

CALL FOR RESEARCH PAPERS

African Youth Research Challenge: The Impact of Climate Change in Africa

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Open to: African youth aged 18-35, to address specific knowledge gaps in climate change literature in Africa.

Background

Climate change is a global issue that affects everyone, but its impact is felt more severely in developing countries like those in Africa, who are particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change due to their heavy reliance on agriculture, limited infrastructure, and high levels of poverty. While the African continent accounts for only two to three per cent of global greenhouse gas emissions, it suffers disproportionately from it. Africa is warming faster ¹, its sea levels are rising faster than the global mean rate ², and high-water stress is estimated to affect about 250 million people on the continent and displace up to 700 million individuals by 2030 ³.

African countries have been proactive in addressing the challenges of climate change. Over 40 African countries have updated their national climate plans with more ambitious goals and increased commitments to mitigate and adapt to climate change ³, and research has been a critical tool in identifying the risks and potential solutions. As a result, there has been a significant increase in research on climate change in Africa in recent years ⁴. The research has focused on various aspects of climate change, including the impacts on the environment, agriculture, water resources, and health.

Youth-led research builds youth capacities and engages them in producing evidence – with and for other youth – that not only contributes to enriching research agendas but can also have real-life application. Also, through the skills and spaces it provides, it engages population groups that are rarely considered as contributors in relevant scientific research, it increases the visibility of youth perspectives and views, renders them accessible beyond strictly youth communities, and eventually enhances their uptake by decision-makers and development actors.

As such, in line with the Agenda 2030 call to “Leave No-One Behind”, youth-led research opens the space for youth to engage in action, to voice their perspectives on ongoing and emerging challenges and to inform policymaking.

This has been a central objective in UNESCO's work as it strives to promote youth-led research, to enable the production of diversified, cutting-edge and gender-responsive knowledge and evidence on critical areas affecting youth globally and locally.

¹ World Economic Forum, *This is the state of the climate in Africa – and why it urgently matters to us all*, 2021, <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2021/10/state-of-the-climate-in-africa/>

² World Meteorological Organization, *State of the Climate in Africa*, 2021, https://library.wmo.int/index.php?lvl=notice_display&id=21973#.ZCWA6nZBy70

³ World Meteorological Organization, *Climate change in Africa can destabilize 'countries and entire regions'*, 2022, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/09/1126221>

⁴ University World News Africa Edition, "Countries spend less than 1% of GDP on research", 2021, <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20210616151534847>

Inspired by UNESCO's "Youth As Researchers" youth-led research initiative, UNESCO Chairs, the Youth UNESCO Climate Action Network (YoU-CAN) and the African Youth Climate Hub (AYCH), a program of the Hassan II International Center for Environmental Training; the academic branch of the Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection, the African Youth Research Challenge (AYRC) is a youth development program, designed to ensure, support and advance African youth voices, by enabling youth to design and conduct scientific and social research on climate change impact and solutions for the African continent.

The African Youth Research Challenge will provide training and mentoring that supports youth to design and conduct scientific and social research on climate change impact and solutions for the African continent. This research aims at informing policy making as well as feeding academic knowledge. It will consist of a call for papers competition for African youth to address specific knowledge gaps in climate change literature in Africa. The papers, complying with the set criteria, will be selected, and eventually reformulated by their young authors into policy briefs to inform policy makers.

The initiative is supported by an Experts Committee, which will provide thematic guidance, mentoring and capacity-building tools, as well as technical support. It is also supported by a Youth Steering Committee that will ensure that the process remains youth led.

Call for Papers

Through this call, UNESCO and the Mohammed VI Foundation seek to collect brief research papers that contribute to both academic knowledge and evidence-based policymaking on climate change in Africa. Those selected will then produce a Policy Paper on the subject, in 2026.

Contributors:

Applicants must be:

- African youth aged 18-35.
- African origin.
- Either live in Africa or be enrolled in an academy or university based in Africa.
- Academic qualifications: Bachelor's Degree (minimum) or equivalent and above.
- Have any action or prior research experience on climate, or at least the research paper intended to be submitted is related to climate change.

Selected applicants will not receive any form of financial remuneration/compensation for the research paper.

Scope of papers (*for more information, please read Annex I*):

Thematic scope: Each paper is expected to contribute to the central research question of the project and to one of the analytical categories (see Annex 1) through which to explore it. In doing so, papers can focus on any thematic area that the author is interested in analyzing.

Main Categories	Example themes and areas that could be linked to the category
Resilience, Adaptation and Mitigation (Inclusive Climate Responses, Sustainability)	• One Health approach (integration between the environment, the human and the animal) • Climate impact and vulnerability • Indigenous practices • Public Health, Epidemiology, Climate & Health. • Conservation and Biodiversity, Earth & Environmental Sciences • Physics, Chemistry, Mathematics, Computer Sciences • Agronomy, Forestry, Fisheries, Food Science, Veterinary • Energy, decarbonisation • Disaster Risk Reduction • Other
Regeneration of Ecosystems	• Water Security, Water Management, Water Quality, Hydrology, Hydrogeology, Treatment, Desalination • Oceanography, Marine Biology, Fisheries, Maritime Activities, Coastal Resilience, Sea-Level Rise, Policy • Recycling • Other
Public Policy (Climate-Smart Governance, Economic Strategies)	• Climate impact • History, Philosophy, Ethics • Cultural Commons, Languages, Arts and Aesthetics (imagining alternatives) • Media, Communication and Journalism (raising awareness) • Circular economy, Income generating activities, Economics • Political Science, Sociology • Geography • Development • Law • Education • Management • Natural and environmental policies • Critical assessment of current government policies and practices contributing to climate change or prolonging dependence on fossil fuel • Local and indigenous practices and traditions • Other
Cross-cutting	• Engineering: Energy, Civil/Mechanical/Chemical Engineering, Materials • Just transition to post carbon-fuel world • Climate impact • Impact and role of digital technologies and AI • Gender and Social inclusion (rural, indigenous, young women) • Blue economy • Green economy • Indigenous practices • Other

Spatial scope: The call for papers is focused on the African continent.

Temporal scope: The research will investigate data and issues that have been relevant in the past 7 years.

Audience: Policy makers, development organizations, academic institutions, youth networks and organizations engaging in climate action and research in Africa.

Ethics: Contributors to the call for papers need to ensure that:

- When using primary data from third parties they have and provide the required ethics approval from an academic institution. Particular attention must be paid to sensitive data that may generate risk or harm for either the authors themselves or third parties.
- No plagiarized or self-plagiarized material should be included. Provide proper credit or citation to the original work of the third parties.
- They clearly report to UNESCO and the Mohammed VI Foundation any use of Artificial Intelligence means in drafting or consolidating the paper. This includes details about when authors used such means and for what purpose (e.g. to edit text they authored; to research literature or available data; etc.)

Length: Each paper cannot exceed 10 pages (including information on methods, findings and discussion/analysis), single spacing, in Times New Roman 11.

Style: Papers should provide a rigorous presentation of research, per standard academic practice. Authors are also encouraged to consider the Style Manual for UNESCO publications.

Papers are encouraged to follow the broadly applied structure for research papers, an example of which is proposed below:

- Abstract
- Introduction (background, rationale of research and presentation of research question)
- Materials and Methods
- Results
- Discussion
- Conclusions
- Acknowledgements, and References

Language: Papers may be submitted in either English, French, or Arabic in accordance with the language preferences of the authors.

Process and timelines

All applications must be submitted by **May 15, 2026**, at 23:59 CET. UNESCO and the Mohammed VI Foundation will select 10 papers respecting geographical and thematic diversity. Selected applicants will be notified and provided with the detailed framing document of the project (with information on concepts and on the five lenses of the project), which they can use as a reference point in their work.

All selected authors would need to submit their paper explaining also any peer-review or quality assurance processes they may have completed by then. UNESCO and the Mohammed VI Foundation will review the submitted papers and may revert to the authors for additional adjustments.

Indicative Timeline :

MILESTONES	TIMELINE
Launch of the challenge (Call for proposals)	February 2026
Submission of the Research Proposals	February – May 2026
Evaluation of the Research Proposals	May – June 2026
Announcement of the Research laureates after evaluation of the research proposals by the consortium.	June 2026
Extensive capacity building at the Hassan II Centre for Environmental Training (Morocco)	July – September 2026
Research and strategic analysis for the development of policy papers	July – September 2026
Production of policy-papers	September – December 2026
High-level policy-dialogue for young African researchers to share their recommendations.	Late 2026
Translation into different languages and publication by the AYCH observatory component to strengthen African youth access to climate knowledge and data. The resources will also be made available on the YoU-CAN's platform.	Late 2026 - 2027
Evaluation	Late 2026 - 2027

The African Youth Climate Hub (AYCH) is a youth-driven initiative, amplifying African youth voices on climate action and facilitating exchange and support in areas of skills, knowledge, entrepreneurship, and job opportunities. Run by youth for youth in Africa, AYCH aspires to deliver immediate, tangible outcomes and expand to partner with other regions.

AYCH is a formal partnership between the Mohammed VI Foundation for Environmental Protection, the Children and Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) [YOUNGO], OCP Group, and University Mohammed VI Polytechnic and Les Eaux Minérales d'Oulmès. It operates on two platforms: the physical Hassan II International Center for Environmental Training and a youth-focused online platform.

It features six key elements to boost youth and intergenerational engagement. These include a network for fostering connections, an incubator supporting youth-led projects, a forum to celebrate and highlight youth contributions, a knowledge center for shared learning, an observatory to spotlight youth leadership continent-wide, and a dashboard for collecting youth-related data.

The Youth UNESCO Climate Action Network (YoU-CAN) is a UNESCO flagship that connects existing youth climate networks worldwide to strengthen cooperation and foster multidisciplinary youth-led climate action and research. It aims to advance climate action by leveraging four key thematic areas: Education for Climate Action, Sciences for Climate Action, Culture for Climate Action and Communication and Information for Climate Action, through (i) proposing creative and innovative actions, (ii) responding to local challenges and needs; (iii) supporting youth in the coproduction and dissemination of knowledge, (iv) strengthening youth capacities, and (v) ensuring youth voices are heard by participating in high-level climate events and dialogues.

Annex II – Privacy notice

Your privacy is important to us. We take every precaution to protect the information you provide in accordance with the UNESCO Principles on Personal Data Protection and Privacy (<https://www.unesco.org/en/privacy-policy>).

In connection to the administration of the Call for Papers under UNESCO and Mohammed VI Foundation's global project "African Youth Research Challenge: The Impact of Climate Change in Africa", UNESCO and the Mohammed VI Foundation collect and process information including personal data such as your name, email address, nationality, age, gender, education level.

The information you provide will be processed only for the purpose of (i) selecting the papers that will be produced and included in UNESCO and Mohammed VI Foundation's "African Youth Research Challenge: The Impact of Climate Change in Africa" global study ; (ii) communicating with you to inform you of the outcome of the selection process and, if selected, to share information and exchange on reviewing or finalizing your paper; (iii) overall correspondence concerning your cooperation with UNESCO and the Mohammed VI Foundation (if selected).

Access to this information will be strictly limited to UNESCO, the Mohammed VI Foundation, the Experts Committee and the Youth Research Committee who will sign with UNESCO and the Mohammed VI Foundation confidentiality agreements.

The information you provide will be processed exclusively for the purposes described in this notice. Any other use will always be subject to further consent. Following the call for papers, if you are selected to produce a paper you have the option to author it anonymously or with a pseudonym, especially if the information in the paper may put you at risk or generate harm for you.

We will not process your personal data for direct marketing or other commercial purposes.

Your data will be stored for a 1-year period after the challenge closes, for internal audit, reference and statistical purposes. Should you need to contact us for additional information or in order to access, correct or delete your data, please send an email to the following addresses: youth@unesco.org & d.remy@unesco.org. For any other questions regarding the processing of your personal data, contact privacy@unesco.org + Centreinternationalhassan2@fm6e.org.