

Principles for getting Natural Climate Solutions right in Africa



Africa is rapidly becoming a focal point for nature-based climate solutions, attracting growing interests from carbon markets and global finance. However, many initiatives overlook the region's diverse social-ecological contexts and development priorities. With 5 years to go to the culmination of the SDGs/Agenda 2030, 2025 is a critical moment to shape investment decisions.

This brief summarises a proposed set of guiding principles to steer implementation and financing of natural climate solutions on the African continent and in its ocean.

These principles aim to align financing and project development with local needs and continental goals, recognising that implementation will vary by context. They are intended to inform both the negotiation process and the actions needed to realise intergovernmental agreements on the ground.



A decision-making framework that is inclusive, data-driven, and grounded in African realities

Climate solutions, if not paired with a consideration of justice that includes the needs of nature and people, can have more negative impacts than positive. Interventions will require tradeoffs, and a careful balancing to weigh up the winners and the losers. This framework advocates to move beyond the 'business as usual' approach and to consider the complexity across livelihoods, biodiversity and landscapes in the decisions being made.

Recognising and explicitly addressing these trade-offs is crucial for maximising co-benefits and supporting transparent, informed decision-making across three core areas:

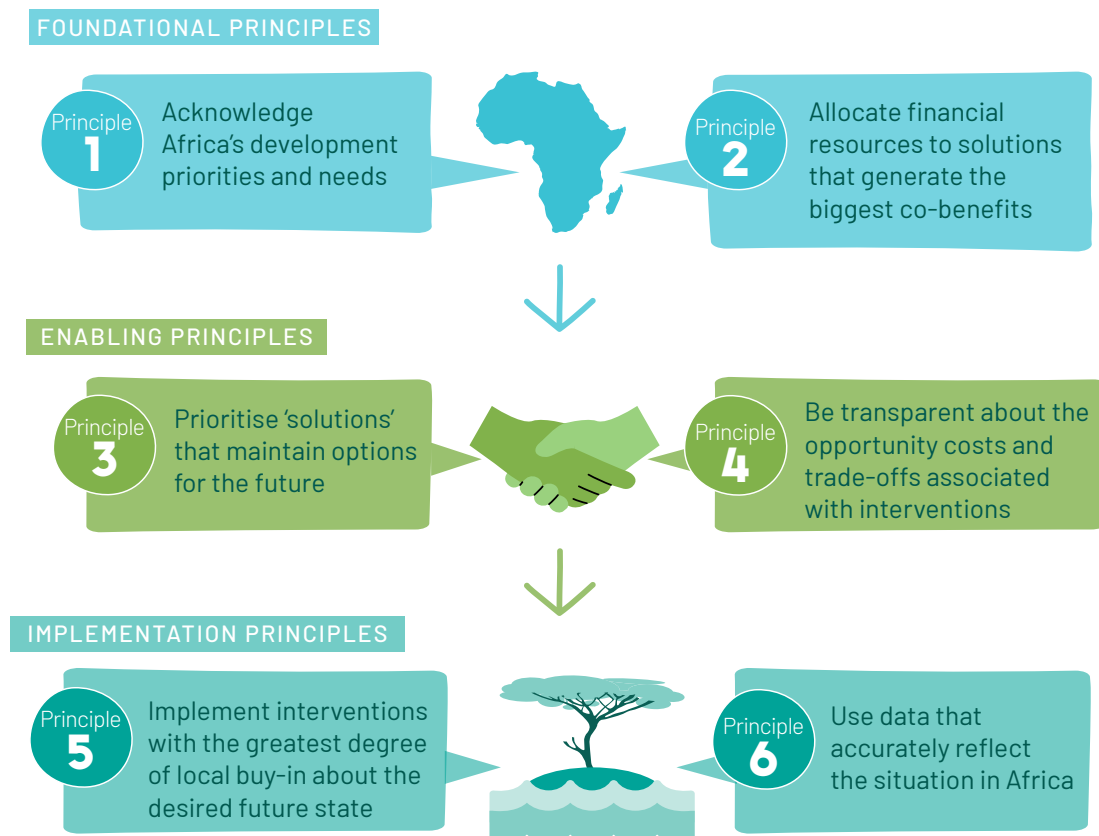
1 climate mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction;

2 biodiversity conservation; and

3 human wellbeing, livelihoods, food security and nature's contributions to people.

This requires gathering the necessary data to provide evidence on these, while developing institutional frameworks so that decisions can be made with transparency and accountability.

The **set of six principles** (illustrated below) provides a framework for gathering and applying evidence to support more equitable and sustainable decision-making for climate solutions that align to the needs and aspirations of Africans.



Acknowledge Africa's development priorities and needs

Africa's critical development needs, outlined in Agenda 2063, must be prioritised alongside climate and biodiversity goals. Africa lags in key development indicators and infrastructure, with strong public demand for adaptation and resilience-building across sectors. Ignoring this reality leads to unsustainable development pathways.

Accounting for Africa's development priorities can transform existing challenges into opportunities for synergistic outcomes.

FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES

Principle 1

Principle 2

Allocate financial resources to solutions that generate the biggest co-benefits

In practice, there tends to be a singular focus on financial returns rather than conservation and livelihood gains. Designing carbon credit interventions to target multiple co-benefits delivers greater value while achieving multiple targets. **Priority should be on broader impact generating investments that recognise and address trade-offs while contributing to social and environmental solutions.** These trade-offs must be based on prior interaction with and receive explicit endorsement from recipient communities to build their adaptive capacity and resilience.

Prioritise 'solutions' that maintain options for the future

Long-term thinking requires ecosystem-appropriate solutions respecting natural processes, indigenous knowledge, and existing livelihoods, rather than transformative interventions that irreversibly alter land/sea-scapes.

Future uncertainties make inflexible approaches risky. Interventions allowing continued sustainable land/sea use and income generation succeed more readily in Africa than those permanently transforming land and water systems. **Long-term perspectives in nature-based solutions are imperative.**

ENABLING PRINCIPLES

Principle 3

Principle 4

Be transparent about the opportunity costs and trade-offs associated with interventions

It is critical to recognise costs and trade-offs and find innovative ways to compensate the losers (e.g. in protected areas if no other options are available) and above all, to **ensure inclusivity in decision-making.**

Systems thinking emphasizes and understanding of the interrelationships between components as a whole and nexus approaches leverage integrated thinking across interconnected domains (e.g., water-energy-food) within a system. These two approaches help to create solutions that take into account complexity and the broader picture. This necessitates **recognising fundamental ecosystem differences:** interventions successful in closed canopy forests often fail catastrophically in open ecosystems.

Implement interventions with the greatest degree of local buy-in

The lack of local buy-in is often a recipe for failure of projects across the continent. Neglecting local realities, needs and aspirations severely undermine interventions. Co-designing solutions based on communities' visions significantly improves implementation success.

IMPLEMENTATION PRINCIPLES

Principle 5

Principle 6

Use data that accurately reflect the situation in Africa

Global datasets provide useful planetary overviews but often misrepresent local conditions. Open ecosystems are frequently misclassified as degraded forests in global products, leading to inappropriate carbon sequestration recommendations. **Africa-specific data on soil carbon, above-ground biomass, biodiversity intactness and marine ecosystem status should be prioritized where available,** with investment directed toward filling existing data gaps.



The framework can be used to guide finance and support inclusive decision-making

The 6 principles need to guide decisions not only on how money is invested in carbon projects on the continent, but also what projects are prioritised.

Funding for climate projects must incorporate the 'true' financial costs of implementing projects – including the opportunity costs borne by communities and governments.

Well-designed interventions will be costly if they account fully for the opportunity costs and trade-offs. However, strategic, locally-informed investment can deliver significant benefits for African people as well as global sustainability. This approach is critical for long-term project sustainability and equitable benefit distribution, recognising the existing richness of the African continent and its coastal waters.

The evidence base for decision-making needs to recognise the interconnection across carbon, biodiversity, and livelihood dimensions – critically, that terrestrial and marine carbon sequestration form one integrated carbon cycle, with biodiversity health in each realm influencing the other through complex feedback loops.

The principles leverage a systems approach that advocates for this enhanced alignment between marine and terrestrial realms, and as such, can advance the goals of all three Rio Conventions simultaneously (Convention on Biological Diversity, UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification).

African people's well-being and aspirations must be central, acknowledging the deep cultural connections between communities and their environments, and the role of biodiversity in sustaining livelihoods and identities.

This brief is an output of the Future Ecosystems for Africa Project and summarises a full publication currently in submission, "Principles for getting Natural Climate Solutions right in Africa"

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