



**The Brookings Institution
Africa Growth Initiative
Foresight Africa Podcast**

“Dispatches from Africa’s COP: Kenyan youth on the frontlines of climate adaptation”

December 5, 2022

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Episode Summary:

Beverly Musili, policy analyst at the Kenya Institute for Public Policy Research and Analysis, and Tomas Hurdson, CEO of Youth Green Space Action, discuss the outcomes of this year's COP. Both view resolutions on loss and damage as a positive outcome, as well as the solidarity displayed by African youth. Looking ahead however, they highlight the need for more climate financing and establishment of an African Youth Council.

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ORDU: Hi, I'm Aloysius Uche Ordu, director of the Africa Growth Initiative at the Brookings Institution and host of Foresight Africa podcast. We wrapped up season one of the podcast in August and we will return with season two in early 2023 after the publication of our flagship report titled "Foresight Africa."

Now, though, I'm happy to present a special series on this podcast titled, "Dispatches from Africa's COP." In November, COP27 was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. One of the key themes of COP27 was the role of youth in addressing the climate change challenge, and Africa's youths rose to the occasion and presented some of the things they are doing on the frontlines of the climate fight.

In this special series, I'm talking to youth climate activists from different African countries who participated in COP27. They will share their valuable insights and their ideas and proposals for action. These youths are from Ghana, from Kenya, from Madagascar, and from the Seychelles.

You can find season one episodes of this podcast on our website, Brookings dot edu slash Foresight Africa Podcast. Also, you can find the "Foresight Africa" report there as well. And now, here is a dispatch from COP27, Africa's COP.

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My guests today are two Kenyan youths that participated in COP27 in Sharm El Sheikh, Egypt. Over 84% of Kenyan land is classified as arid and semi-arid. The country is exposed, therefore, to drought, locust invasion, and flood, which have devastating impact on people's livelihoods around the Horn of Africa.

First youth is Beverly Musili. Beverly is a policy analyst at the Kenya Institute of Public Policy Research Analysis, KIPPRA, one of AGI's partner institutions. The second is Tomas Hurdson, youth activist and CEO, Youth Green Space Action. Beverly and Tomas, I'd like to welcome you both to our show. It was great indeed to see you both at COP27. To start with, do tell me about yourselves. What motivated you to become a climate activist?

MUSILI: Okay. Thank you, Doctor Ordu. So, I am also a lawyer by profession, and my work as a policy analyst has focused on governance, human rights, focusing on women, girls, children, and other vulnerable populations, and also climate justice.

So, my work on climate change was motivated by three looming realities. Firstly, the realities of the adverse effects of climate change in Africa. Africa is the most vulnerable to climate change, a situation where we have contributed the least to in terms of global warming, one in which we are also not very well prepared for, and one where we are also likely to face the greatest burden. Also, the reality that youth will face the brunt of climate change based on future environmental trends and may not benefit from the environmental resources that past generations have benefited from. And lastly, that women have been affected disproportionately as a result of climate change impacts. So, overall, the burdens of climate change do not seem to be balanced.

ORDU: And Tomas?

HURDSONE: Thank you so much, Dr. Ordu and the entire team for having us here today. Well, to begin with, I'm Tomas Hurdson from Kenya. I'm currently serving as the chief executive officer of Youth Greenspace Action and Network Organization, which is an NGO that deals in innovation as a co-mandate in mitigating the impacts of climate change. In the same breath, I lead the young people that is on the Kenyan Youth Climate Change Directorate in amplifying their voices in unison.

Now, if I come back to what motivated me to do what I'm doing here today, I must say I have a background on resource management. That is where I've majored on. But then now on my motive was solely driven by the push to create impact and the impact will in turn in turn bring others on board to see the need of the ravaging effects of climate change not only within Africa, but also the whole globe. So, it's within our small steps and initiatives that in turn effect change to bring the goodwill, so that this change can be effected by small steps. Hence result resulting to change that we need to see. Thank you.

ORDU: So, how are Kenyan youths adapting to climate change in your view? Beverly?

MUSILI: So, youth have been engaging in various adaptation efforts at the community level, especially in the phases of implementation. Youth are also playing a very key role in terms of innovating and the innovations aspect of it. Another angle is in lobbying and influencing political attitudes or policies, advocacy, and mobilizing in terms of climate change adaptation. So, despite the perception that youth are categorized as vulnerable populations, they are actually able to contribute in terms of the climate change adaptation discourse.

ORDU: And Tomas?

HURDSONE: Well, I can say, back in Kenya, the youths have taken the front lead in, coming out to take lead in the initiatives of mitigating the impacts of climate change. And they have taken diverse initiatives in addressing climate change adaptations such as awareness raising and behavioral change in mitigating the impacts of climate change, both at the school level, community level, and also at the national level where they they are engaged in various operations.

ORDU: In preparation for COP27, it'd be great to hear from you about how, you know, the sort of homework you actually did before you went to Egypt.

HURDSONE: First and foremost was to understand the major themes of this year's COP, which were finance, science, youth, and future generations, decarbonization, adaptation, and agriculture, just to mention but a few, which was to aid in relating within the African context of the loss and damage incurred by the effects of climate change.

ORDU: Beverly?

MUSILI: So, I read on previous COP documentations and some of the commitments that had been made previously. I also researched on Africa's most pressing issues, given that this COP was intended to be Afrocentric. So, in informing the COP27, I did background research on what exactly are Africa's most pressing issues, which were issues on, you know, food security and agriculture, the persistent drought, and trying to see if those were going to be addressed comprehensively in COP27.

ORDU: And what were your expectations before you left Kenya? Tomas?

HURDSONE: Well, my major expectation was to see countries contributing to their high percentages of emission are able to pay up for the loss and damage cost through climate financing, but also to stop the activities that are generating high global emissions. That was my major expectation that was to, you know, come out of this COP.

ORDU: What about your actual experiences during the COP itself?

HURDSONE: Well, my actual experiences: the best and interesting moment was to see how negotiations on thematic areas was taking place and getting to, you know, involved in some of the

key elements that were taking place there. But also being a leader and an upcoming leader, the best thing was to interact and exchange contacts with amazing people doing beautiful things for humanity. That really melted my heart and getting to know that the world out here has really good people doing amazing thing to save humanity.

ORDU: And Beverly, what were your expectations before you left and your actual experience while you at COP?

MUSILI: So, my expectations were for leaders to deliberate the unique issues facing Africa and come up with concrete solutions for Africa. And, related also to translating rhetoric to action, that is something that I think we are all looking forward to in this year's COP27. Beyond that was also looking for a platform for engagement, knowledge sharing, and peer learning, this being a global forum.

In terms of my experiences, I really welcomed the presence of several Africans at this global forum. There were also great opportunities to network, a lot of cross-learning with other African countries from, for example, MENA, learning what they were doing in relation to the specific climate issues that they were facing. And from that we were able to draw commonalities and also learn lessons.

ORDU: So, from your perspectives, both of you, what went really well for you at COP27 and why? And what did not, in your view, go so well and why?

HURDSONE: As I'll outrightly put it, this year's COP turned out to be one of the best as it fulfilled the Glasgow agreement on the need to have high representation of the youths in the decision-making platforms. And this was highly achieved and that I must really congratulate the COP's presidency on making that happen.

But also to really thank also the Egyptian government of the well-coordinated efforts of beefing up security and the protocol that really laid good grounds to assist, you know, the foreign people that were there for the first time. That was commendable.

But then one thing that was not really attractive to me or appealing was still the issue of plastic materials being used. And you see, we as we are advocating for transition from the single use of plastic and still was a major challenge still being witnessed there. So, my take or my resolution is to encourage the government to transition to better packaging system or better packaging materials in the near future if they have such international foras.

ORDU: Great recommendation, indeed. And Beverly, what impressed you or surprised you the most during your stay in Egypt?

MUSILI: First, I would commend the Egyptian government in terms of the organization of the COP27 itself. Secondly, the opportunities for different organizations to contribute to the discussion from an interdisciplinary point of view. Lastly, and most importantly was African leaders seem to be becoming more assertive in terms of their demands for climate finance and action. As the African Union chairperson and Senegalese president argued at COP27, and I'll quote him, "We are funding our own adaptation efforts when we are the victims, which means we are being doubly punished and we are not ready to put up with that."

So, seeing African leaders actually come to the table in terms of negotiating and bargaining power was very, very empowering for us as Africans. So, that is something I can say was quite, quite commendable.

The other aspect maybe that we did not do so well in may be the aspect of accreditation. I think we may need to iron out the process for accreditation, especially if we are saying that we want COP27

to be more inclusive in terms of representation of youth organizations, representation from women-led organizations. We may need to make the accreditation process a bit more accessible.

ORDU: I couldn't agree more. I mean, the accreditation process could actually be simpler. And in that sense, I think we all learned lessons about preparatory work for COP 28, the need to register as early as possible so that we can also minimize the risks of the challenges of accreditation.

Let me now turn to some of the things you both actually did while you were at COP27. And I recall you were both involved in the debate about setting up an African Youth Council, which was a forum that initially was set up for you guys to discuss this Council by the African Development Bank and the Global Center on Adaptation. What are your thoughts about such a council for Africa's youth? Tomas?

HURDSONE: Thank you so much for this. Well, regarding the African Youth Council, it has come at a timely time. There is, you know, the continent really needs the youths to stand up and own the African problems at hand and not to really figure out all the external solutions, but rather than internal solutions. So, for me, this council will really act as a linkage of the youths and the various government bodies, both within the African continent, but also other relevant stakeholders within the environmental programs, but also non-governmental organizations that really want to work with the young people in achieving their agenda, the AU Agenda 2063. That is the sustainability of Africa. So, for me, this Council will really be of importance in unifying, acting as a unifying factor, both not only to the youths, but also to the continent as a whole.

ORDU: And Beverly, your thoughts on the Youth Council?

MUSILI: So, I think it's an innovative and novel idea. If well-structured in terms of mandate, governance, and coordination, it can be instrumental in driving the change that we want as youth to see youth-led organizations in climate change being more involved in terms of effective engagement, inclusion, participation, especially at policymaking and decision-making levels within their countries, but also at a regional and international level.

And a key gap is that Africa does not have a dedicated institution dealing with capacity building or capacity development of youth on climate change, which the Council could take up to fill in that gap and also build linkages with other existing African institutions, and thereby allow that accessibility or linkages between the youth-led organizations and these regional institutions that we have. So, the Council could ideally federate the youth-led organizations in climate change and also provide value addition in terms of support in capacity development or resource mobilization.

ORDU: I just wondered from you both, what sort of characteristics would you be looking for in terms of the youths that will replace, you know, basically represent our continent on this Council. Any ideas of the sort of characteristics you personally would be looking for?

HURDSONE: Well, If I'm just to begin with, all we are looking for here is basically integrity and transparency. Because integrity and transparency goes hand in hand. So, if basically we bring in people that are not transparent, even the process itself will not be transparent and inclusive, and that will really be a discriminatory process in the effect. And it will be just a body being formed for the sake, but not to achieve the core mandate that was effected for.

ORDU: And Beverly, any thoughts?

MUSILI: Personally, I would want this Council to have the aspect of competency and talent. So, I would be looking for an organization that possesses a critical mass of skills to actually go to the negotiating table and bring something to the table. So, looking at how to dispel this rhetoric that, you know, the youth are just young people, but looking at youth as talent that can be tapped into

and talent that can be harnessed. So, I would be looking for Council that is made up of competent and well experienced youth. And they are there.

ORDU: Indeed they are absolutely there. I saw them myself. And so the four points you both made: a sense of integrity in the youths to represent Africa on the Council; the need for transparency and competence; and of course, talents. I hundred percent with you both these are the sort of characteristics and we will be looking for and for representation on the Council.

Let's turn now, Tomas and Beverley, to issues of public policy. Public policy. For example, what would your advice to our governments be on how to tap into the youths potential to tackle climate change in Africa?

MUSILI: So, in quite a number of sectors, like I said, youth are seen as just young people or vulnerable populations. Yet we have potential to be actively engaged in providing technical inputs or technical expertise and also to be actively engaged in terms of implementation. So, what I would like to see is that youth being brought, number one, to have a seat on the table, but also being involved meaningfully to also bring something to the table, not just to have a seat, but also to be meaningfully engaged in terms of the technical aspects of these policies or programs that governments would be rolling out, having youth representation in terms of the technical expertise in task forces, in working groups, and in steering committees.

ORDU: And Tomas, any thoughts?

HURDSONE: For me is just the governments of the day should actually see to the effect of addressing inequalities, including in the access to and control of productive resources such as finance, land, and technology, especially youths from poor and marginalized communities. The resources should be well distributed such that everyone feels they are part and parcel of what is really happening in their own country. If this is not achieved, we are raising countries that is just full of elite but not, you know, universal experience, then that would really bring the marginalization part of it.

But then what we really want to see the government of the day really ready to own up by addressing the issues of resource mobilization, but also resource decentralization, not only at the national level, but also at the grassroots level where the common man is able to really feel they are part and parcel of what the government of the day is promoting, and that is the well-being of their citizens.

ORDU: Tomas, you touched upon a very important point about resource mobilization, indeed, which is critical to what we are discussing here. And Beverly, I'm just wondering from your perspectives, where do you see the gaps that need to be plugged for effective climate justice among youths and vulnerable populations?

MUSILI: So, I would say, number one is the aspect of inclusion. So, having all these groups that have a say or that are affected by climate change being included in the policymaking processes. The other one is meaningful engagement with these populations, and that is up until the local levels, making sure that there's meaningful engagement of these local communities in terms of the decisions that are likely to affect them. So, that is currently not adequate because we may find that decisions are made in a manner that is not completely inclusive and in a way that has not fully engaged all local communities that are likely to be affected by policy decisions.

ORDU: So, do you see any links between climate justice and gender equity? Beverly?

MUSILI: Yes. I would emphasize that the climate crisis is not gender neutral. Women and girls experience most likely the greatest impacts of climate change, and that intensifies already preexisting gender inequalities. And we can see this in a number of different aspects. First is the

fact that we know that agriculture is a critical employment sector for women in low- and low-and-middle-income countries. And during periods of drought or erratic rainfall or erratic weather patterns, women who are the, you know, the core agricultural workers, must then work harder to secure income and are also likely to be disadvantaged in that situation.

More specific examples would be risks related to conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence in its various forms; restricted access to key sexual and reproductive health services; limited access to nutrition and dietary requirements; and also restricted access to water and sanitation services, which are all critical for women and girls if we're talking about climate justice. And in this inequality, this is likely to also affect other developmental outcomes, such as those for children.

ORDU: And Tomas, do you see any links between climate justice and gender equity?

HURDSONE: Well, for me is to just recognize that climate justice and gender, actually, there is there is the linkage. And as you can see, the ravaging effects of climate change is not only affecting one gender or, you know, affecting the other, but it is a universal theme. So, it's something that when it is tackled, every gender, every you know, both sides of representation should be brought on board in addressing these needs, but also looking into consideration the need of not to overemphasize on a single gender. That really also causes some anxiety in the other gender.

I mean, in the recent times we've seen a lot of priority and even programs centered on the girl child. But then we also ask our that ourselves as a boy child, where are we headed if we are in the same planet and we are also disregarded in some programs? We know women stand a chance of vulnerability, but then they should be well moderated to see the effect that also the same way the girl child thrives is also the same way the boy child thrives. And that's why the more we need to address this issue of social security.

There are a lot of high cases, insecurity rising. It's because the boy child feels locked out in these most significant programs. And that's why we need to really look at how we engage both at national, local, regional, and also at the international level, how we can synergize to really bring the both genders, both gender on board to address these issues without discriminating the other, inasmuch as one would pose to be seen as, you know, to be in danger or to be vulnerable than the other.

ORDU: Excellent points indeed. So, what commitments would you both like to see during COP27 discussions regarding, in terms of outcomes, regarding gender and youths?

MUSILI: So, I would like to see mainstreaming of gender, in terms of whether it's national climate change plans. Also recognizing the nuances of gender. So, I agree with Tomas that in as much as yes, we're focusing on the girl child, but there's a reason for that. We're looking at just basic indicators of development, and that is that women and girls are more disadvantaged than the boy child. That is just that's just a fact. And also that they are likely to face more vulnerabilities because of other historical injustices.

What I would like to see is that recognition, that nuanced aspect of gender, why we are focusing on women and girls. That is why we came up with aspects on affirmative action, which we have not even realized to 100%, just to bring the girl child at par with the boy child. So, it may seem like more focus is being given on the girl child, but that is to rectify some historical injustices that have been present. So, I would like that recognition on the nuanced gender aspects.

On the youth, I think what would be very important is to see what specific commitments will be provided in terms of eliminating barriers that youth face, especially in unlocking climate finances, which I think is a significant barrier that youth face. So, what kind of commitments will COP come up with in terms of unlocking these resources for the youth?

ORDU: And Tomas, what commitments would you like to see out of COP27 regarding gender and youths?

HURDSONE: For me, I will actually summarize it this way. This is the time to really say what we mean, but also mean what we say. It's not all about just having engagements and declarations, but then it's the time to really actualize what we've been saying on paperwork, but also actualizing them on the ground so that the common man who's out there, who's not really able to be in these high level discussions, can really experience what is really happening with regards to what is being discussed revolving about them.

But also one of the commitments that I would really love to see more so for the young people is the higher representations on the negotiations platforms. It's not just a matter of showing up and sitting and becoming a flower vessel on the table, but also being able to be given that platform to, you know, articulate the issues very well. But then the issues that it related are verified and then authenticated, then they are able to be adopted. So, for me, it's the high representation, but also as we move forward, as my good sister Beverly put it, we should we should really look at how we have our accreditation system that really favor us all so that others don't remain locked out while important issues are being deliberated on.

ORDU: If I may ask you both, if you had a magic wand in terms of expectations, of outcomes from COP27, what would those be?

MUSILI: So, I think something that has really come up is, I would say, conclusive and comprehensive resolution of, do I say, computing this question of loss and damage. In an ideal world, we'd want to see how is this loss and damage in the African context actually being resolved and looking at the financing and the computation of how this is going to be done. That would be something I think for me would be a great achievement.

Then also on the financing, just having, you know, credibility in terms of commitments to fund clean energy projects. And I think that would require quite a number of commitments from different nations.

Lastly, I would say the aspect of climate leadership, that means leaders actually taking ownership of the situation and further actually implementing doing what they have said that they're going to do and not renege on any of the commitments or the promises that they have made.

ORDU: And Tomas, two specific things in terms of outcome from COP27, from your perspective?

HURDSONE: For me, what I would really want to see, actually, this being a COP that is being held in Africa, what my take would really be is African countries come together to come out stronger and synergize that efforts in, you know, utilizing their resources for fast tracking development in the continent. But also look at how they can really utilize her natural resources in developing their own continent, because we've really had a lot of a lot of conversations on fossil fuels, clean energy transition. But then these conversations are being spearheaded with the countries that are really developed.

But then Africa is still developing. Then what is really the need of us having the natural resources at the expense of not utilizing them for our own benefit? So, what we are really asking, can we really, Africa, exploit our resources? But inasmuch as we are exploiting our natural resources, can we really also look at the environmental hazards that might come out of that but also provide alternatives? We cannot just be assuming with the conversations coming out, transitioning to clean energy, transitioning from fossil fuels. But then there are no clear alternatives offered, you know,

for these transitions which will actually render most households jobless, render economic growth for other countries will decline.

So, what we are really asking as African countries, this is the time that they really need to step up and stand up and speak in one voice.

But also, what I really want to see come out again is the policy, the trickle-down policy effect that is able to be, you know, it is well understood from the top, but also well interpreted for also the common man. That is those are the grass roots communities able to comprehend. And they are able, even as they are putting into action these policies, they are able to say, yes, this policy has been adopted. I easily understand it and this is the reason why I'm doing it for this cause. And that is the best thing we can do, not just doing policies for elites. Thank you.

ORDU: Thank you very much. So, if I hear you both very clearly: loss and damage, concrete resolution as an outcome of COP27—Africa's COP—loss and damage, which for the first time actually made it to the agenda of these negotiations in Egypt. I also hear you say that financing—financing is absolutely critical. We still have ways to go to the 100 billion per year that was promised back in Paris. So, clearly financing is important.

And I also hear you say that our leaders, the need for solidarity for African leaders in these negotiations to speak with one voice, matters ranging from energy transition to loss and damage to financing, to speak with one voice in terms of their approach vis-a-vis the rest of the world.

Thank you both very, very much. I've been speaking to Beverly Musili and Tomas Hurdson, two Kenyan youths I was privileged to work with during the COP27 in Egypt. Have a wonderful afternoon. Thank you.

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I'm Aloysius Uche Ordu, and this has been Foresight Africa. To learn more about what you heard today, you can find this episode online at Brookings dot edu slash Foresight Africa podcast.

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My special thanks to the production team, including Fred Dews, producer; Nicole Ntungire and Sakina Djantchiemo, associate producers; and Gastón Reboredo, audio engineer, and Matt Murphy, audio intern.

The show's art was designed by Shavanthi Mendis based on a concept by the creative firm Blossom. Additional support for this podcast comes from my colleagues in Brookings Global and the Office of Communications at Brookings.

Thank you very much.