

Concept Note and Programme

Public Panel: Gulf Investment in Green Economic Growth Across Sub-Saharan Africa

The Capital Menlyn Maine | Monday, 29 September 2025

Sub-Saharan Africa is entering a decisive decade for climate action and green growth. The region offers vast renewable energy potential and critical mineral resources essential for the clean energy transition. However, unlocking this potential requires large-scale investment that many countries cannot mobilize domestically. Gulf states, meanwhile, are emerging as important partners in climate finance. Their sovereign wealth funds, development banks, and private investors are increasingly drawn to Africa as part of broader economic diversification strategies, their commitments to climate action, and efforts to secure long-term food and energy security.

While Gulf financing spans the continent, certain countries have already emerged as front-runners. Kenya and Ethiopia are advancing geothermal and green agriculture, while South Africa is increasingly seen as a hub for utility-scale renewable energy and green hydrogen. South Africa's strong financial markets, infrastructure base, and policy frameworks make it a natural gateway for Gulf investment into the wider region, offering both scale and replicability.

Several projects underway in South Africa highlight this potential, spanning renewable energy, green hydrogen, and critical mineral value chains — sectors where Gulf capital and expertise can accelerate progress. For instance, AMEA Power's recent 20-year Power Purchase Agreement with Eskom signals the importance of the strategic relationship between the Gulf and Africa to advance renewable energy market development in the region. The lessons from these projects can serve as models for structuring sustainable and mutually beneficial Gulf–Africa green financing partnerships.

Convened by the Rihla Initiative for Green Economic Growth in partnership with the South African Institute of International Affairs and supported by the Embassy of the United Arab Emirates in Pretoria, this event will examine how Gulf capital can accelerate Africa's green transition, with South Africa as the entry point for regional scaling. Key questions include:

- What are the main drivers behind Gulf financing in Sub-Saharan Africa, and how do they intersect with climate objectives?
- How can South Africa's experience as a key country for Gulf-backed renewable energy and hydrogen projects inform wider regional strategies?
- Which financing mechanisms and policy frameworks are best suited to deepen Gulf–Africa cooperation while ensuring inclusive and sustainable development outcomes?

By engaging researchers, policymakers, and investors under the Chatham House rule, this event aims to sharpen understanding of Gulf–Africa investment dynamics and outline pathways for long-term collaboration on green economic growth.

Programme

9:30-10:00	REGISTRATION AND WELCOME TEA	
10:00-10:15	Opening and Welcome	<p>Alex Benkenstein, Head: Climate and Natural Resources Programme, SAIIA</p> <p>Mehran Haghirian, Director of the Rihla Initiative for Green Economic Growth</p>
10:15-10:30	Address by Ambassador of the United Arab Emirates (TBC)	
10:30-11:30	Panel 1: Main drivers of Gulf financing in Sub-Saharan Africa	<p>Moderator: Vuyiswa Hlongwane, Rihla Coordinator for Sub-Saharan Africa</p> <p>Kudakwashe Manjonjo, Rihla Sub-Saharan Africa Policy Council</p> <p>Humza Sheikh, Rihla Gulf Committee</p> <p>Jordan Mc Lean, Researcher: Climate and Natural Resources Programme, SAIIA</p> <p>Representative, Masdar</p>
11:30-11:45	TEA BEAK	
11:45-12:45	Panel 2: South Africa's experience as a hub for Gulf-backed Green Development Projects	<p>Moderator: Alex Benkenstein, Head: Climate and Natural Resources Programme, SAIIA</p> <p>Mehran Haghirian, Director of the Rihla Initiative for Green Economic Growth</p> <p>Kirsten Pearson, Senior Researcher: Climate Finance, SAIIA</p>
12:45-14:00	LUNCH	