regulatory barriers: Complex grant application processes and stringent regulatory requirements hinder access to funding.

Senegal

Senegal, a West African nation of about 18.2 million people, has faced multiple crises since 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic, political unrest, and economic hardships, all of which have disproportionately impacted its youth. Despite government initiatives for sustainable development and renewable energy, the country’s commitment to oil and gas development highlights the tension between economic growth and environmental protection.



Climate change significantly threatens Senegal’s coastal communities, where most of the population resides. Coastal erosion has led to job losses in tourism and fisheries, driving many young people to undertake dangerous migrations to Europe, with over 2,000 deaths recorded between 2020 and early 2024. Inland deforestation and declining agricultural productivity have exacerbated rural depopulation, pushing more youth into precarious migration routes. These challenges highlight the urgent need for climate justice and legal empowerment to protect Senegal’s vulnerable populations, particularly its youth. They also help explain the rise of youth-led activism in the country.



OVERVIEW OF YOUTH-LED CLIMATE ACTIVISM



Forms of activism: Senegalese youth are involved in climate advocacy, marine conservation, and urban greening projects.



Geographical distribution: Activism is concentrated in urban areas such as Dakar and along the coastal regions.

FUNDING SOURCES

Primary sources: Funding comes from international environmental organizations and local government grants.

CHALLENGES



Funding inconsistency: Unstable funding and complex grant application processes affect project continuity.



Bureaucratic challenges: Administrative hurdles pose difficulties in accessing and managing funds.

Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone, with a population of about 8.5 million people, has experienced severe environmental degradation due to deforestation, mining, and the effects of climate change. The West African nation’s vulnerability to climate change is glaringly evident, as it ranks among the top 10 percent of countries globally most at risk. As one of the world’s poorest nations, Sierra Leone faces numerous challenges from climate change, including endangering crucial economic sectors and exacerbating environmental degradation.



OVERVIEW OF YOUTH-LED CLIMATE ACTIVISM



Forms of activism: Youth-led climate justice activism in Sierra Leone takes various practical forms, driven by a deep recognition of the urgent need for proactive engagement. Sierra Leonean youth are predominantly involved in waste management, community-based environmental education, and climate advocacy campaigns. One key effort is the UNICEF Youth-Led Action Initiative, where young advocates are leading a campaign to include climate-smart education in the national curriculum. This aims to equip future generations with the tools they need to address climate challenges. At the grassroots level, organizations like Plan International Sierra Leone and Our Recycling Hub are mobilizing young people to make a tangible impact on the ground. These efforts not only promote environmental sustainability but also create economic opportunities in marginalized communities. In addition to these local actions, youth-led organizations are increasingly leveraging legal strategies, including litigation and policy advocacy, to combat the adverse effects of climate change. Litigation, in particular, has become a powerful tool for young activists to hold governments and corporations accountable, pushing for stricter environmental protection.



Geographical distribution: Activism is prominent in Freetown and along the coastal areas, which are highly impacted by waste pollution and coastal degradation. It is also notable in larger towns like Makeni and Bo, where we identified a significant number of climate justice activists and networks.

(continued)

FUNDING SOURCES

Primary sources: Funding is secured from intergovernmental facilities like the Green Climate Fund implemented by the government of Sierra Leone. International NGOs—like the Global Fund for Children, Save the Children UK, and ActionAid—provide both financial and non-financial resources to youth-led organizations. Young activists also receive occasional support from local businesses.

CHALLENGES



Infrastructure issues: Poor infrastructure affects the implementation of waste management and environmental education and mobilization programs.



Funding sustainability: Insufficient funding and a lack of long-term financial support pose significant challenges. The reliance on short-term grants hampers the long-term sustainability of projects.



Uganda

Uganda faces significant environmental challenges, including deforestation, wetland degradation, and the effects of climate change. These issues are having an increasingly severe impact on the country's largely young population, threatening their livelihoods, health, and future prospects. With over 75 percent of its over 49 million people under the age of 30, youth are at the forefront of climate activism, advocating for stronger environmental protections and sustainable development. The recent development of the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), a project intended to transport oil from Uganda to the Tanzanian coast, has sparked widespread concern among youth activists. They argue that EACOP threatens vital ecosystems, accelerates carbon emissions, and undermines Uganda's climate commitments. Despite some government initiatives—such as promoting renewable energy and reforestation—widespread poverty and inadequate enforcement of environmental laws remain major obstacles.



OVERVIEW OF YOUTH-LED CLIMATE ACTIVISM



Forms of activism: Young people in Uganda are stepping up through necessity. Their efforts range from adjusting daily behaviors to reduce individual environmental footprints, to participating in tree-planting initiatives and other green programs, to engaging in political activism to push for systemic change. Youth-led climate action in Uganda exists on a broad spectrum: from those involved in global movements like Fridays for Future, to community-level activists working to secure their livelihoods and support their families, to those who have the knowledge and passion but lack the resources, platforms, or skills to actively engage. Global youth movements have garnered significant attention from politicians, policymakers, and citizens, inspiring many Ugandan youth to join the fight for climate justice. High-profile activists like Hilda Flavia Nakabuye and Vanessa Nakate bridge local and international climate justice efforts, advocating for change both globally and at home. There is a growing use of legal empowerment strategies in Uganda, such as public interest litigation, strategic litigation, and advocacy, by which groups like Students Against EACOP Uganda are holding both government and private actors accountable for their environmental law violations. These approaches aim to push for greater responsibility and adherence to environmental safeguards.



Geographical distribution: Youth-led climate activism in Uganda is geographically diverse, with significant activity concentrated in areas most affected by environmental challenges. Kampala serves as a key hub for national-level activism and coordination, while regions like Eastern Uganda and the West Nile experience heightened grassroots efforts due to specific climate challenges. In Western Uganda, youth activism is particularly focused on addressing the environmental threats posed by oil exploration, especially around EACOP. In the West Nile, gold and sand mining have spurred local activism as young people mobilize to combat land degradation and pollution. In Northern and Eastern Uganda, regions prone to landslides and floods, youth groups are engaged in climate adaptation and disaster-response efforts.



FUNDING SOURCES

Primary sources: Funding is provided by international foundations such as the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, Mama Cash, governmental bodies like the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and the EU, Action on Disability and Development International, and several UN agencies.

(continued)

CHALLENGES



Gender disparity: There is a notable underrepresentation of young women in climate activism roles. This disparity not only limits the diversity of perspectives in climate initiatives but also hinders the effectiveness of efforts to address environmental challenges.



Financial and resource constraints: Young people in Uganda often lack the financial and material resources necessary for effective climate change advocacy. This scarcity hampers their ability to implement large-scale initiatives and responses to climate change, leaving them feeling powerless in the face of escalating environmental challenges.



Legal barriers: Child-led organizations face legal challenges in securing funding due to requirements that persons must be over 18 years of age to sign contracts or officially register an organization.



Pictured above: The LEF-CYP Climate Justice Fund launch meeting in Uganda.

4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF COUNTRY-SPECIFIC INSIGHTS

Overview

In analyzing youth-led climate activism across these six countries, distinct patterns and trends emerge. Each country also presents unique challenges and opportunities, reflecting its distinct socioeconomic context, environmental issues, and the maturity of local youth-led movements. This comparative analysis aims to synthesize these insights to identify commonalities, divergences, and areas where cross-country learning and support can be beneficial.

Common Themes

YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES

“Much is yet to be done,” says a respondent from Uganda. Across all six countries, youth-led climate activism is characterized by a strong focus on community engagement and environmental education. Initiatives such as reforestation, waste management, and clean energy advocacy are prevalent. In each country, youth organizations work tirelessly to raise awareness about climate change and promote sustainable practices within their communities.

FUNDING CHALLENGES

A recurring challenge faced by youth-led organizations across these countries is securing sufficient and sustainable funding. Issues such as bureaucratic hurdles, donor skepticism, and limited access to larger grants are common. Despite these challenges, there is a notable effort to mobilize resources through small grants, self-funding, and support from international NGOs.

CAPACITY-BUILDING NEEDS

The need for enhanced capacity building is a critical subject. Youth-led organizations across all six countries often struggle with technical expertise, project management skills, and effective fundraising strategies. There is a widespread call for targeted training programs to address these gaps and empower youth activists with the skills necessary for successful project implementation. Youth activists also often face challenges in connecting their work to broader climate justice frameworks, especially when lacking a scientific background.

One activist reflected on this journey, stating:

“My understanding of climate change was limited, and I could not confidently talk about it with colleagues as I thought it was just for those that were into sciences. When I joined a live webinar hosted by Greenpeace Liberia, I started to connect the dots and link my environmental justice campaign work to climate justice. I want to thank ActionAid Liberia for further inviting me to attend more trainings, which broadened my understanding of climate justice and gave me the reason for taking action as a young person.”

Opportunities for Cross-Country Learning

SHARING BEST PRACTICES

Countries with advanced initiatives, such as Uganda’s clean energy advocacy or Senegal’s marine conservation efforts, can share best practices with those facing similar environmental issues. This exchange can foster innovation and improve the effectiveness of youth-led climate activism across regions.

REGIONAL NETWORKS AND COLLABORATION

Establishing regional networks that facilitate collaboration among youth-led organizations can enhance resource sharing, knowledge exchange, and collective advocacy. A Pan-African youth movement could amplify youth voices and strengthen regional responses to climate challenges.

TAILORED CAPACITY-BUILDING PROGRAMS

Developing region-specific capacity-building programs that address the unique needs of youth activists in different countries can enhance their effectiveness. For example, technical training in project management and legal advocacy tailored to local contexts can provide the support needed to overcome common challenges.

5. KEY FINDINGS AND TRENDS

Trends in Youth-Led Climate Activism

INCREASED AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT

There is a growing awareness of climate issues among youth in all six countries. This heightened awareness is leading to increased engagement in climate activism, with more young people participating in environmental initiatives and advocating for climate action.

DIVERSE FORMS OF ACTIVISM

Youth-led climate activism takes diverse forms, reflecting local environmental challenges and priorities. While some countries focus on reforestation and waste management, others emphasize marine conservation and sustainable agriculture. This diversity highlights the adaptability of youth-led initiatives in addressing specific regional issues.

EMERGENCE OF INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS

Youth activists are developing innovative solutions to climate challenges, such as alternative livelihoods for Indigenous communities in Uganda and sustainable fishing practices in Guinea-Bissau. These approaches demonstrate the potential of youth-led movements to drive impactful change through locally adapted solutions.

Shared Challenges Across the Countries

FUNDING SUSTAINABILITY

One of the most pressing challenges is securing sustainable funding. Many youth-led organizations struggle with inconsistent funding, limited access to large grants, and bureaucratic barriers. For context, according to the UN Foundation, only 6 percent of global development aid is allocated to support programs for young people. This stark statistic highlights a critical issue: the majority of development aid bypasses youth-led initiatives, leaving little funding available for young people to address pressing challenges like climate change. Addressing this challenge requires a concerted effort to improve funding mechanisms and provide long-term support. Bridging the funding gap will involve simplifying grant processes, increasing youth participation in decision-making, and creating tailored financial products to meet the needs of youth-led organizations. In turn, this would empower young leaders to scale their impact and drive transformative climate action across the globe.

CAPACITY CONSTRAINTS

There is a widespread need for capacity building to enhance the effectiveness of youth-led initiatives. Many organizations lack the technical skills, project management expertise, and fundraising capabilities necessary for successful implementation. Targeted training and support are essential to bridge these gaps.

LEGAL AND REGULATORY HURDLES

Legal and regulatory barriers impact the ability of youth-led organizations to access and manage funding. Issues such as legal uncertainties for child-led groups and stringent grant application processes create significant obstacles. Simplifying regulations and providing legal support can help address these challenges.

Recommendations for Enhancing Youth-Led Climate Activism

DEVELOP FLEXIBLE FUNDING MODELS

Create funding models that prioritize flexibility and long-term support for youth-led initiatives. Multi-year grants and simplified application processes can provide the stability needed for sustained impact.

INVEST IN CAPACITY BUILDING

Provide comprehensive capacity-building programs that address the specific needs of youth-led organizations. Training in project management, financial literacy, and advocacy can enhance the effectiveness and sustainability of their efforts.

FACILITATE REGIONAL COLLABORATION

Encourage cross-country collaboration and knowledge sharing among youth-led organizations. Establishing regional networks can strengthen collective action and amplify the impact of climate initiatives.

SUPPORT LEGAL EMPOWERMENT

Provide more learning and increase the understanding of the concept of legal empowerment as a tool for community education, mobilization, policy change, and advocacy. This can help challenge power structures and build long-lasting change.

6. SPECIFIC CHALLENGES: LINGUISTIC BARRIERS, LEGAL EMPOWERMENT, AND GENDER DISPARITY

Perceived Bias Toward English-Speaking Funding Mechanisms

One significant challenge faced by French- and Portuguese-speaking countries is accessing funding within a philanthropic ecosystem that is perceived to heavily favor English-speaking organizations. Many of these organizations feel that the funding landscape, along with the capacity-building opportunities that come with financial support, disproportionately benefits English-speaking organizations. According to several interviewees, philanthropy is largely seen as an English-speaking practice, placing French- or Portuguese-speaking organizations at a distinct disadvantage.

This disparity extends beyond funding to the very ability to engage in global discussions on critical issues like climate justice. One interviewee highlighted that in a global setting, he struggled to keep pace with his English-speaking colleagues, who had a more comprehensive understanding and deeper knowledge of climate justice topics. This gap in expertise and familiarity with key issues further isolates French- and Portuguese-speaking organizations from the mainstream philanthropic community. In response to these challenges, some organizations have resorted to adopting English names in an effort to appear bilingual and enhance their visibility. This strategy, though practical, highlights the broader issue of linguistic barriers and the need for a more inclusive funding ecosystem that accommodates the diverse linguistic backgrounds of organizations across the Global South.

In summary, these challenges manifest as:

LIMITED FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

Organizations in French-speaking and Portuguese-speaking countries often find fewer funding opportunities compared to their English-speaking counterparts. Many international donors and philanthropic foundations are based in English-speaking countries or have a primary focus on English-speaking regions, leading to a disparity in the availability of grants and financial support.

LANGUAGE BARRIERS

The language of communication and application processes can be a significant barrier. Many funding applications, reports, and communications are conducted in English, creating obstacles for organizations in French- and Portuguese-speaking countries that may not have the resources or expertise to navigate these requirements. This linguistic divide increases the difficulty of securing funding.

Recommendations for Addressing Linguistic Bias

INCREASE MULTILINGUAL SUPPORT

Philanthropic organizations should provide multilingual support and resources to facilitate access for non-English-speaking organizations. This includes translating application materials, offering language assistance, and ensuring that funding opportunities are accessible in multiple languages.

DEVELOP REGIONAL FUNDING MECHANISMS

Establish funding mechanisms specifically designed for French- and Portuguese-speaking regions. This can involve creating dedicated grants, regional partnerships, and localized grantmaking bodies that better understand and cater to the needs of these regions.

PROMOTE INCLUSIVITY IN PHILANTHROPY

Advocate for greater inclusivity within the philanthropic community by highlighting the contributions and needs of youth-led organizations in French- and Portuguese-speaking countries. Building awareness and fostering relationships with donors can help bridge the gap and ensure more equitable distribution of resources.

Understanding Legal Empowerment: Perceptions and Realities

Legal empowerment is increasingly recognized as a critical approach for enabling communities to protect their rights and advocate for justice. Many of the organizations interviewed demonstrated a strong commitment to community-centered approaches, using law as an organizing tool to varying degrees. For instance, Amis de l’Afrique Francophone-Bénin (AMAF Benin) shared a powerful example where the demand for legal knowledge originated from the communities themselves, as one participant emphasized: “You need to leave us with knowledge of the law, something that can really protect us and our lands.”

Despite this commitment, there are still a lot of misconceptions about what legal empowerment entails. Many of the stakeholders equate legal empowerment with engaging in court proceedings or legal battles. This narrow view overlooks the broader scope of legal empowerment, which includes educating communities about their rights, advocating for policy changes, and using legal tools to address injustices outside the courtroom. It also means that many organizations doing legal empowerment may not necessarily categorize or describe their work as such. Therefore, such organizations may still need access to specific legal empowerment language and frameworks to ensure their interventions are deliberate, focused, and strengthened. The “know, use, and shape the law” framework, along with learnings from its cycle, offers a valuable lens through which organizations can frame and enhance their legal empowerment efforts.

During our scoping, every conversation began with mini legal empowerment 101 lessons, covering essential concepts such as democratizing the law, empowering people with legal knowledge, and using the law effectively to invoke authority and evidence for administrative solutions. These introductory sessions were well received, with participants showing both appreciation and a keen interest in learning more. We also observed that when these legal empowerment 101 sessions preceded discussions or questions, the responses from participants were notably more concrete and informed.

This experience highlights the importance of foundational legal education in shaping the effectiveness of legal empowerment work. By equipping communities and organizations with the right tools and language, they can better navigate the complexities of legal systems and advocate more effectively for their rights.

Gender Disparity in Climate Justice Work

A critical observation throughout our scoping study and the resulting reports is the stark absence of young women in climate justice spaces. Despite their vulnerability to the impacts of climate change, young women remain underrepresented in decision-making processes and community-led initiatives. In several focus groups conducted as part of this study, groups of 20–30 young men dominated the discussions, with just a couple of young women present to share their perspectives and experiences.

This disparity is deeply concerning, as it not only limits the diversity of voices and solutions but also reflects broader systemic issues related to gender inequality. Climate change entrenches existing vulnerabilities for women and girls, particularly in Sub-Saharan Africa, where they often bear the brunt of environmental degradation through increased responsibilities in securing water, food, and energy for their families.

The absence of young women in these spaces is not merely an oversight; it points to a failure to create inclusive frameworks that recognize and uplift their contributions. Cultural norms, patriarchal structures, and limited access to education or resources for leadership development further hinder young women’s participation. Without intentional efforts to break down these barriers, climate justice will remain incomplete, leaving out voices that are crucial for holistic and equitable solutions.

To address this gap, targeted interventions are needed. These include creating safe, supportive platforms for young women to engage in climate dialogue, offering leadership training programs tailored to their specific needs, and ensuring that funding mechanisms prioritize initiatives led by young women. By doing so, we can begin to shift the dynamics of participation and ensure that young women are not only included but empowered to co-lead in the fight for climate justice.



7. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS AND STRATEGIC ACTION PLANS

Addressing Linguistic Barriers

Challenge: French- and Portuguese-speaking countries, particularly Guinea-Bissau and Benin, have expressed difficulties in accessing funding due to the dominance of English in the philanthropic community. This has resulted in reduced opportunities for youth-led organizations in these regions to secure necessary financial support.

Recommendation: Develop multilingual grant programs and provide application guidelines, training materials, and support in French and Portuguese.

Action Plan:

- **Multilingual outreach:** Advocate among the funding community for the translation of all grant-related documents into French and Portuguese, ensuring they are easily accessible to youth-led organizations in Guinea-Bissau and Benin.

Strengthening Capacity Building in Non-English-Speaking Countries

Challenge: Youth-led groups, especially in non-English-speaking countries, struggle with limited capacity in grant writing, proposal development, implementation and donor engagement. These gaps prevent them from effectively accessing available funding opportunities, perpetuating an already existing inequality in resource allocation.

Recommendation: Strengthen the capacity throughout tailored workshops and multilingual support. Offer workshops in French and Portuguese that focus on grant writing, proposal development, and donor engagement, helping youth organizations in these regions to navigate the funding landscape more effectively.

Action Plans:

- Regularly review the accessibility and success rates of applications from French- and Portuguese-speaking countries to refine the approach and increase inclusivity.
- Develop and distribute multilingual toolkits and templates tailored to the needs of youth-led organizations in these regions.
- Organize capacity-building sessions in French and Portuguese focused on grant writing, proposal structuring, and communication strategies.

Strengthening Capacity Building and Technical Support

Challenge: Reports from Liberia and Sierra Leone highlight that youth-led organizations often lack the technical expertise needed to implement and sustain complex climate projects.

Recommendation: Support the establishment of regional training hubs that provide ongoing capacity-building support in key areas such as climate adaptation, project management, and legal empowerment.

Action Plans:

- **Localized training:** Develop training programs in collaboration with local experts, ensuring they address the specific needs and challenges of each country, with materials available in multiple languages.
- **Sustainable support:** Provide continuous support through mentorship, online resources, and periodic in-person workshops to ensure that organizations can apply the skills they learn.

Increasing Legal Empowerment Understanding

Challenge: Across the board, communities engaged in legal empowerment work often associate it exclusively with litigation, limiting their understanding of the broader scope of legal empowerment.

Recommendation: Build community knowledge and understanding of the full scope legal empowerment approaches.

Action Plans:

- **Awareness campaigns:** Conduct outreach initiatives that clarify the different facets of legal empowerment, highlighting successful non-litigation examples from similar contexts.
- **Practical training:** Offer training sessions on various legal empowerment approaches, focusing on community-level advocacy and rights education in both urban and rural settings.
- **Resource development:** Create resource materials in French and Portuguese, including case studies and toolkits, to help organizations in Benin, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal adopt a more holistic view of legal empowerment.

Supporting Youth Representation in Policymaking and Policy Advocacy

Challenge: Reports from Guinea-Bissau, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda indicate that youth voices are often marginalized in national climate policy discussions, despite the significant impact of climate change on young people.

Recommendation: Strengthen youth representation in national climate policy-making processes across all six countries.

Action Plans:

- **Capacity building for advocacy:** Support the training of youth leaders in policy advocacy, negotiation, and public speaking to effectively represent their communities in policy dialogues.
- **Cross-country collaboration:** Facilitate regional youth summits that bring together young climate activists from all six countries to share experiences, strategize on common challenges, and build a united front in policy advocacy.

Promoting Inclusive and Sustainable Livelihoods Through Youth-Led Green Entrepreneurship

Challenge: In Sierra Leone and Uganda, youth struggle to access the resources needed to start and grow green businesses, which are critical for sustainable livelihoods and climate resilience.

Recommendation: Promote youth-led green entrepreneurship by providing targeted support in the form of training, funding, and market access.

Action Plans:

- **Training programs:** Support entrepreneurship training programs focusing on sustainable business models, renewable energy, and eco-friendly agriculture, tailored to the needs of youth in each country.
- **Access to finance:** Create microfinance programs and start-up grants specifically for youth-led green businesses, with flexible repayment terms to encourage participation.
- **Market-access support:** Assist young entrepreneurs in accessing local, regional, and international markets, including through partnerships with private sector actors and trade associations.

Fostering Regional Collaboration and Solidarity

Challenge: Youth organizations in French- and Portuguese-speaking countries often feel isolated from regional networks dominated by English-speaking groups, limiting their ability to collaborate and share resources.

Recommendation: Strengthen and expand regional youth climate networks to be more inclusive of French- and Portuguese-speaking organizations.

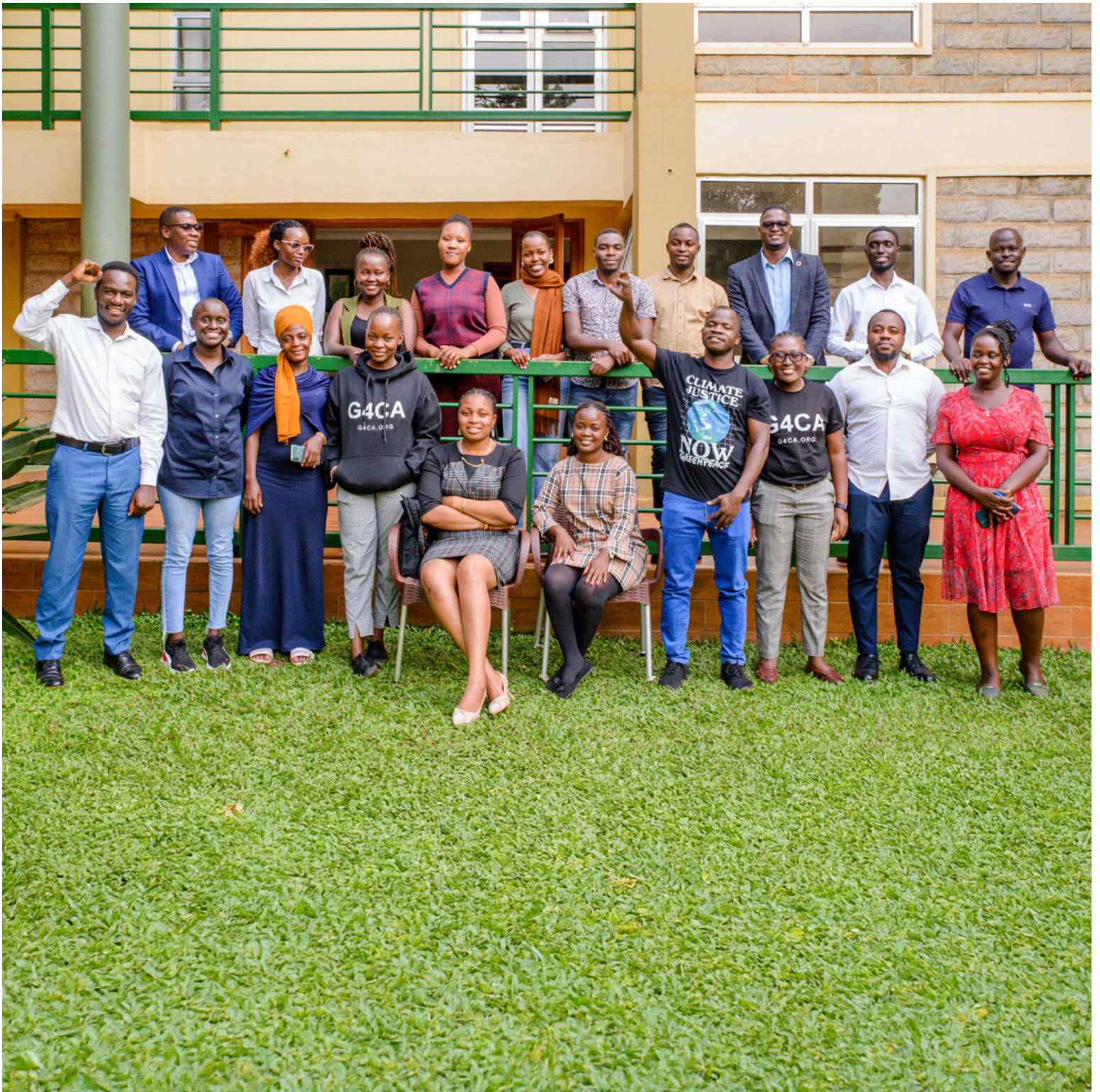
Action Plans:

- **Network expansion:** Actively recruit youth organizations from Benin, Guinea-Bissau, and Senegal into existing regional networks, ensuring that they have equal representation and opportunities.
- **Language inclusion:** Ensure that all network communications, events, and resources are available in French and Portuguese, with translation services provided during meetings and conferences.
- **Projects:** Facilitate the development of joint projects that address cross-border climate issues, encouraging collaboration between youth organizations from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

8. CONCLUSION

The synthesis of findings from Benin, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Uganda reveals a complex and interconnected landscape of challenges and opportunities for youth-led climate action across these countries. Despite diverse contexts, common themes emerge, such as the need for greater access to funding, capacity building, legal empowerment, and inclusive governance. The strategic recommendations provided offer a pathway to address these challenges, enabling youth to play a pivotal role in combating climate change and driving sustainable development.


The efforts of youth organizations in these countries are a testament to the resilience and innovation of young people in the face of environmental crisis. However, to maximize their impact, it is essential that stakeholders—including governments, international organizations, and funders—commit to implementing the recommendations outlined in this report. By fostering an environment that supports youth-led initiatives, we can ensure that the next generation is equipped to tackle the climate crisis and secure a sustainable future for all.



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