



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

**“Dispatches from Africa’s COP: Seychelles youth opt for climate capacity building”  
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*Episode Summary:*

Victoria Alis, president of Oceans Project Seychelles, discusses vulnerabilities faced by ocean ecosystems in the Seychelles and measures some local NGOs in her town put in place in preparation for COP27. Alis lists local climate-related capacity building and mobilization of local youth as priorities for mitigation and adaptation of ocean health in her community.

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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 their 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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**ORDU:** My guest today is Victoria Alis from the Seychelles. Victoria is the president of the Oceans Project Seychelles. She participated in COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. The Seychelles is prone to tsunamis, hurricanes, and tropical cyclones. So, the Seychellois are no strangers to the ravages of climate change. Victoria, welcome to the show.

**ALIS:** Thank you so much for having me.

**ORDU:** It's great to hear that you are the president of the Oceans Project in Seychelles. Could you tell us a little bit about that project, please?

**ALIS:** Sure. It's a local NGO that was launched in 2016 and it was in response to the virus impacts on ocean health, whether that is climate change and sustainable fisheries, marine plastic pollution. And so, a group of youth, local youth, decided to launch this NGO, focusing primarily on outreach programs, education, sensitization programs, and research. So, we've been focusing mainly on marine plastic pollution, but we're now trying to tackle a lot more climate change and seeing how we can bring more youth with us.

**ORDU:** So, what measures did you take at home in Seychelles in preparation for COP27?

**ALIS:** So, before coming here, I organized the second Local Conference of Youth Seychelles LCOY. It's a YOUNGO registered event, YOUNGO being the children and youth constituency to the UNFCCC. And this three, four day event was basically meant to consult our youth to inform them what's going on in terms of local climate action, whether it's for mitigation or adaptation, letting them know who's doing what, informing them of the

different policies and consulting them on the projects in the pipeline and what is to be expected in the next couple of years.

And what we want to do as well is give them the tools to be able to know what's going on at COP, whether that's virtual links to just follow the various site events. But we wanted to make sure that they knew what COP was all about. So, it was an introductory session. But, all the information I got from this conference allowed me to better prepare for my interventions, trying to kind of give a voice to the local youth. So, it was a great consultative exercise for me just to know what people back home think, what are their challenges, what are their priority areas, and basically try to communicate that at a higher level.

**ORDU:** So, what were your expectations and actual experiences at COP?

**ALIS:** So, my experience at COP, it was a really great networking experience. I think for me, more than anything, I'm not coming here as a ... I didn't come to COP as a technical expert in negotiations, but it was more to amplify the challenges that we we're facing back home and to try and find new collaborations, new partnerships, new sources of funding and to support my team, our national delegation.

In terms of expectations, so, I think a lot was expected from this COP, particularly as a follow up to COP26 back in Glasgow and coming from SIDS and being part of AOSIS, the key demand really was to see a loss and damage facility. So, in terms of expectations, the expectations were high and I think some part of it were met, I think some expectations were met in terms of seeing the political will on paper. But there was still a little bit of a disappointment.

**ORDU:** You mentioned SIDS. For the benefit of our listeners, could you explain what that acronym stands for, please?

**ALIS:** Sorry. So, SIDS—they are the small island developing states. We have 58 island states and 38 are U.N. members. And they qualify as ... so they have a very unique the sense that they're quite isolated. A lot of them are known to be more larger oceanic states because most of the country is made of water that depend on the marine environment and they are extremely vulnerable to climate change impacts because of issues of sea level rise, our dependance on the coral reefs, and coral reefs being extremely vulnerable ecosystems to the climate change impacts.

**ORDU:** Right. Thank you for clarifying that. Victoria, it's has been stated that for small island states like yours, the Seychelles, and basically the idea of the oceans warming, the climate warming above 1.5 degrees is not negotiable. What does that mean to you in particular as a Seychellois?

**ALIS:** It means a lot. And it means that I mean, at 1.5, we need to expect that between 70 to 90% of our coral reefs will be gone. And we know that coral reefs are home to more than 25% of all marine life. And at 1.5, in terms of sea level rise, we would be expecting to have a large portion of our coastal communities completely displaced or gone. So, this is why we're saying 1.5 is not negotiable, is because if we reach that stage—and we were already at 1.2, so we're very close to that 1.5 limit—this is going to be a whole other ballgame. And this is when we can start really talking about migration issues and the loss of millions of livelihoods.

**ORDU:** We've seen, Victoria, that the ocean can be the world's greatest ally against climate change. How are NGOs, the youths, and others tackling the issues of ocean health in your home country Seychelles in order to build resilience?

**ALIS:** So, I mean, I can take the example of this NGO that I'm part of, the Ocean Project Seychelles. And as I said, we've been tackling more of the marine plastic pollution issue, but we tend to disassociate plastic pollution with the climate change crisis, but it's very much linked. And so, we've been trying to understand where the different sources are coming from and how that actually impacts our marine life and biodiversity. So, knowing that plastic pollution contributes to about 4% of global greenhouse gas emissions, we we're trying to make that link.

So, ensuring that our ocean is really as resilient as it can be. So, by trying to sort out the issues of biodiversity loss, issues of marine plastic pollution. And the way we see it is that it would give our ocean a better chance of battling against the impacts of climate change.

So, we are also having a growing community of scientists back home. More and more marine biologists and people in the oceanographic sphere. So, in their own way, by conducting research, by asking questions, we're also having young lawyers looking into environmental impacts and how they can bring their skill sets to preserve our marine resources. I know that ecocide is still some that's quite new, but that's something we're also looking into. How can we introduce this legal term, ecocide, into Seychelles? So, there's a lot of push from the youth community.

**ORDU:** Interesting. Victoria, meaningful youth inclusion in climate change policy and decision-making has been raised numerous times during COP27. What do you understand by that?

**ALIS:** So, for me, meaningful youth engagement, I think it's making sure that we don't use youth as tokens. I think we need to really go past this tokenistic approach to youth engagement. And it's not just about having youth around one table or having one or two workshops focused on youth. But it really has to be a two-way approach and ensuring that whatever strategic plans is being developed on a national level, we do it in a way that is consultative, but that is also, that resonates with what youth believe are priorities for them.

So, it's ensuring that when we have our NDCs and we're looking at national goals for the next 5 to 10 years, is that we have a strategic plan in terms of workforce. So, as we are planning for this future workforce, we have all the infrastructure and all the facilities for our youth on a local basis.

So yes, it's it's ensuring that we have the appropriate platforms to consult, to inform youth, to give them a voice. But beyond that, to really have not just a voice, but on black on white I think we need to integrate what youth are spreading across, whether it's through a declaration, whether it's through a manifesto on a national level or regional level. I think whatever documents are out there it's ensuring that the policymakers and decision-makers really integrate what the youth are saying and their demands.

**ORDU:** Victoria, at COP27 you were actively involved in the debate about setting up an African Youth Council. What are your thoughts about the proposed council?

**ALIS:** I think such a proposed council could play a huge role in identifying the gaps and opportunities for youth in the region and to act as a connecting platform. Because I feel that we have in Africa—it is a huge continent and we can easily divide it in different regions. So, having one African Climate Youth Council could really bring the youth together, and I think could play a significant role and basically acting as a guidance to financial facilities.

And we've heard a lot of times that the youth or, you know, stakeholders on the local ground have great ideas, great projects, but there's no funding. And then we have the funders that say, okay, well, we have the money, we've got the funding, but we can't seem to see the projects. So, I think that having that council could act as a bit of a middle ground, particularly if some of the key partners or the financial facilities and institutes, I think, yeah, it could be it could play a significant role to make that bridge.

**ORDU:** Yeah, I was in support of what you've just said. I was absolutely amazed by the energy, by the energy in that conversation with youths from all across Africa really debating the nuances of the Council, the sort of competence and credibility of the youths to be selected to serve. And I just thought it was a fantastic conversation. And, of course, you played a very, very big role in your small group and of course, the broader conversation. So, congratulations to you and and the rest of Africa's youths.

Moving on now, Victoria, what are the challenges, in your view, of engaging citizens in policymaking and how can we overcome these challenges?

**ALIS:** I think depending on where you are in the world, you'll get different responses. Right? We all we all face similar challenges, but also different challenges. And for me, I think, to really engage citizens, whether it's climate change policymaking or just climate change action, I think they need to feel like they have ... they can take ownership of what's being put in place. They that they feel that they are really part of it. And to see how these actions can benefit them directly. I mean, back in Seychelles, luckily enough, compared to the Pacific Islands and the Caribbean Islands, we haven't been hit as hard. We haven't really seen the extent of climate change impacts yet. But it is going to come, we don't know when but it's coming.

And so, because we haven't really seen these major impacts yet, I think everyone's aware of climate change, but it's not necessarily a priority area for them on a personal basis.

So, I think it's trying to use an approach where when we try to engage citizens in a meaningful way is that we really try to make them understand the benefits, whether it's through conservation efforts, restoration efforts, what are the direct and indirect benefits that will bring to them.

And when it comes to actually putting in place policies, it has to come from a bottom up approach and not just from a top-bottom. So it's really including them where there are proper follow ups, because I've seen it in the past where in terms of citizens' engagement, they'll be, there'll be workshops or there'll be meetings, but after that there is no follow up. And so, I think people can easily feel used.

So, I would say that ensuring there is a continuity to the work we do on the ground with the with the citizens, and that we do it in a way where we really try to put ourselves in their

shoes. We try and understand how do they perceive climate change and how can we make it really relatable to their to their lives.

**ORDU:** Do you see any links between climate justice and gender equality?

**ALIS:** Yeah, there's clearly a link. I mean, there is a whole constituency around gender under the UNFCCC. And I think it's safe to say that if we don't bring that on the table and it's not being addressed properly, then it's hard to really meet these climate justice goals. We know that women are impacted in a different way. So, it's recognizing the impacts on a gender level. It's understanding how drastic these impacts can be. And there's been so much research done on this. So, it's ensuring that we address what has been proved time and time again and that it's reflected in the COP decisions, but beyond that, it's reflected in our nationally determined contributions, our NDCs, and reflected in our in our policies.

**ORDU:** Talking about research, Victoria, why is it important to promote country-led and country-owned climate research in small island states such as Seychelles?

**ALIS:** So, that's really critical. I think that one common challenge that we share amongst all SIDS is that we lack capacity, we lack capacity across the board. But we have an enormous knowledge, local knowledge, when we talk about energy transition and implementing different technologies within our island states.

Most of the time we rely on external experts and we've seen this numerous times back in Seychelles where whether it's through technology, whether it's through national studies, whether it's through legal consultants coming in to advise us on our legal structure. When it comes to climate change and on other topics, the issue is that this knowledge comes in the country, but it then leaves the country.

And so there is no transfer of this knowledge, which means that when we are when we have access to finance—there is finance—but the thing is, we need to go beyond just access to finance. We need to ensure that we are able to manage this finance and that's for reasons of continuity, for reasons of resilience, we need to ensure that it's our own people that are able to manage the different tools out there to build climate resilience and for adaptation and mitigation.

I think if we rely on the Global North to come in—and again when it's we are, I think, grateful that we have technical support from the Global North, but they don't have our perception, they have their perception. And so it's a bit broken when they come in, when external experts come in the country, they will advise based on the conditions they have back home, which is completely well, quite irrelevant to what we are having to deal with.

So, it's ensuring that we empower our citizens, our own local people, to take on and to become the future experts. Um, and that, yeah, we basically build on that. It has to be locally-driven and it has to be country-owned.

**ORDU:** Talking about finance, as you also sensed in COP27, there are there was just so much climate finance talk everywhere you went, that is demanding access to finance enough for a small island state like Seychelles?

**ALIS:** No, it's not enough. Demanding climate finance is key, and it's been one of the key agendas for a very, very long time. But we need to go beyond that. And this is when it goes back to this country-driven research and ensuring that we have the capacity on the ground to then manage this finance.

I think it's something that's been missed and in a lot of the panel discussions that I was either part of or that I listen to in COP27, I feel like that question was missing a little bit. There were a lot of demands for access to climate finance. And that's key, because especially for a country like Seychelles, where we are identified as a high income country, we don't necessarily have all we access like other SIDS would have.

But beyond that, an issue that we we've been faced with is once the money comes in, whether it's for an NGO or whether it's a local authority, governmental body, we tend to be a little surprised or a little overwhelmed with the amount of technical work that it demands to report back to grant bodies, especially when it's long-term projects. I've seen long-term projects right in the middle being completely abandoned just because of issues of capacity. So, that for me is a key point I wanted to highlight.

**ORDU:** I think reporting back, as you say, is crucial. But even more important, of course, is the effective use of those funds when they ultimately do come in. Victoria, just turning back now to the actual conversations and deliberations at COP, what impressed you or surprised you the most at COP27? What would you have liked to see more of included at COP27?

**ALIS:** What I was quite surprised was ... so I mean I was at COP26 last year and there was quite a strong presence of youth at COP26. But this year I have to say there's been a huge mobilization of youth across the world and I know that some unfortunately weren't able to make it due to financial issues and visas, you can really feel the energy and you can really you could really feel the presence of youth, whether it's inside events, whether it's in the negotiating rooms. There was definitely a very strong presence, which I was expecting, but not to that extent.

And I would say well organized. I know that there was the Youth for Climate Manifesto, there was the Global Youth Statement that was coordinated for YOUNGO. But there was also the ACAP, the African Climate Action Plan also launched.

So, you could see a lot of youth got together from different regions across the world and they made their points very clear and their demands very clear. And I thought that was great. Delegations were very responsive. And you could see respective ministers, respective high level delegates and accept or welcome these declarations and manifestos. So, that for me was a huge highlight.

In terms of what could have been what more could have been done, I would say that there's always a disconnection between the side events and the negotiations, and that's what I had also observed last year at COP26. But I feel this year there's been a quite a big disconnection and I feel like delaying tactics have confused quite a few people. So, I would have hoped to see a bit more fluidity between these two platforms with these two areas.

**ORDU:** I fully agree with you and share the sentiment because it's not just the presence. You talked of tokenism earlier on. It's not just the presence of the youths at COP27, it's the actual deliberate nature and the role they played and seen them in many of these panels, and you can

actually see that many of these kids and—not kids, young people—were very, very knowledgeable about climate science, et cetera. And I think that is something to commend, especially the African youths of which you were a part, who now have the opportunity to actually put our policymakers' feet to the fire, to urge them not to renege on their commitments and to push the agenda forward.

**ORDU:** Victoria, it was indeed a pleasure to meet you at COP27 in Egypt and thank you very much for joining me this morning to share your reflections on COP27. Enjoy your day and thanks again.

**ALIS:** Thank you so much for having me and wishing you all a great day as well.

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**ORDU:** 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](https://www.brookings.edu/podcasts/foresight-africa/) podcast.

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