



Youth perspectives on climate adaptation in Kibera, Nairobi

Policy Brief: Kibera

Title: Youth, Climate Resilience, and Policy Gaps in Nairobi's Kibera Informal Settlement

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Campaign: Voices Unheard: From the Pyrenees to Kibera

Summary

Nairobi's Kibera informal settlement, home to an estimated 250,000-700,000 residents.¹ It is a stark example of urban climate vulnerability. Intensifying floods and extreme heat disproportionately affect its youth, who constitute over 60% of the population.² Despite Kenya's progressive national climate policies, a significant implementation gap persists at the local level. Youth, who are both the most affected and a source of innovative solutions, are systematically excluded from decision-making processes and access to climate finance.

This brief, informed by community-level research and a parallel analysis of the French Pyrenees, argues that effective climate resilience cannot be achieved without the meaningful inclusion of youth. We detail the specific climate threats facing Kibera's youth, analyze the existing policy frameworks and their shortcomings, and provide concrete recommendations for creating inclusive, youth-led climate adaptation strategies. The lessons from Kibera are not isolated; they reflect a global governance failure to integrate frontline communities into climate resilience planning.

1. About the Campaign: Voices Unheard from Pyrenees to Kibera

This policy brief is a product of the campaign "**Voices Unheard: From the Pyrenees to Kibera**," supported by the **AU-EU Action Lab**.³ This programme, funded by the European Union and implemented by Oxfam, the European Youth Forum, and Restless Development Uganda, brings together youth from Africa and Europe to collaborate on joint initiatives.

The campaign connects the lived experiences of youth in Kibera, Kenya, and the Pyrenees, France, two communities severely impacted by floods and droughts. It is implemented by two youth-led organisations: **Association Petite Graine (France)** and **Maida CBO (Kenya)**. Our project focuses on amplifying youth voices, facilitating transnational learning, and advocating for inclusive policy-making that

¹ Amnesty International. (2023). Kenya: The Unseen Majority: Nairobi's Slum Dwellers. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr32/005/2009/en/>

² UN-Habitat. (2022). World Cities Report 2022: Envisaging the Future of Cities. United Nations Human Settlements Programme. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/2022/06/wcr_2022.pdf

³ European Commission. (2022). Youth Action Plan in EU external action for 2022-2027. JOIN (2022) 53 final. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/nl/qanda_22_5882

recognizes young people as essential partners in building climate resilience, rather than merely as victims.

2. Local Realities: A Case Study of Kibera, Nairobi

2.1 Presentation of Kibera

Kibera is one of Africa's largest informal settlements, characterized by high population density, inadequate infrastructure, and pervasive poverty. Residents face challenges related to land tenure insecurity, limited access to clean water and sanitation, and high unemployment rates. The physical landscape, a network of narrow paths and makeshift dwellings built along the banks of the Ngong River, makes it acutely vulnerable to climate shocks.

2.2. The Climate Crisis in Kibera

Kibera is on the frontline of urban climate impacts:

- **Flooding:** Seasonal rains now cause devastating flash floods. The clogged Ngong River bursts its banks, destroying homes, contaminating water sources with raw sewage and industrial waste, and displacing thousands. Waterborne diseases, such as cholera and typhoid, spread rapidly in the aftermath.⁴
- **Drought & Water Scarcity:** Periods of drought lead to severe water shortages. Illegal water vendors exploit this scarcity, charging exorbitant prices for often-contaminated water, placing an immense burden on low-income households.⁵
- **Extreme Heat:** The dense concentration of corrugated iron roofs creates urban heat islands, elevating temperatures and health risks for residents.⁶

2.3. Impact on Youth

Young people in Kibera bear the brunt of these crises. Floods disrupt education by damaging schools and limiting safe access. Economic opportunities vanish as small-scale businesses are wiped out. The stress of constant displacement and health insecurity creates a significant mental health toll.⁷ Despite this, youth are highly resourceful, organizing community clean-ups, sharing early warnings, and

⁴ https://ris.utwente.nl/ws/portalfiles/portal/483486672/FloodExposure_Report_Nairobi_Space4All_1_.pdf

⁵ UNDP. (2021). Water Scarcity in Kenya: A Challenge to Human Security and Sustainable Development. <https://www.scrip.org/journal/paperinformation?paperid=106638>

⁶ Climate Action Tracker. (2023). Kenya Country Profile. <https://climateactiontracker.org/countries/kenya/policies-action/>

⁷ UNICEF. (2023). The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index.

developing local solutions efforts that often go unrecognized and unsupported by formal systems.

3. Policy Frameworks: Analysis of Gaps in the Kenyan Context

Kenya has developed a robust suite of climate policies, but their translation to protection for Kibera's youth is weak.

3.1. What is in Place

- **National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP 2023–2027):** Focuses on water security and climate-smart agriculture. Establishes the National Climate Change Fund (NCCF).⁸
- **The Water Act (2016):** Decentralizes water management to local Water Resource Users Associations (WRUAs).⁹
- **Nairobi City County Climate Change Act (2021):** Kenya's first sub-national climate law, mandating climate-resilient urban planning and budgeting.¹⁰

3.2. Identified Gaps

Implementation Deficit

The chasm between national policy and local action in Kibera represents a critical failure in climate governance. While Kenya's National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) eloquently outlines strategies for water security and community-based adaptation, these plans consistently fail to materialize in the informal settlement. Nairobi County's climate budgeting and project implementation exhibit a clear bias toward high-visibility, infrastructural projects in the central business district and affluent suburbs, such as beautification of Uhuru Park and Gardens or large-scale drainage works in industrial areas. This leaves community-led, grassroots adaptation in informal settlements chronically underfunded and deprioritized. For instance, a youth group's proposal for a localized rainwater harvesting system or a project to line drainage ditches with sandbags is often deemed too small-scale or logistically complex by county officials, despite its immediate and tangible impact. This deficit is not merely bureaucratic; it is a form of systemic neglect that perpetuates vulnerability, ensuring that top-down policies remain theoretical documents that do not translate into flood-resilient homes or secure water access for Kibera's residents.

Financial Inaccessibility

⁸ Government of Kenya. (2023). National Climate Change Action Plan (NCCAP) 2023–2027. Ministry of Environment, Climate Change and Forestry.

⁹ Government of Kenya. (2016). Water Act No.

43. <http://www.kenyalaw.org:8181/exist/rest/db/kenyalex/Kenya/Legislation/English/Acts%20and%20Regulations/W/Water%20Act%20-%20No.%2043%20of%202016/docs/WaterAct43of2016.pdf>

¹⁰ Nairobi City County. (2021). Nairobi City County Climate Change Act. <https://nairobiassembly.go.ke/acts/>

The architecture of global and national climate finance is fundamentally ill-suited for grassroots actors in informal settlements, creating an insurmountable barrier to resilience. While billions are pledged internationally through mechanisms like the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and nationally through the National Climate Change Fund (NCCF), an estimated 88% of this funding fails to reach the local level.¹¹ For youth-led Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) in Kibera, accessing these resources is a near-impossible task. The application processes demand extensive technical proposals, audited financial histories, and formal registration documents that many groups cannot provide. Furthermore, the requirement for a formal bank account and the ability to manage large grants with complex reporting structures exclude the very organizations that possess the community trust and contextual knowledge to implement effective solutions. This creates a perverse reality where those most affected by climate change and most capable of crafting immediate, culturally appropriate adaptations are systematically locked out of the funding required to act, forcing them to rely on inadequate and unpredictable donor philanthropy.

Lack of Youth Inclusion & Weak Enforcement

The systemic exclusion of youth from governance structures, coupled with blatant weak enforcement of environmental laws, creates a dual crisis of representation and accountability. Bodies like the Water Resource Users Associations (WRUAs) and Nairobi's climate change committees are often co-opted by political and economic elites who prioritize commercial and industrial interests over community welfare. Youth who lack the political connections and financial capital to influence these spaces are sidelined, their voices and innovative ideas dismissed as inexperienced. This exclusion is compounded by the flagrant weak enforcement of regulations like the Environmental Management and Coordination Act (EMCA). Industries adjacent to Kibera illegally discharge toxic waste into the Ngong River with impunity, as under-resourced and sometimes corrupt regulators turn a blind eye.¹² This direct pollution clogs the riverbed, drastically increasing the severity and toxicity of seasonal floods. Thus, the community faces a dual injustice: they are denied a seat at the table where decisions are made, and then they are forced to suffer the consequences of the illegal actions that the authorities willfully fail to prevent

4. Youth Left Out: Structural Exclusion in Kenya

The exclusion of youth from climate governance in Kenya is structural:

- **Tokenism:** Youth are often invited to events for photo opportunities rather than engaged in meaningful dialogue or decision-making.
- **Inaccessible Spaces:** Government planning meetings are held in formal settings at inconvenient times, with jargon-heavy language, creating barriers to participation.

¹¹ ODI. (2023). Localising Climate Finance: Mapping the Gaps in Kenya.

¹² NEMA. (2023). State of Environment Report. National Environment Management Authority.

- **Lack of Political Will:** There is no mandated quota or serious mechanism to ensure youth representation in key environmental and climate bodies at the county or national levels.

5. Qualitative Interviews and Recommendations for Inclusive Climate Resilience

The lived experiences of Kibera's youth, gathered from interviews with 25+ residents aged 21-28, paint a harrowing picture of systemic failure and underscore the urgent need for a new, inclusive approach to climate governance. Issa (24) described the 2024 floods as leaving "so many people homeless and destroyed a lot of property," a sentiment echoed by Frank (26) who stated simply, "Homes have been destroyed completely leaving many of us homeless." The health impacts are severe, with Samuel (25) noting the "mixing of sewer water with normal drinking water," leading to disease outbreaks. The collective trauma is compounded by a profound sense of abandonment by public authorities. Yasmin (22) lamented the lack of clear information and emergency teams, feeling "we were on our own," while Rahma (23) criticized the "poor emergency response to disaster cases like floods." This sentiment of exclusion extends to planning processes; the overwhelming majority of respondents, including Abdulrahman (27) and Hawo (21), stated they do not feel heard. Musa (28) captured the consensus, stating, "Young people need to be involved in the policy sector more, because young people are the ones who experience the damages firsthand."

From these testimonies, a clear set of youth-led priorities emerges, moving beyond theoretical frameworks to actionable, community-defined solutions. The respondents consistently highlighted the immediate need for functional drainage and waste management, with Abass (24) calling for "better drainage systems" and Purity (26) emphasizing "regularly cleaned" drains to prevent blockages. There is a strong demand for dignified relocation over forced evictions, as noted by Faridah (25), who stressed the need for "fair relocation or support for families displaced." Furthermore, youth like Marveline (22) proposed practical measures like using "SMS or social media" for early warnings and creating "community forums held inside Kibera" to ensure their direct participation. Their insights reveal that resilience is not just about infrastructure, but about agency, communication, and respect.

6. Recommendations for Inclusive Climate Resilience in Kibera

Based on extensive community consultations and the direct testimonies of Kibera's youth, the following recommendations provide a concrete roadmap for bridging the policy-implementation gap and leveraging the untapped potential of young people as agents of climate resilience.

6.1. Establish Kibera Youth Climate Resilience Hubs and Corps

A fundamental step is the creation of physically dedicated, community-owned Youth Climate Resilience Hubs. These hubs would function as central nodes for training, innovation, and resource distribution, moving beyond ad-hoc projects to long-term

capacity building. Directly informed by youth like Morgan (23) and Eli (26), these hubs would sponsor a Community-Coordinated Drainage and Waste Management Corps. This corps would be funded and equipped to lead the regular desilting of drainage channels and solid waste collection, transforming a critical gap in public service into a source of green employment and localized resilience. The hubs would also host workshops on vertical gardens and serve as a depot for tools, directly addressing the food insecurity and environmental health crises highlighted by respondents.

6.2. Mandate Youth Representation in Governance

To dismantle the systemic exclusion that young people like Abdirahman (22) and Marian (25) describe, a mandatory quota of 30% youth membership in all climate-related committees is essential. This should be enacted by the Nairobi City County Assembly and applied to bodies like the WRUAs and the County Climate Change Coordination Committee. Furthermore, we recommend the creation of Ward-Level Climate Resilience Committees to institutionalize youth participation, ensuring young people have direct input in budgeting, infrastructure projects, and disaster preparedness at the most local level, transforming their role from consultants to co-decision makers.

6.3. Create a County-Level Youth Climate Fund

Addressing the critical gap of financial inaccessibility requires a dedicated funding mechanism designed for grassroots innovators. A County-Level Youth Climate Fund would decentralize resources through a streamlined system of micro-grants. Administered by a board including county officials and community leaders, it would feature simplified application processes and offer mentorship. This fund would directly finance the hyper-local solutions youth are eager to implement, from rainwater harvesting systems to waste-to-value enterprises, building financial literacy and a track record for youth groups.

6.4. Integrate Youth into Early Warning and Relocation Systems

As emphasized by Mustafa (27), Kibera's youth are an underutilized asset in disaster preparedness. We recommend the formal integration of a Youth-Driven Early Warning and Response System into the county's framework. This involves recruiting and training youth volunteers to disseminate official alerts via mobile technology and trusted, hyper-local channels, and to assist in evacuations. Simultaneously, the county must establish a Transparent and Accessible Relocation Protocol, developed in partnership with youth and community representatives like Saida (24). This protocol would halt forced evictions and instead provide a clear, humane plan with adequate notice and viable alternative housing for families in flood-prone zones.

6.5. Foster Transnational Peer Learning

Climate resilience is a global challenge that benefits from shared learning. Utilizing platforms like the EU's Erasmus+ programme to facilitate exchanges between youth in Kibera and the Pyrenees creates a powerful pipeline for innovation and solidarity.

This exchange would allow for sharing technical strategies and, more importantly, build a transnational advocacy network. By uniting their voices, youth can collectively lobby institutions like the EU and AU, demonstrating that the gaps in local implementation and youth exclusion are universal problems requiring coordinated solutions.

7. Focus on the situation in the French Pyrenees

In the French Pyrenees, communities face two sides of the same climate crisis: violent floods and prolonged droughts.

In the mountain town of Luchon, a devastating flood in 2013 destroyed homes, infrastructure, and livelihoods. More than a decade later, there is still no functioning flood warning system for the valley. People rely on late or incomplete alerts, and there are no clear public instructions on what to do in case of another disaster.

Further east, in the small rural village of Caramany, the opposite problem dominates: water scarcity. Since 2022, the region has faced one of the worst droughts in France, forcing the government to restrict water use for most activities. Vineyards, small farms, and households struggle to adapt. Local initiatives to save water exist, but public support and long-term planning remain limited.

Impact on Youth

Young people are among the most affected. Many depend on seasonal work in tourism or agriculture, sectors directly hit by floods and droughts. When disasters strike, they lose income, stability, and a sense of security about their future in the region.

Youth from Luchon and Caramany also report feeling excluded from local decision-making. They rarely receive clear information, are not invited to discussions about adaptation measures, and lack opportunities to voice their ideas for protecting their communities. This exclusion discourages civic engagement and wastes valuable local knowledge.

Policy Gaps

France has strong national and European laws on climate adaptation, but implementation at the local level is slow and fragmented.

In Luchon, there are still no reliable early-warning systems, and limited communication between authorities and residents. Responsibilities for prevention and emergency response remain unclear, with overlapping administrative roles and little public transparency. Existing plans for flood prevention or crisis management are not publicly available to residents, leaving people unsure who is in charge or what actions would be taken in the event of another flood.

In Caramany, national and regional policies on water management exist, but they are rarely implemented at the local level. The State appears largely absent, while the

small municipality lacks the technical and financial capacity to address the crisis. As a result, drought management relies mainly on restrictive decrees rather than on long-term measures such as repairing irrigation canals, cultivating more drought-resistant crops, making agriculture more resilient, collecting rainwater, or reusing treated wastewater.

What Should Be Done

Meaningfully engage with local populations, especially youth, to actively participate in designing and monitoring climate adaptation measures.

For floods, strengthen the early-warning system by improving prediction and alarm raising, and implement efficient preventive measures (e.g., lower mountain lake levels, restore riverbanks).

For droughts, support community-led water solutions through rainwater collection, natural filtration, canal restoration, and climate-resilient farming.

8. Conclusion

Kibera's youth are living through a climate emergency exacerbated by policy neglect and exclusionary governance. The existing national and county policies provide an adequate framework on paper, but without deliberate, funded mechanisms to include youth as protagonists, resilience will remain an elusive goal. The partnership between Maida CBO and Association Petite Graine demonstrates that the challenges of climate governance, top-down decision-making, inadequate funding localization, and the marginalization of youth are universal, from the European mountains to African informal settlements. The solution is also universal: empower those on the frontlines. Investing in Kibera's youth is not an act of charity; it is a strategic imperative for achieving climate resilience and sustainable urban development.

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