

# Catalyzing momentum for health negotiations at COP28

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Women from a temporary camp where access to clean water is a huge challenge in drought-hit Modeka, Garissa Kenya, fetch unclean drinking water from a makeshift trough. Severe weather endangers water and food supply. Credit: [WHO / Billy Miaron](#)

By now, there is no doubt that the climate crisis is also a significant health crisis affecting people across the globe.

This might be obvious to some, but to others the impacts haven't hit home yet.

With the increase of extreme weather events, waterborne and vector-borne diseases, malnutrition, [heat stress](#), mental illness, and the growing burden of care for people suffering from diseases triggered by [climate](#) episodes and disasters, the health implications of [climate change](#) are becoming more apparent around the world, worsening population health indicators.

The recent Lancet Countdown [Report](#) shows escalating health impacts of climate change.

Adults aged over 65 and infants under one experience double the heat wave exposure compared to the period 1986 to 2005.

Severe weather endangers water and food supply, leading to malnutrition. In 2021, for instance, 127 million people in 122 countries faced increased food insecurity, compared to 1981–2010.

Climate shift expands pathogens, risking billions of people's health with infectious diseases.

In addition, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), 56% of public health events since 2001 have been linked to climate change.

Africa accounted for 94% of the world's malaria cases in 2019 and it underscores the urgent need for health-centric climate policies, especially as Africa's population is set to nearly double by 2050.

## **Affecting lives**

Talk to anyone in the streets of major capitals of Africa and they are

acutely aware of how climate change is impacting their day-to-day lives.

Your taxi driver in Nairobi is likely to mention the current threat of El Niño and elsewhere you'll hear plenty of examples of how people's daily lives have been directly impacted by climate change.

Malawi has recently experienced its worst cholera outbreak in two decades, caused by flooding in the southern region before spreading to the rest of the county.

More than 40,000 people were diagnosed with cholera, and at least 1,300 deaths recorded.

The people most affected were those living in poor rural communities, relying mainly on subsistence agriculture and lacking access to [health facilities](#) to protect themselves.

While the "right to health" is enshrined in the Paris Agreement as a fundamental requirement for climate action, and despite the glaring health challenges, only five percent of climate funds go to adaptation and only one percent of the adaptation funds are dedicated to health.

## **Collective approach**

The recently concluded Africa Climate Summit in Nairobi called for a collective approach to tackle climate change, with commitments equating to nearly US\$26 billion.

However, none of this was allocated to support climate and health mitigation and adaptation interventions.

That summit was a significant milestone in the quest to prioritize health at the forthcoming 2023 UN climate change conference COP28.

Although health was not addressed in the Nairobi Declaration, adopted at the Nairobi summit, various stakeholders gathered under the auspices of Amref Health Africa to ensure Africa takes the lead as the only continent with a unified position to climate and health ahead of COP28.

This a huge win and no small feat.

The position calls for a collaborative, global approach to tackling climate change and creating solutions.

It is not a North or South issue, but a collective challenge that requires a unified response.

Convening alongside the Africa Climate Summit started a critical conversation about the importance of health in [climate action](#) and now it is up to global leaders to take note and implement the continent's ambitions.

The inaugural summit was the first step in taking control of the continent's destiny, with a focus on solutions and calls to action by Africans, for Africans.

It's no longer about what the world can do to help Africa, but what Africa can do for the world.

## **Call to action**

Political momentum is building, and this year, for the very first time, world leaders gathering at COP28 will engage in an official program focused on climate and health.

We welcome the initiative of the COP28 Presidency in organizing Health Day at COP28 for the first time (3 December) and call for

dedicated health days in subsequent COPs.

This has the potential to be a watershed moment for global health and a positive indication of the growing political recognition of the [climate crisis](#) as a health crisis.

The COP28 Presidency, in collaboration with the WHO and other partners, has developed the COP28 Declaration on Climate and Health prior to the conference.

This is a voluntary call to action that lies outside the formal United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) negotiations. It captures countries' shared views and aspirations towards safeguarding and investing in the health of populations worldwide.

While a number of countries have endorsed it, we urge countries, especially African nations, to support the Declaration, which is in concordance with Africa's unified stance on climate and health.

These are great steps and the time has come for [global leaders](#) to recognize the impact of climate change on health and take action to make a real difference in people's health.

The climate negotiations must prioritize adaptation and mitigation efforts, as well as prevention of loss and damage, while maximizing health benefits and minimizing inadvertent risks to human health.

It is crucial that we support the African Group of Negotiators to effectively carry out their duties.

Africa is a key voice in global climate negotiations, which needs to be equipped with evidence to drive global and national policy reforms. It is also imperative to put countries most affected by climate change at the

center of decision-making processes and prioritize solutions that build the necessary resilience to climate change.

This calls for prioritization of health in global climate adaptation and mitigation financing. We cannot afford to wait any longer.

It is essential that everyone takes an active role in combating climate change and takes responsibility for their individual actions.

We demand that policymakers review and implement existing policies to aggressively implement a worldwide equitable transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources in alignment with the Paris Agreement, recognizing the inherent public health benefits.

Furthermore, we must urgently strengthen and adapt [health systems](#), including robust early warning systems to address climate-related health risks, including timely alerts for extreme heat, vector-borne diseases, and other health threats linked to climatic changes, and ensure no community is left behind, no matter how remote.

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