



# Report

## Africa's Green Equation: Impact, Sustainability & Youth in Green Entrepreneurship

July 2025



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### 1. Executive Summary

On June 11, 2025, YouthConnekt Africa (YCA) Hub convened the second 'X Space titled "Africa's Green Equation: Impact, Sustainability & Youth in Green Entrepreneurship" to examine the complexities, realities, and opportunities in Africa's green equation. The dialogue explored climate change, not only as an environmental challenge, but also as a strategic lever for economic revival across the continent.

As part of YCA's strategic engagement with youth and partners in the lead-up to the 2025 YouthConnekt Africa Summit, the discussion brought together voices from distinct green sectors to educate, share experiences, and guide young Africans and entrepreneurs in the green economy sector. It shed light on systemic barriers, such as inaccessible financing, complicated legal frameworks, and age-related bias, that continue to limit the recognition of youth-led efforts, all of which restrain the scalability of innovative climate change solutions. Despite these challenges, the discussion surfaced recommendations for transformation, such as creating sustainable business models, resilience, and consistency.

### 2. Introduction and Background

Africa faces two interconnected crises: pervasive youth unemployment, affecting 70-80% of young people, and severe environmental degradation impacting lives and livelihoods. Amid these complexities, the expanding green economy is emerging as a transformative opportunity to forge a more sustainable future. It presents a unique pathway to simultaneously generate vital employment opportunities and drive inclusive, environmentally conscious growth across the continent. Projections indicate that by 2030, this sector could generate up to 4 million new jobs in critical areas such as solar energy and agritech, thereby significantly contributing to the continent's broader strategic objective of creating 25 million new jobs to effectively absorb its expanding youth labor force.

The dialogue brought together a diverse audience of young innovators and experts from across the continent, including our esteemed panelists Mr. Tony Tiyou, Founder and CEO of Renewables in Africa; Ms. Nicole Nkoum, a Climate Finance Consultant at Global Green Growth Institute(GGGI); Ms. Mariama Djambony Badji, CEO of Design Engineering Architecture, specializing in eco-friendly construction; Mr. Temoho Khetleli, Managing Director at Bohloeki Entreprises; and Ms. Allen Umulisa, Managing Director at RIA Green

Stalks, a sustainable agribusiness. These distinguished panelists shared invaluable firsthand experiences navigating the complexities of the green economy, illuminating both the specific challenges confronting African youth and offering practical solutions to accelerate the continent's transition towards a sustainable and inclusive future.

### **3. Key Discussion Points and Findings**

#### **Financing of Green Solutions by Youth Entrepreneurs:**

Access to finance remains one of the most significant challenges for young people in the green economy. However, as highlighted by Nicole Nkoum during the discussion, the problem is not a lack of funding but rather a lack of trust and support systems for youth-led businesses. Many investors are hesitant to fund young entrepreneurs, not because the money isn't available, but because existing financial structures are not designed to recognize or support the potential of youth-driven green innovations.

#### **Structuring for Success in Green Entrepreneurship:**

Across Africa, many young people are entering the green economy driven by passion and a desire to make an impact. However, turning that passion into a viable enterprise remains a major challenge.

Tony Tiyou, a renewable energy entrepreneur, shared that when he began his journey, he believed that being in a promising industry like green energy would be enough to succeed. Over time, he learned that even green solutions require a clear business model and structure, strong sector understanding, and the ability to build scalable models that attract investment and deliver long-term impact.

#### **Local Knowledge and Innovation:**

Community-driven solutions, firmly grounded in local practices, are proving incredibly powerful in forging sustainable change. Mariama Djambony Badji in Senegal perfectly embodies this transformative shift. Inspired by her grandmother's lessons embedded in storytelling on traditional house-building, and leveraging her expertise in civil engineering and environmental protection, Mariama is pioneering green construction systems deeply rooted in African realities.

Mariama Djambony Badji's work beautifully illustrates the power of embracing readily available resources, local materials like raw earth, combined with time-honored techniques, yields eco-friendly, affordable housing. This approach not only significantly reduces the carbon footprint associated with imported, energy-intensive materials but also introduces natural thermal comfort, thereby minimizing reliance on artificial climate control. This trend powerfully underscores the immense value of community-driven solutions, where local

practices serve as potent catalysts for sustainable change, economic growth, and the preservation of cultural identity, while simultaneously building a more resilient future.

### **Navigating Bureaucratic Barriers:**

Young entrepreneurs across Africa, despite their innovative spirit, frequently encounter substantial obstacles when launching and expanding their ventures. A significant challenge lies in dealing with bureaucratic obstacles. This encompasses more than just completing paperwork; it involves confronting essential doubts regarding youth-led initiatives, often compounded by opaque and protracted administrative processes. Governments, while often promoting youth entrepreneurship, may not have fully streamlined their regulatory environments, causing considerable delays in securing essential permits, licenses, and certifications. Such problems can consume valuable resources, hinder progress, and even cause new businesses to fail before they have a chance to thrive.

Temoho Khetleli shared insights underscoring these very points, noting that for young business owners, obtaining permits and building client trust often requires substantial, consistent effort to establish credibility within systems that tend to undervalue youth. This highlights that for young entrepreneurs, success frequently hinges not just on the strength of their concepts but on their determination to overcome systemic biases and slow administrative processes.

### **Scaling Agribusiness for Impact:**

Agriculture remains a profoundly fertile ground for green entrepreneurship across Africa, showcasing immense potential for both environmental stewardship and economic prosperity. This trend highlights how innovative approaches and strategic growth can transform small-scale farming into impactful, sustainable businesses. It's about moving beyond subsistence, embracing modern methods, and strategically navigating market demands to achieve significant scale and create far-reaching positive change.

Allen Umulisa's journey explicitly illustrates this transformation. Starting with a modest farm, she quickly saw the financial viability in agriculture, even with manual irrigation. Her strategic move to a greenhouse operation allowed for the adoption of modern methods, boosting productivity and crop quality. Crucially, Allen understood the need to meet global market requirements, diligently pursuing certifications to unlock broader access. Her initiative grew from supporting 20 farmers to 250, with 60% being women and youth. This expansion reinforces that the green economy isn't just about protecting the environment; it's about building genuinely impactful, sustainable businesses that solve real problems with practical, scalable solutions.

## 4. Barriers to Youth Participation in the Green Economy

### Challenging Access to Green Finance:

While significant global funds are indeed available for climate action, a key challenge for many green entrepreneurs, especially youth-led initiatives, involves meeting the exceedingly tough requirements for accessing large-scale climate finance. This trend reveals a fundamental disconnect: substantial funding exists, yet the practical realities faced by innovative, often new, green businesses present considerable challenges.

Nicole Nkoum highlighted that even when considerable capital is present, such as from the Global Climate Fund, the proposed solutions are often not considered "bankable." This means projects, despite their environmental benefits, may lack the specific financial structures, proven revenue models, or risk assessments required by large institutional funders. This creates a significant barrier. Consequently, many promising green projects, despite their potential, struggle to access the very funding designed to accelerate climate solutions, thus limiting their ability to expand and achieve full impact.

### Disconnect from National Policy and Regulatory Frameworks:

Green entrepreneurs in Africa are profoundly disconnected from national policies and corresponding regulatory frameworks. Despite their pivotal role in addressing climate change, many entrepreneurs operate without a comprehensive understanding of the broader policy landscape intended to guide and foster sustainable development. This fundamental gap creates considerable challenges for both investment attraction and market penetration.

Tony Tiyou, drawing upon over a decade of experience as CEO and Co-founder of Renewables in Africa, emphasized that while every green business necessitates a clear strategic approach and a revenue stream, its ultimate success is linked to comprehending national policies. When entrepreneurs lack a connection with guiding national strategies, aligning their business models for optimal support becomes exceptionally difficult. This absence of policy awareness and integration manifests as difficulties in securing finance (as projects may not align with investor priorities influenced by policy), navigating complex market entry barriers, and accessing appropriate mentorship, ultimately impeding their ability to leverage available support structures and expand their impactful solutions.

### Capacity Gaps:

While young entrepreneurs often bring immense passion and creativity to their ventures, a significant complication they face is addressing crucial capacity gaps. Many lack access to essential technical training, legal assistance, or robust business development support. This



means that despite brilliant ideas, they might struggle with the practicalities of scaling, formalizing, or sustaining their operations.

Allen Umulisa's early journey in agriculture clearly illustrates this very challenge and how it can be overcome. She began with limited knowledge and resources, initially engaging in manual irrigation on a small plot. However, with a strong determination, she gradually scaled her initiative by proactively adopting modern techniques and diligently acquiring certifications to meet global market demands. Her story underscores a vital point: access to practical support, whether it's hands-on training in new methods or guidance on legal and certification requirements, is key to transitioning from small-scale projects into truly impactful, sustainable enterprises.

### Undervalued Youth Leadership:

Despite the ability to generate disruptive, innovative solutions, young people frequently find their leadership capabilities overlooked, leading to their exclusion from significant decision-making processes, especially in critical spaces for green development. This trend is made worse by systemic biases and practical hurdles, as highlighted by insights from entrepreneur Temoho Khetleli.

Young individuals often face underestimation in the industry, where their lack of extensive traditional experience can lead to skepticism from established players. This directly impacts their perceived credibility, making it difficult to gain trust from clients and secure essential resources. Temoho noted that for youth, obtaining permits and building client trust demands significant and sustained effort to prove one's capability within systems that consistently undervalue them. This effectively keeps young leaders focused on day-to-day survival rather than being recognized or invited into strategic, influential positions. Consequently, their voices are often absent from higher-level policy discussions and environmental governance strategies, limiting both the visibility of their innovative ideas and their ability to shape broader national or regional green agendas.

### Recommendations

#### Education and Skilling:

**To build a generation of green economy leaders, there is a need to** embed sustainability, environmental awareness, and entrepreneurship into formal education systems. **Integrating these topics into school and university curricula will help young people develop a deeper understanding of green development from an early age. Additionally,** expanding technical and vocational training in key sectors such as renewable energy, eco-construction, and climate-smart agriculture will equip youth with the hands-on skills required to thrive in emerging green industries.

## Policy Reform:

Participants stressed the urgency of moving beyond symbolic gestures to meaningful and institutionalized youth inclusion in policy and governance. Policy reform should therefore strategically focus on empowering youth in decision-making processes, advancing national unity and social cohesion, and peace processes, thereby ensuring their voices demonstrably influence outcomes and promote lasting peace and stability.

## Finance and Investment:

Financial systems must evolve to be more inclusive of youth-led enterprises. This includes **the creation of blended finance mechanisms and guarantee schemes that reduce investment risk and make funding more accessible**. Establishing youth-specific climate innovation funds across different regions will ensure that young entrepreneurs have equitable access to the capital needed to launch and scale climate-smart solutions.

## Conclusion

The "Africa's Green Equation" X Space powerfully confirmed that Africa's green transformation will be driven by its youth's innovation and leadership, not just policy. Young innovators are already building a more resilient, sustainable, and inclusive future through bold entrepreneurship and community-led solutions.

However, scaling this potential demands significant structural change. The discussion highlighted critical barriers such as tough access to green finance, a disconnect from national policy, and persistent gaps in capacity and recognition for young leaders. Addressing these systemic issues through equitable capital access, inclusive policymaking, and sustained investment in skills must become central to Africa's climate and development plans. As the continent looks to the 2025 YouthConnekt Africa Summit, insights from this session provided a vital roadmap for governments, investors, and institutions to move to action, placing young Africans at the forefront of the continent's green future.