



Advancing Africa's Adaptation Finance Priorities Under the South African G20 Presidency

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Introduction

As climate impacts escalate in scale, frequency and unpredictability, Africa continues to bear the brunt disproportionately, with deepened vulnerabilities and the emergence of new risks. In 2024 the continent was warming faster than the global average, as reported by the World Meteorological Organisation, with record-breaking temperatures that averaged 0.86°C above the 1991–2020 baseline.¹ The Global Centre on Adaptation² reported that the continent is warming at an alarming rate of 1.28°C, making it the fastest-warming region globally. This poses risks to critical sectors dependent on food systems; ecosystems and biodiversity; water availability; human settlements and infrastructure; health; economic growth; education; and heritage. The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report projected a warming of 3.2–4°C by the end of the 21st century that is expected to drive intensifying climate hazards such as prolonged droughts, erratic rainfall, extreme heat, floods, cyclones and accelerated sea-level rise. Structural vulnerabilities – including poverty, weak institutional capacity, limited early warning systems and heavy reliance on climate-sensitive sectors – further constrain the continent's ability to adapt effectively. Without urgent scaled-up investment in adaptation, Africa could face a reduction of up to 50% in crop yields by 2050, with devastating implications for livelihoods, health and sustainable development.³ Mobilising adaptation finance is therefore critical to safeguard Africa's progress toward Agenda 2063 and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Adaptation finance aims to reduce the vulnerability of human or natural systems to climate impacts by enhancing adaptive capacity and resilience.⁴ Due to Africa's acute exposure to climate risks, the UNEP Adaptation Gap Report 2024 estimated that the continent requires between \$187–359 billion annually to finance climate adaptation, yet only \$28 billion was mobilised globally for adaptation in 2022.⁵ According to the UNDP, Africa received \$108.7 billion in total climate finance over the 2011–2021 period, with a skewed distribution to Eastern Africa, which received the largest share at \$43.9 billion. This was followed by West Africa at \$34.2 billion, Southern Africa at \$19.8 billion, North Africa at \$10.0 billion and Central Africa at \$10.8 billion.⁶ In 2021/22, the Climate Policy Initiative (CPI) tracked \$43.7 billion, showing that 2022 marked the first year in which climate finance flows exceeded \$50 billion.⁷ Nonetheless, the CPI and UNDP warn that Africa's flows must quadruple by 2030 to meet climate targets, and that adaptation investment alone faces an 80% shortfall. South Africa's G20 presidency is a critical opportunity to champion increased adaptation finance from all sources, particularly grant-based and non-debt-creating flows. At the same time, it can create incentives for mobilising private sector investment in climate resilience in terms of support for the effective development and implementation of National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) across Africa.

As of October 2024, only 22 African countries had formally submitted their NAPs to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).⁸ Many other African countries are at various stages of developing or integrating adaptation priorities into national policies. The finance needed to implement these plans remains grossly inadequate, fragmented and misaligned. Progress has been made in technology transfer and capacity building, yet the most persistent barrier is the chronic underfunding of adaptation efforts, especially for vulnerable and marginalised communities. Much of the available finance is delivered as debt-creating loans rather than grants, compounding fiscal stress in already vulnerable economies. The Green Climate Fund (GCF), the largest dedicated climate fund, has approved \$6.3 billion

¹ World Meteorological Organization, [The State of the Global Climate 2024](#) WMO-No. 1368 (2025).

² Global Center on Adaptation, [Climate Risks in Africa](#) State and Trends in Adaptation Report (2022).

³ Hans O. Pörtner, et.al., [Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability](#) Working Group II Technical Support Unit (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022).

⁴ Morgan Richmond, "Adaptation finance: Six key steps for structuring instruments that deliver results", Climate Finance Lab, 2024, <https://www.climatefinancelab.org/news/adaptation-finance-six-key-steps/>

⁵ UN Environment Programme, [Adaptation Gap Report 2024](#) (2024).

⁶ UN Development Programme, [Climate Finance in Africa: An overview of climate finance flows, challenges and opportunities](#) (2024)

⁷ Climate Policy initiative, [Landscape of Climate Finance in Africa 2024](#) (2024).

⁸ UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, [National Adaptation Plans 2024: Progress Report](#) UNFCCC LDC Expert Group (2024).

for 125 projects in 50 African countries with 55% (\$3.5 billion) allocated to adaptation. However, implementation has fallen short, with only 27% of targeted beneficiaries having been reached and just 1% progress recorded on water resilience.⁹ The Adaptation Fund (AF) and the Global Environment Facility have been more limited in scale and slow to disburse funds, which further constrain timely adaptation.¹⁰ Meanwhile, philanthropic contributions are growing but remain largely absent from official OECD tracking, leaving key data gaps. This fragmented landscape highlights the urgent need for scaled-up, predictable and grant-based finance that aligns with NAPs.¹¹

Recent G20 developments in climate and finance provide an opportunity to amplify Africa's adaptation finance priorities through the Sustainable Finance Working Group (SFWG). In 2024, the SFWG endorsed the G20 Sustainable Finance Roadmap, which prioritises the mobilisation of capital for adaptation in vulnerable regions, although implementation remains uneven. South Africa's presidency offers a pivotal opportunity to leverage these platforms to push for the operationalisation of the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) at COP30, scaling grant-based adaptation finance and centring Africa's NAPs in G20 Finance Track discussions.

Opportunities in G20 processes to advance Africa's adaptation finance agenda

Key entry points in G20 processes

G20 Finance Track

The **G20 Finance Track engagement** focuses on accelerating the global sustainable finance agenda by guiding international economic cooperation and financial architecture reform. Climate change has been recognised as a key global economic challenge. This track brings together G20 finance ministers, central bank governors, the International Monetary Fund, World Bank and other multilateral development banks (MDBs) to coordinate responses on global economic challenges. The Track encompasses seven technical groups and three task forces. Notably, under Brazil's 2023–2024 presidency, progress was made through the endorsement of a roadmap to make MDBs 'Bigger, Better, and More Effective'. The following four aspects were prioritised:¹²

- optimising the operations of international environmental and climate funds to deliver sustainable finance;
- advancing credible, robust and just transition plans;
- analysing implementation challenges related to sustainability reporting standards, including for small and medium-sized enterprises, emerging markets and developing economies; and
- financing nature-based solutions.

⁹ GCF Africa Portfolio Overview, presentation not made public, 2024.

¹⁰ Global Environment Facility, [GEF Programming Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change](#) Third LDCF/SCCF Strategy Meeting (2022).

¹¹ OECD/UNDP, [Investing in Climate for Growth and Development: The Case for Enhanced NDCs](#) (OECD Publishing, 2025).

¹² G20 Brasil 2024, [Accelerating Sustainable Finance for Emerging Markets and Developing Economies](#) Vertical Climate and Environmental Funds (VCEF) Review (2024).

Brazil's term saw growing momentum around the re-channelling of special drawing rights (SDRs), including efforts through MDBs such as the African Development Bank (AfDB) aimed at expanding access to concessional finance. The 2023 G20 saw increased MDB climate finance commitments, projected to reach \$120 billion by 2030, and the formal inclusion of debtor country perspectives in sovereign debt discussions with support for instruments like debt-for-climate swaps and disaster-linked clauses. These resolutions offer a valuable foundation for Africa to advance its climate adaptation agenda, given that MDBs remain a key source of adaptation finance.

Sustainable Finance Working Group

The SFWG is the most directly relevant platform for addressing adaptation finance within the Finance Track. Its mandate is to develop frameworks that align public and private capital with sustainability goals, including work on climate finance taxonomies, disclosure standards and alignment mechanisms such as the Common Framework for Climate Finance Alignment.¹³ Recent efforts have focused on improving the transparency of financial flows and mobilising private finance, with an emphasis on net-zero targets and mitigation sectors such as energy and industry. In Africa, the SFWG's narrow framing of climate finance poses a challenge. Adaptation, central to Africa's climate and development agenda, remains poorly integrated into these frameworks. The prevailing focus on private sector mobilisation overlooks the fact that adaptation finance on the continent depends heavily on public and concessional sources.

Development Working Group

The G20's Development Working Group (DWG) is tasked with coordinating efforts to accelerate progress toward the SDGs, particularly in developing countries.¹⁴ Its 2024 priorities included sustainable infrastructure, digital inclusion and shock-resilient development systems. While adaptation has not been given standalone attention, it is deeply interlinked with core DWG concerns, especially poverty reduction, food security and disaster risk management. Integrating adaptation into the DWG's agenda in African countries is strategic and urgently needed. As climate impacts continue to derail SDG progress across the continent, adaptation is essential for building resilient livelihoods, protecting public health and securing urban futures.¹⁵ The DWG provides an entry point to scale up locally led adaptation by supporting institutional capacity building, mobilising finance and supporting inclusive development planning.

Alignment with UNFCCC climate finance commitments

The UNFCCC provides the overarching legal framework for climate finance obligations through the Paris Agreement, placing a binding responsibility on developed countries to support developing countries in mitigation and adaptation. Article 9(1) of the Paris Agreement states, 'Developed parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation, in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention.'¹⁶ This provision affirms that climate finance is a legal duty, not a voluntary contribution, grounded in the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, as established under Article 2(2) of the Paris Agreement. The UNFCCC has also led to the establishment of key institutions governing adaptation finance, including the

¹³ G20 South Africa 2025, [Sustainable Finance Working Group: 2025 Presidency and Co-chairs Note on Agenda Priorities](#) Finance Track (2025).

¹⁴ G20 South Africa 2025, [Sherpa Track issue note, Development Working Group](#) (2025).

¹⁵ UN, [Rescuing SDG 11 for a Resilient Urban Planet](#) SDG 11 Synthesis Report (High Level Political Forum, 2023).

¹⁶ UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, [The Paris Agreement](#) (2016).

GCF, AF, Adaptation Committee and Least Developed Countries Fund.¹⁷ The GCF, for instance, as the operating entity of the Financial Mechanism under both the Convention and the Paris Agreement, was explicitly mandated to channel resources in a balanced manner between mitigation and adaptation. It is through this framework that Africa and other vulnerable regions seek predictable, accessible and needs-based financing to implement their NAPs and build long-term resilience.

As outlined in Decision 1/CMA.4 at COP27, the Just Transition Work Programme aims to foster discussions on pathways to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement.¹⁸ In parallel, the G20 pursues its overarching objective of fostering international economic cooperation and addressing major global economic issues. G20 countries, through the Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG), seek to advance the environmental dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its SDGs, given a focus on key priorities and deliverables, including the mobilisation of financial resources.¹⁹ Through Priority 4 on Climate Change and Air Quality, the G20 emphasises climate finance and a just transition for all as key sub-priorities. Among the expected outcomes are enhanced collaboration; the sharing of experiences and best practices; identification of resource mobilisation opportunities to support just transition efforts in G20 countries; and the advancement of proposals for new financial models to mobilise climate finance for a just transition for all.

This alignment between the UNFCCC Just Transition Work Programme and the G20 ECSWG agenda is an important opportunity to synergise efforts across global and economic platforms. The G20's influence in global financial systems is further reflected in the Leaders' Declaration on Sustainable Development, Energy Transitions and Climate Action, paragraph 44. Here it recognises the importance of 'optimizing the operations of vertical climate and environmental funds, aligning them with countries' needs, priorities, and strategies to enhance national ownership and maximize the impact of investments'.²⁰ It encourages funds to 'work together, take concrete steps to unlock their full potential, and improve access, including through a common application and enhanced cooperation with MDBs and national development institutions'. Furthermore, G20 leaders have underscored the importance of 'continuing the work on operationalizing Just Transitions, considering its economic, social, and environmental dimensions and local circumstances'²¹ while advancing efforts to address challenges to the financing of nature-based solutions featured in the Global Goal on Adaptation (GGA).²²

The commitment to mobilise \$100 billion per year by 2020 to support climate action in developing countries²² has been reaffirmed through subsequent COP decisions and the Paris Agreement's Decision 1/CP.21. Yet this goal remains unmet, with only \$86 billion mobilised by developed countries in 2021. Over 70% of this finance consists of concessional and non-concessional loans, with the potential of putting African countries under debt distress.²³ These persistent shortfalls potentially undermine the trust of African countries in the UNFCCC process and developed country parties. South Africa's G20 presidency is an opportunity to represent African interests and priorities to other G20 member states, which collectively constitute around 85% of global GDP and 75% of global Greenhouse Gas emissions, and which have strong institutional influence in the global financial architecture.

¹⁷ "Least Developed Countries Fund – LDCF" Global Environment Facility, n.d., <https://www.thegef.org/what-we-do/topics/least-developed-countries-fund-ldcf>

¹⁸ United Nations Framework on Climate Change, *Matters relating to the work programme for urgently scaling up mitigation ambition and implementation referred to in paragraph 27 of decision 1/CMA.3* (Decision -/CMA.4, n.d.)

¹⁹ G20 South Africa 2025, *Environment and Climate Sustainability Working Group (ECSWG)* (2024).

²⁰ G20 Brasil 2024, "G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration", 2024, <https://g20.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/11/G20-Rio-de-Janeiro-Leaders-Declaration-EN.pdf>

²¹ G20 Brasil 2024, "G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration".

²² UN-Habitat, *The Critical Role of Nature-based Solutions for Enhancing Climate Resilience in Informal Areas* (2023).

²³ "Climate Finance and the \$100 billion goal", OECD, n.d., <https://www.oecd.org/en/topics/sub-issues/climate-finance-and-the-usd-100-billion-goal.html>

The Africa Group of Negotiators' common position on the New Collective Quantified Goal

The NCQG²⁴ is the most consequential climate finance negotiation for Africa, with its finalisation at COP30 set to define the future architecture of climate finance. Building on the African Group of Negotiators' priorities, Africa's position emphasises that the NCQG must go beyond numerical targets and enshrine core principles of equity, transparency and accessibility. It must include a substantial increase in adaptation finance, ensure a high share of non-debt-inducing instruments such as grants and guarantee simplified, direct access to resources for the countries and communities most in need. The G20, under South Africa's presidency, has a strategic role to play in demonstrating how the NCQG can be implemented. By embedding adaptation targets into MDB reform agendas, enabling innovative instruments such as debt-for-climate swaps and promoting inclusive financial tracking systems, the G20 can influence both the ambition and the modalities of the NCQG. Such leadership will reinforce Africa's call for climate finance that is aligned with just transition objectives, responsive to local needs and capable of supporting a scaled-up, grant-equivalent contribution within the \$1.3 trillion-per-year ambition articulated in the Baku to Belém Roadmap.

Global Stocktake 1

Established under the Paris Agreement, the Global Stocktake (GST) is a process that assesses collective progress towards the Paris Agreement goals through a five-yearly review that evaluates where the world stands on climate action and support, identifying gaps and informing future climate plans. The first GST, concluded at COP28 in 2023,²⁵

noted with deep regret that the goal of developed country Parties to mobilize jointly \$100 billion per year by 2020 in the context of meaningful mitigation actions and transparency on implementation was not met in 2021, including owing to challenges in mobilizing finance from private sources, and welcomed the ongoing efforts of developed country Parties towards achieving the goal of mobilizing jointly \$100 billion per year.

It added that²⁶

the adaptation finance gap is widening, and that current levels of climate finance, technology development and transfer, and capacity-building for adaptation remain insufficient to respond to worsening climate change impacts in developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

The GST synthesis report explicitly called for significant scaling and accessible finance to support the needs of developing countries, with a special emphasis on Africa's acute adaptation challenges.²⁷

G20 countries could help to operationalise the GST recommendations through their leadership in MDB reforms, the GCF replenishment and the direction of private financial flows. To shape the credibility of post-

²⁴ UNFCCC, [Ad hoc work programme on the new collective quantified goal on climate finance](#) (2022).

²⁵ UNFCCC, [Report of the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement on its fifth session, held in the United Arab Emirates from 30 November to 13 December 2023](#), (2023), p. 11.

²⁶ UNFCCC (2023), p. 12.

²⁷ UNFCCC, [First global Stocktake](#) (2023).

GST climate finance outcomes in Africa, reorienting these instruments to prioritise grant-based adaptation finance will better address Africa's adaptation needs while avoiding unsustainable debt stress. Conversely, failure to respond to the GST's adaptation finance imperative will further erode trust between developed and developing countries in climate action, risk exacerbating vulnerabilities in Africa, and undermine the integrity of the Paris Agreement process. African countries can therefore leverage the South African G20 presidency to close Africa's adaptation finance gap by presenting their agenda and recommendations to relevant G20 working groups.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Scaling locally led adaptation through targeted grants and concessional finance for subnational action

There is a need to scale up locally led adaptation by channelling climate finance directly to subnational and community-level actors through a combination of grant-based funding and highly concessional loans that do not exacerbate national debt burdens. Drawing on Kenya's County Climate Change Funds (CCCFs) and the Financing Locally Led Climate Action (FLLoCA) programme, which demonstrates how transparent, participatory and legally grounded mechanisms can reach millions, this approach empowers local institutions to plan and deliver climate solutions tailored to local realities.²⁸ The World Bank's concessional financing under FLLoCA illustrates the potential for enabling transformative adaptation without adding to fiscal stress. This model aligns with the Paris Agreement's Article 7.5, the G20's commitment to whole-of-society adaptation and the Principles for Locally Led Adaptation, offering a scalable and equitable pathway toward achieving the GGA across Africa. This will require partnerships with national and local governments, as well as with development partners, especially the AfDB, the GCF, the AF, the G20 presidency, development finance institutions, philanthropic organisations and non-governmental organisations such as the Adaptation Consortium and the International Institute for Environment and Development.

Recommendation 2: Expanding climate finance instruments through innovative tools such as debt-for-climate swaps

Debt-for-climate swaps offer an innovative and practical solution for high debt burdens and climate change vulnerability. These swaps redirect funds to initiatives that build long-term climate resilience by aligning financial relief with environmental protection. The Seychelles debt-for-nature swap is an example of how developing nations can link their national debts to climate action.²⁹ Seychelles redirected over \$22 million to conservation and adaptation initiatives through a debt-for-nature swap finance instrument. This financing mechanism reduced Seychelles' cost of debt by converting foreign debt into a concessional local currency debt. Debt-for-climate swaps align with the G20 priority on debt sustainability and innovative financing models for climate action.

²⁸ Republic of Kenya, [Financing Locally-led Climate Action Program \(FLLoCA\)](#) Program Implementation Unit (2020).

²⁹ UN-OHRLS, [Financing for Development of Small Island Developing States](#) (n.d.).

The G20 could champion the integration of debt-for-climate swaps into the Global Debt Relief Framework and endorse the use of blended financing mechanisms such as debt-for-climate swaps in international finance platforms, especially the Green Climate Fund and the Green Environmental Fund. At the same time, it is vital for the G20 to collaborate with multilateral development banks such as the AfDB and the International Monetary Fund. The private sector, including local commercial banks, could also play a role by providing risk-sharing tools.

Case study : Kenya's County Climate Change Funds and the FLoCA programme

Kenya's Climate Change Act (2016) provides a legal mandate for integrating climate action across all levels of government, empowering counties to formulate and implement climate policies and budgets aligned with national goals. Building on this enabling national framework, several counties, including Makueni, Isiolo, Kitui, Wajir and Garissa, enacted their own CCCF acts, formally establishing climate finance mechanisms embedded in county legislation. These acts institutionalise the allocation of at least 2% of county development budgets toward climate resilience, managed through participatory planning structures at ward and county levels. Since 2011, CCCFs have successfully financed over 138 locally prioritised adaptation projects, reaching more than 2 million people with investments in water access, rangeland management and early warning systems. Recognised for their transparency, equity and effectiveness, CCCFs have now been integrated into the national FLoCA programme and are widely regarded as a scalable model for locally led adaptation across Africa

Recommendation 3: Bridging climate finance gaps through MDB reforms and scaling of country-led project pipeline development

Achieving this ambition requires targeted reforms of MDBs, which remain the primary channels for adaptation funding in Africa. These reforms should restructure MDB instruments and mandates to better support the non-revenue-generating nature of adaptation projects, particularly in least developed countries (LDCs) and fragile contexts. A G20-backed political signal anchored in the Leaders' Declaration could call for MDBs to commit to significantly scaling up adaptation finance to Africa, ensuring that at least 50% of climate finance for African LDCs is provided as grants or highly concessional finance (zero-interest loans, extended maturities). To operationalise such a commitment, the SFWG could be invited to develop an implementation roadmap, building on ongoing capital adequacy reforms and emerging opportunities to re-channel SDRs. These efforts must also prioritise scaling up the development of project pipelines, with targeted capacity-building initiatives that enhance national and local expertise in identifying, designing and preparing bankable adaptation projects, ensuring a steady flow of well-prepared proposals ready for financing.³⁰ Strategic partner institutions that could assist in advancing this agenda include the African Capacity Building Foundation; regional economic communities; continental, regional and national NGOs; and development partners.

³⁰ "Unlocking Climate Finance for Ghana: A Five-Day SCACAF Workshop", Agnes Africa, 2025, <https://www.agnesafrica.org/scacaf-ghana/>

Case Study: Seychelles' debt-for-nature swap

In 2018, the Republic of Seychelles pioneered a groundbreaking debt-for-nature swap, positioning itself at the forefront of innovative climate finance. This financial mechanism enabled the country to reduce its external debt burden while simultaneously investing in marine and climate resilience. Facilitated by the Nature Conservancy, the initiative involved the buyback of about \$21.6 million of Seychelles' foreign debt at a discounted rate. The financing was supported by a coalition of philanthropic donors, allowing the debt to be restructured into local currency obligations under more favourable terms. The proceeds were channelled into a newly created independent entity, the Seychelles Conservation and Climate Adaptation Trust, which became the institutional vehicle responsible for disbursing funds toward marine conservation, climate resilience and community-based adaptation. A portion of the funds has been dedicated to protecting 30% of the country's Exclusive Economic Zone and promoting ecosystem-based adaptation strategies such as mangrove restoration, coral reef protection and sustainable fisheries. This debt-for-nature swap aligns strongly with Africa's growing emphasis on blended finance models that reduce sovereign debt stress while supporting NAP implementation. As an innovative climate finance tool, the Seychelles model demonstrates the viability of leveraging existing debt obligations to unlock grant-based or concessional adaptation funding.

Case study: AGNES initiative for the development of a pipeline of bankable project proposals to unlock climate finance

The Strengthening Capacities of National Experts for African Countries on the Development of a Pipeline of Bankable Project Proposals to Unlock Climate Finance (SCACAF) initiative, led by AGNES, serves as a practical model for enhancing access to climate adaptation finance in Africa. Implemented in Kenya, Ethiopia and Ghana, the initiative adopted a hands-on, 'learning by doing' approach to build national capacity in designing and developing high-quality, fundable climate adaptation projects. Multidisciplinary teams of national experts were set up in each country, including representatives from government ministries, civil society and local communities. These teams were trained in key areas such as climate rationale formulation, budget design, proposal alignment with funder requirements and use of diagnostic tools to identify gaps and innovative solutions. The resulting project pipelines addressed diverse priorities, including rangeland and livestock systems, sustainable agriculture, coastal resilience, gender equity and water management. Several of these proposals have already attracted interest from potential funding partners, demonstrating the initiative's impact. The SCACAF model underscores the importance of empowering country-led expert teams to drive proposal development, institutionalise knowledge and lay the groundwork for scalable access to adaptation finance across the continent.

Conclusion

South Africa's 2025 G20 presidency is an unprecedented opportunity to drive convergence between G20 processes and the UNFCCC framework to close the critical adaptation finance gap facing Africa. It is therefore imperative that the G20 actively champion the scaling of predictable and grant-based flow of adaptation finance on par with mitigation funding while operationalising the principles of equity, accessibility and non-debt-inducing instruments. Embedding these imperatives within ongoing MDB reforms and innovative financial instruments will be essential to realising Africa's NDCs and NAPs, along with the broader objectives of the Paris Agreement.

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Acknowledgement

SALLA gratefully acknowledges the support of the Swedish Government and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation for this publication. This publication was also supported by a grant from the African Climate Foundation (ACF) and (in part) by a grant from the Open Society Foundations from a grant from the International Development Research Centre, Ottawa, Canada.

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