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Dear Future Activists: How to Lead Intersectional Climate and Environmental Action

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Climate injustices and leadership in and from Eastern Africa

This final chapter reflects briefly on key lessons from Eastern Africa before directly hearing from climate leaders on the frontline of the movement for intersectional climate justice. *Climate Justice in Action* celebrates the innovations, activism and adaptations led by diverse communities, governments and organizations across Eastern Africa. Like much of the Majority World (Crawford et al, 2023), Eastern Africa is bearing the brunt of climate change, environmental degradation and deforestation. The interconnected nature of conflict, food insecurity and climate change are more evidence in Eastern Africa than anywhere else in the world (Bedasa and Deksisa, 2024). Yet, the region has been neglected from policy and knowledge production tables. This book therefore intentionally centres voices and experiences that are too often overlooked in global climate discourse.

Through practical, grounded examples, the chapters expose the deep social, economic and environmental injustices that climate change inflicts on vulnerable communities across the region. They underscore how climate change compounds existing inequalities – particularly for marginalized groups such as displaced people – and demonstrate the urgent need for intersectional, inclusive responses. Importantly, the book highlights that climate activism is alive and resilient in Eastern Africa, despite limited media

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coverage and the challenges posed by repressive regimes. By amplifying the work of local researchers, activists and practitioners, we send a powerful message: that grassroots action and activism matter, and that collaborative efforts are key to meaningful change.

We collectively direct attention to the region's minimal historical contribution to the climate crisis (Wengraf et al, 2023), juxtaposed with recent efforts to expand fossil fuel extraction; an objective that endangers the future of both people and ecosystems. We call out the entrenched power structures in both government and the private sector, and showcase the diverse efforts to challenge them. This is despite the fact that oil and gas discoveries and increased industrialization – which tends to benefit multinational corporations from the Minority World – have contributed to ozone-layer depletion, pollution and environmental degradation. Here, Eastern African researchers and activists have foregrounded lived experiences, centred their epistemologies and highlighted their 'stories from the forests'. They contribute to growing work, which centres on, in particular, civil society efforts to 'frame oil deposits as a stranded asset and advocate that oil remain in the ground … in order to remain within the limits of a world carbon budget', in contrast to the 'economic imperative' argument employed by political actors to extract despite the ecological consequences (Wokuri, 2025: 1). These stories are diverse, ranging from adaptation, mitigation, activism and survival strategies in a context where environmental challenges have put people's livelihoods on the ropes. It is important to listen to these knowledge creators and activists because they constitute narratives of hunters who have survived the vagaries of the forest and watched in shock as the climate changed over time: from unpredictable rainfall patterns to hot temperatures becoming intense, from flash floods becoming normalized to increased food insecurity.

This book affirms, through both literature and practical evidence, that Eastern Africa is severely affected by the impacts of climate change. It faces increasing frequency and intensity of droughts, floods and landslides. Refugees, particularly those living in camps and settlements across the region, are especially vulnerable, experiencing higher temperatures and lower rainfall than other areas (Bose, 2024; Fransen et al, 2024). The need to centre this experience influenced our choice of book cover – which features Phillip Kairu's collage, 'Bidi Bidi', on the environmental challenges that exist in the refugee camps in northern Uganda. Chapter 15 in the book explores the intersection of climate change and displacement, reminding us that Eastern Africa is home to millions of refugees forced to leave their homes by conflict, but increasingly by climate-related disasters, with the two often intertwined. While cross-border displacement is significant, internal displacement is even more widespread. Both populations increasingly find their way into the region's growing cities (Crawford, 2021; Earle, 2024;

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Crawford, 2025) – where new challenges are found as they find their way into unplanned and environmentally precarious informal settlements (Mattar and Crawford, 2023). These situations are often worse when individuals are part of multiple marginalized communities, such as LGBTQIA+ refugees (Crawford et al, 2025) or queer people with disabilities (McQuaid and Crawford, 2025). Yet, refugee and internally displaced communities are often left out of adaptation and resilience strategies, though their needs are just as urgent. The region's reliance on agriculture heightens its vulnerability, as climate change brings water stress, more incidence of pests and diseases; leading to reduced agricultural yields. Vulnerability is also reflected in limited employment opportunities, remote locations with inadequate infrastructure, and poor access to essential services.

This book highlights how climate change exacerbates pre-existing injustices and society's most vulnerable are structurally hit the hardest by climate change. By reading this book, we hope that activists and policy makers gain a wide-ranging understanding of the realities of climate change in the region.

The need for intersectional and decolonial climate justice

Collectively, the 39 authors/contributors – the majority of whom (over 60 per cent) are based in Africa – to *Climate Justice in Action* highlight the importance of intersectional climate actions that not only seek to curb environmental catastrophe triggered by erratic weather, heatwaves, floods and droughts in one of the most climate vulnerable regions in the world, but focus on transforming the inequalities that drive present and historical social and economic injustices. In doing so, our book shifts the gaze beyond vulnerabilities, to action and response, highlighting myriad creative pathways to activism and adaptation. They train our focus on the root causes of inequality and injustice, and the interconnections between multiple forms of marginalization and oppression. At the same time, they acknowledge climate adaptation involves significant yet often invisible labour that is undervalued and unequally distributed, and for climate justice and a just transition to be achieved, this labour must be recognized, redefined and transformed (Johnson et al, 2023).

In amplifying community voices, celebrating diversity and demonstrating the importance of intersectional approaches, *Climate Justice in Action* spotlights the lessons and leadership of Eastern Africa, offering key learnings for the global climate-justice movement. This includes the importance of rethinking the politics of climate knowledge and inclusion in order to decolonize and decentre hegemonic approaches that tend to replicate problematic binaries and exclusions. Too often, climate knowledge is dominated by certain people,

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from certain places, with little done to address entrenched barriers. As a small survey of climate-justice scholars' highlights, Majority World scholars often face 'restricted access to knowledge and technology, publishing difficulties, systemic pressures, development challenges, and repression' (Mikulewicz et al, 2023: 256). The authors here offer alternative communal and holistic visions for climate justice that emphasize intersectionality, solidarity, creativity and plurality. They also remind us that every effort in response to the climate crisis matters. Chapters in the book spotlight the importance of Indigenous knowledge, echoing calls about the importance of such knowledge in climate-change adaptation across the continent and beyond (Schlingmann et al, 2021l; Leal Filho et al, 2022).

Eastern Africa requires a coordinated approach where activism, adaptation efforts and policy making work together simultaneously and inform each other. It is crucial that all stakeholders embrace this collaborative mindset rather than working in silos. Without this we risk exacerbating or creating new vulnerabilities even through seemingly well-intentioned initiatives. For example, the way in which some climate finance policies and initiatives have exacerbated climate injustices (Dafermos, 2025). Our book intentionally brings together the voices of activists, artists, researchers, journalists and practitioners from across this diverse region, highlighting the urgent need for multiple perspectives, epistemologies and methodologies. From the conceptual underpinnings of solidarity and collectivity that integrate social, environmental and climate-justice movements, to policy innovations that entwine national, regional and international instruments and embed human rights principles, innovations to strengthen food and energy security, and women-centred programmes that resist the normalization of patriarchal power.

Our authors compel attention to lived experiences and local visions for radical transformations and more-than-human perspectives for alternative sustainable futures. Their accounts offer direct pathways to bringing grassroots perspectives to the centre of climate action, rethinking the politics of climate knowledge, and seeking a de- and anticolonial approach that directly addresses inequities of power in our responses to the compounding climate crisis. As Ikal Angelei notes in our Foreword 'By amplifying local communities' voices, challenging unjust power structures, and proposing innovative, holistic approaches, African environmental advocacy is at the forefront, leading the push for global climate action.'

Climate action and activism: tools, challenges and futures

In this, the chapters of our book speak for themselves. They demonstrate how climate action is laden with politics. For sustainable climate action,

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there is need to acknowledge that activism and policy making should be context specific, taking into account historical antecedents and situated in local and Indigenous knowledge systems to gain traction and collective ownership. There is a need for collaborative activism, rights and planetary consciousness, which embraces epistemologies and experiential Indigenous knowledges and systems of Majority World people and communities. The inclusion of marginalized groups is a non-negotiable issue if durable and lasting solutions to climate action are to be found. Drawing on the lessons of a transdisciplinary research project in urban South Africa, the importance of building marginalized communities 'capacity to adapt locally and to integrate their perspectives into higher-level adaptation measures' has been stressed, and that 'knowledge co-creation at the community level is central to the capacity building that is needed in order to inform transformative adaptation' (Ziervogel et al, 2022: 607). This echoes the importance of commitment to epistemic justice within climate-change programmes and scholarship.

Transformation does not happen overnight. Wangari Maathai's journey – the subject of Chapter 1 in this book – shows that it can take years of steady, nonconfrontational work to build a strong movement. For over a decade, her efforts focused on community engagement, education, and trust building, laying a solid foundation supported by local communities and even parts of the government. Only after this groundwork was in place did the movement grow into a powerful force, capable of challenging harmful government policies related to deforestation and human rights abuses.

The next generation of climate activists and policy makers understand that climate change is taking place within a context of multifaceted crises, or 'polycrisis', where multiple, and interconnected challenges are colliding in complex and unpredictable ways. For example, the aforementioned connection between food insecurity, conflict and climate change. There is a need to build a collective voice among activists pushing for different sociopolitical and environmental causes so that the resultant solutions can address the root causes of these complex, interrelated issues. An intersectional climate activism rooted and turbo charged by marginalized groups including women, youth, older people, displaced communities, diffabled individuals and queer communities holds promise to galvanize different constituencies.

Climate Justice in Action showcases initiatives such as water-harvesting technologies, training in climate-smart agriculture, and fruit tree planting. Expanding the reach and impact of such initiatives through increased climate financing is both urgent and essential. Our authors offer a rich collection of tools and strategies for activists to use in their work. These include public-awareness campaigns, digital activism, coalition building, protests, community organizing, reforestation efforts, petitions, media campaigns and litigation. It also emphasizes the importance of forming a wide range

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of partnerships including with students, civil society groups, religious organizations, international media and global climate movements.

Young people are no longer waiting for a seat at the table – this book clearly shows that they are bringing their own chairs and tables when marginalized from climate-change discourse. By amplifying local communities' voices, challenging unjust power structures, and proposing innovative, holistic approaches, this book highlights how young African climate activists are at the forefront, leading the push for global climate action. Through community initiatives like Citizen Voice and Action (CVA), the SAUTI-Youth programme in Tanzani – detailed in Chapter 12 – enables young people to influence policy decisions and advocate for environmental sustainability. It is also essential to focus not only young citizens, but young people who have been displaced and offer a range of knowledge and insight from experiencing environmental challenges in their home, as well as in refugee camps and cities in neighbouring countries (McQuaid and Crawford, 2025b). Activism is often complex and burdensome, as clearly reflected in the stories shared in this book. Challenges should be expected. Activists should not be caught off guard by attempts to silence their voices. Even when governments adopt policies aligned with activist goals, those in power often act against these very policies due to conflicting interests and their ability to do so with impunity.

This book highlights instances where activists have been arrested or harassed by police – a form of systemic violence rooted in colonial legacies. According to nearly 3,000 cases analyzed from the global Environmental Justice Atlas, environmental defenders faced higher rates of assassinations (13 per cent), physical violence (18 per cent), and criminalization (20 per cent) – all of which are significantly higher for Indigenous communities (Schridrl, 2020). Women environmental defenders face notable instances of violence, notably in cases of resource extraction, though gendered violence in Africa is understudied (Tran and Hanaček, 2024). These cases are particularly prevalent among minority, poor, rural, and Indigenous women (Tran and Hanaček, 2023) – underscoring the need for an intersectional analysis and more focus on Eastern Africa. In the private sector, silencing may take more subtle forms, such as bribing activists through job offers. The media also plays a role, selectively amplifying certain voices while sidelining others, particularly in mainstream outlets that reinforce existing power imbalances through gatekeeping. The case of Associated Press erasure of Ugandan activist Vanessa Nakate in 2020 – discussed within this book – is the most well-known, but far from the only one (Hasan, 2024). Staying informed and critically aware of these dynamics is essential – while also resisting them whenever possible.

We need to also be vigilant of who is excluded from environmental action efforts. Uwimana Seifu, an activist for HUMURE, in Burundi and a

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contributor to this chapter, highlights how difficult it is for members of the LGBTQIA+ communities to engage in environmental work and sustainable development due to the constant threat of insecurity. He explains that while many want to contribute, they often do so indirectly out of fear for their safety. As a community leader, Uwimana recalls an initiative to clean up the shores of Lake Tanganyika. The Lake borders the west of Burundi and provides access to water, food and livelihoods for the country, and faces challenges as a result of climate change (Phiri et al, 2023). Uwimana recalls that the Lake is severely polluted by debris from upstream rivers – but notes the challenges of participating openly. Although an LBQ organization was able to take part using simple, accessible materials, their efforts lacked sustainability due to limited funding and support. Seif emphasizes that for GTBQ individuals, especially transgender people, public involvement can be dangerous, as dressing visibly and working in public spaces often invites harassment. His experience underscores that environmental justice in Burundi and elsewhere cannot be separated from the struggle for LGBTQIA+ rights and safety, a point returned to in the following section by Eric Ndawula from Uganda.

Similarly, diffabled people often face significant barriers to participating in climate action, activism and adaptation efforts, including physical inaccessibility, lack of inclusive communication, and exclusion from decision-making processes. Emergency planning and adaptation strategies frequently overlook their specific needs, placing them at heightened risk during climate-related disasters. As articulated in other Majority World contexts, vulnerability to disasters and environmental hazards, 'is due not to their bodies and minds, but to multiple and reinforcing systemic (and normalised) socio-cultural, economic, and political barriers in daily life' (Pirmasari and McQuaid, 2023: 292). However, diffabled activists and community members bring critical knowledge, lived experience and leadership to climate-justice movements. Diffabled people must be actively included as stakeholders in climate and environmental research and decision making, using an intersectional, disability rights-based approach. International and national bodies, along with sustainability programmes, should ensure meaningful participation of disabled communities and specialists to inform equitable adaptation, conservation, and resilience strategies (Kosanic et al, 2022).

We need to ensure that climate action and adaptation is accessible to all – with particular attention to groups who are not only disproportionally impacted by climate change and its consequences, but are regularly excluded from policies and practices to help combat and tackle disasters and environmental injustices. Our understanding of climate change, and our responses to it, must be intersectional and inclusive. With this in mind, in the sections that follow, we hear directly from the voices of leaders in

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Eastern Africa's climate-justice movements. In lieu of a 'conclusion' at the close of our book, we instead look towards the future and how to adapt, advocate and resist in the face of the climate crisis. Learning from the voices in this book is not just an act of solidarity, it is a necessary step toward global and intersectional climate justice that includes everyone, especially those on the frontlines.

Eric Ndawula (Lifeline Youth Empowerment Centre, Uganda)

Eastern Africa has never just been a region in crisis, it is a region of innovation, resilience and radical imagination. For too long, the global climate conversation has silenced or tokenized our voices. This book challenges that. It shifts the gaze from what is being done to us to what is being done by us. In this region, adaptation isn't a buzzword, it's a daily practice. We adapt when we grow food on concrete rooftops. We resist when we call out extractive industries. We transform when we build community in places designed to exclude us. And within this struggle, queer voices offer essential insights, not only because we are disproportionately affected, but because we bring with us a legacy of reimagining what justice, family, and survival can look like. This book will serve as a testament to that reimagining. And that's why I'm honoured to be part of it.

Climate justice must be intersectional

In Eastern Africa, those most impacted by climate change are already marginalized, queer people, women, youth, the urban poor. Yet too often, climate responses fail to address the structural exclusions these groups face. At Lifeline, we've witnessed how climate shocks like flooding and drought compound social inequalities. For queer youth already excluded from formal employment and public services, climate change simply deepens existing vulnerabilities. In our Equal Victims project[1], which focuses on intimate partner violence (IPV) among gay, bisexual and queer men, we've seen how economic instability, often climate-related, can lead to heightened domestic tensions and violence in same-sex relationships. A climate-justice movement that isn't inclusive of queer and other marginalized voices cannot truly be just.

Community knowledge is power

One of the most impactful lessons from our work is that community members are not passive victims – they are active knowledge holders and innovators. Through the Equal Victims project, rural outreach

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sessions, and storytelling platforms, we've documented how queer people adapt in extraordinary ways: urban gardens in cramped informal settlements, shared housing cooperatives to withstand evictions, and mutual aid networks in moments of food insecurity. We've seen queer elders recall forgotten ecological wisdom and young leaders start urban farming collectives in deeply hostile environments. These aren't just coping mechanisms, they are radical acts of resilience that deserve to be honoured and supported.

Climate grief is real!! And so is joy

Working at the intersection of queerness, trauma and environmental collapse, I've seen grief take many forms. Grief for the land. Grief for homes lost. Grief for the freedom to simply exist. But I've also seen moments of incredible joy, joy that emerges from chosen families, from the small wins, from collective care. In our safe houses, in storytelling circles, in food-sharing projects, we've witnessed how queer communities, even in crisis, hold onto life with such fierce tenderness. That energy, grief held in one hand and joy in the other, is what sustains our movements. The next generation must learn to hold both if they're to carry this work forward.

Protect queer and other marginalized climate migrants

As climate-related displacement increases, queer people are uniquely at risk and often invisible within humanitarian responses. In places like Kakuma Refugee Camp in Kenya, LGBTQIA+ refugees have faced horrific violence (Amnesty International, 2023), from physical beatings to arson, at the hands of fellow refugees and local actors. These stories are not isolated; they're part of a broader pattern of exclusion and abandonment. Many queer migrants cannot access basic aid because of criminalization or stigma, and there are no safety nets in place. If climate justice does not explicitly include displaced queer people, through inclusive housing, legal recognition and trauma-informed services, then it is not justice at all.

Fund queer-led green innovation

Queer people are already building solutions. At Lifeline, I've seen queer youth transform waste into tools, plant sustainable food systems in small urban spaces, and design peer education platforms that combine climate awareness with sexual health. But these innovations rarely receive funding. They fall outside traditional development models that are still uncomfortable with queerness. The next decade must prioritize investing in queer-led environmental responses, not as charity, but as necessity. If we want to scale impact, we must

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fund what's already working and trust those closest to the problem to lead the solutions.

Sostine Namanya (WoMin African Alliance, South Africa)

First, it's critical to recognize that the climate crisis is inherently unjust. It disproportionately affects those least responsible for causing it. This isn't just a carbon or a technical challenge but interlinked with histories and structures of systemic injustices. Climate 'solutions' that ignore this context risk deepening other crises by dispossessing communities of their lands and resources, which allow them to deal with other crises. Future climate actors must prioritize intersectional analysis. The systems that perpetuate climate injustice, colonialism, capitalism, patriarchy are deeply interconnected. These power structures produce and perpetuate the climate crisis, and we must recognize that these issues cannot be addressed in isolation. Movements must be built with this systematic awareness, rooted in solidarity across struggles from Indigenous land rights to gender justice and, most importantly, women's liberation. We must therefore shift from managing symptoms to transforming root causes. We must resist those that serve the current model of development and instead support approaches that challenge extractive development systems. Climate-justice movements must dismantle these interlocking systems and structures of power, and support movements that promote gender equality, environmental stewardship and climate resilience simultaneously. Without this systemic approach, we risk pouring solutions into a bottomless pit, feeding the capitalist beast with an insatiable appetite for exploitation and inequality. Our priority must not merely mitigate symptoms but transform the very foundations that perpetuate climate injustice.

Bridging siloed movements with intersectional and feminist approaches

In my work across Eastern Africa, I have seen how climate injustice is inseparable from economic inequality, militarization, gender-based violence and political repression. Yet too often our movements are siloed. We need to deepen collaboration between feminist, environmental, Indigenous and anticapitalist movements. Feminism, in this context, is not only about gender but a way of understanding power and for imagining alternatives rooted in care and collective power and that reject extractive capitalism. Feminist climate justice must centre those most impacted by extractivism, Indigenous communities, and the rural poor. It must challenge systems of 'power over' that rely on fear, violence and dispossession. It must

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uplift traditional knowledge and community-led resistance as visionary paths forward.

Saying NO to harmful climate damaging solutions and reclaiming ecological sovereignty

The climate justice movement must take a firm stand against the corporate capture of climate responses, from carbon markets to green washing by multinationals companies. In the communities I work with, we see how these solutions replicate the same harm they claim to address, fuelling land grabs, evictions and resource theft. Instead, we must strengthen resistance to the extractive model of development and invest in approaches that restore community control over land, forests and water resources. This includes fighting for Indigenous sovereignty, collective land tenure, and different notions of democracy.

Ecofeminism

We must centre ecofeminist principles as a response to the ecological and climate crisis, such as values of solidarity – ubuntu ('I am because we are') – from Africa. Support the interdependence of all life at the core: the human and the other forms of life human/more than human; these linkages have been broken and separated and invisibilized. Community efforts to repair these, to take these back, to defend these, this is feminist climate justice. The ecofeminist approach's vision is for rural women to be involved in all decision making and to grow, sell and consume the products of their family farms, be in leadership, own land and be key decision makers in society. The values, beliefs and actions of ecofeminism is also to know that capitalism, colonialism, racism, patriarchy and the climate crisis are all closely interconnected and that collective action by women is essential in this fight.

Political justice

We also cannot ignore the realities of militarization, occupation and conflict from Palestine to Sudan to DRC to Western Sahara. Climate justice cannot exist under occupation or genocide. These struggles must not be made invisible in our movements. Climate justice is incomplete without political justice. Our solutions must not be based on arbitrary national boundaries, but rather bioregions and ecosystems (such as the Congo Basin or Amazon Rainforest). This reflects our understanding that environmental challenges and movements transcend political borders, and that cross-regional knowledge exchange is essential for building global solidarity.

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It's time we are listened to not as victims but as alternative visionaries

Eastern Africa stands at a tipping point of escalating ecological and climate crisis impacts and growing structural inequalities. It's also rich in resistance, strengths and climate transformative visions, yet is often overlooked in global conversations. We must find ways to learn from one another. Like trees in a forest, we can create a thriving ecosystem, with each our shared knowledge and relationships contributing to our collective survival and well-being. Focusing on climate-justice activism in Eastern Africa is not just about representation, but it's about justice. Our communities are on the frontlines of climate breakdown and our stories reveal the depth of the change needed. We bring critical perspectives rooted in struggle, and resilience shaped by histories of colonialism, resource plunder and imposed development models. We carry anger and knowledge that challenges the dominant narrative that is connected to colonization, capitalism, patriarchy and racism and the harmful model of development. It's time we are listened to not as victims but as alternative visionaries.

Anabela Lemos (Justiça Ambiental! Mozambique)

Our work is rooted in connecting local grassroots struggles against dirty energy that are the main drivers of the polycrisis, with the climate-justice movement nationally, regionally and internationally, and to help build people's power towards real people-centred climate solutions. At Justiça Ambiental![2] we do research and we work with allied civil society in the Global North to strengthen our struggles. Mozambique is one of the countries most affected by ravages of the climate crisis. In 2019, Cyclone Idai and Cyclone Kenneth killed at least 1,400 people in Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Malawi. Hundreds of thousands were displaced, and many died of cholera and other illnesses in the aftermath. Those are the bigger, more visible impacts, but there are less visible impacts that communities in Mozambique are facing everyday: increase of droughts in one part of the county, floods in another, rain during dry season is a constant stress for lives that are made more and more precarious by maldevelopment. To make things worse, the Mozambique government has opened the doors of our country for foreign investment in coal, gas, transition minerals, timber, precious stones and more. Like other African governments, their narrative is that they have the right to exploit their fossil fuels and develop the country as the Global North did.

People are losing their basic right to say NO

The Global South did not cause the climate crisis; it is clear that the Global North is legally and morally culpable for the crisis and must act first and

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strongest to address their historic and current carbon emissions. However, the actual situation we are in today means that the Global North has polluted so much that there is no space for more new fossil fuel exploration in our countries. Transnational corporations from the Global North such as Total, Eni, Exxon Mobil use this narrative of African governments to carry on exploring fossil fuels and as such to carry on business as usual. We are not sure why the Global South governments do not realize that what they are claiming is their right is actually the right to fall into an abyss. It is greed, complicity, ignorance of local and global elites, but for sure is not for the peoples of the Global South. On top of increasing emissions, environmental destruction, worsening climate impacts, the rural subsistence-based communities, the directly affected peoples are not gaining anything, they are losing their lands, their forests, their access to the sea and rivers and are losing their basic right to say NO.

Dangerous investments

The gas exploitation in Cabo Delgado is a clear example of these types of dangerous investments. After losing their lands and livelihoods, communities are living in poverty and the number of human rights violations has skyrocketed. Civil society and journalists who speak out are threatened or killed, and the communities that raise their voices either are disappeared or threatened to the point to stop raising their voices. At the national level, our *impune* (unpunished) government is now threatening to pass new laws to shrink civil society space even further. For sure these investments do benefit the political and corporate elite, so they carry on.

Community rights, system change and grassroots solidarity

Our work is at local, national, regional and international levels to raise awareness about the climate crisis and its key drivers. We integrate climate-justice considerations and an understanding of system change to shape our demands and priorities for climate action. We fight to stop the gas and coal exploitation in Mozambique and we highlight the urgency of ending fossil fuel dependence, while large-scale dams and monoculture plantations expose the flaws in false solutions and carbon markets. At the same time, we support communities affected by those projects, to demand their rights. In Cabo Delgado, the gas industry has already taken land from thousands of local people. Some have been removed by force and others were removed by mutual agreement but are still waiting for land and proper compensation. The so-called consultation process was a joke, with community members unable to dissent for fear of retaliation. Fishing communities, who once lived 10 metres from the sea were moved more than 10 km away from

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their fishing grounds and farmers were moved far from their land. These subsistence communities are losing their entire livelihoods, and many previously self-sufficient communities have been turned dependent, now living off food aid. After Total claimed *force majeure* on their project back in April 2021 and put the project on pause, people are living in abject poverty, and many who had agreed to receive compensation from Total have not received these payments and don't know when they will again. Because of this displacement, and the violence, many people are now living in refugee centres.

JA's longest-running campaign is the fight against the proposed Mphanda Nkuwa dam. Since 2000, this campaign has worked alongside affected riverine communities, Mozambican and international civil society partners, academics and experts to expose the project's impacts and to defend the people's right to say NO. At the same time, we support the implementation of clean and renewable energy, owned and managed by the community, by installing solar power docks for charging electronic devices in Zambézia and Tete provinces. We hope this initiative contributes to showcasing the types of energy solutions that can be adopted in our country, providing communal clean energy to local communities, and stimulating their cooperation and solidarity.

What future activists should prioritize, remember or include in their action

1. Find a way to reach governments, decision makers and even some big influential civil society organizations to understand the drivers of the climate crisis, debunking myths around hydropower and gas as clean climate solutions, and promoting alternative narratives that present real, decentralized, clean energy solutions that benefit the people rather than large corporations and industries.
2. For better lives of dignity for Mozambican and other Global South peoples, our governments and industry must move financing from all fossil fuels to enable a just transition to renewable energy; providing the infrastructure and capital needed for renewable energy, the relevant education, and the technology without patents; and cancel national debt, which is trapping our countries.
3. Campaign to stop finance for those projects, raise your voices against the human rights violations, take Global North companies to court for their human rights abuses, even if they claim that it is the responsibility of the government not them. We need to expose the complicity between the companies and the government. We need more research on corruption and to expose the names in the media.

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Decentralized people-centred energy systems based on justice

It is really important to work towards stopping fossil fuels, and at the same time, uplift financing and vision for a people-centred just energy system. We also need to debunk the narrative of false-solution schemes, such as REDD, megadams, gas as a transition fuel, carbon markets and geoengineering. There are no silver bullets to stop these multiple crises.

The exploration of fossil fuels not only increases emissions but comes with human rights violations, land grabbing, loss of livelihoods: that is our Global South reality and most of the energy is not even for our peoples, but for export. The solution is community-based decentralized energy systems, run by people and based on justice. It is possible and much easier in parts of the Global South, as the majority of our people in Mozambique, for example, do not have access to electricity and the grid doesn't reach them, so decentralized, off-grid solutions can work here. In Mozambique only 35–40 per cent of our people have energy. The work we have done with the solar docks project has given an immense benefit to communities by providing small-scale alternative energy sources – not just for charging mobile phones and listening to the radio but also as gathering places/commons where people can socialize while using the energy. Several families have greater access to energy and this is fostering social interaction in these now well-lit areas. Access to information and education has also expanded, with many children and young people using the solar-powered lighting to study and read at night. Although still limited in scale, these solar dock installations have demonstrated the feasibility of local, decentralized and community-managed solutions. This small solar dock project has shown that the alternatives it promotes are not only viable but also transformational.

We are living in a climate crisis and we do not expect that our governments and fossil fuel companies that caused the problem to begin with, will come with the solution, as they are all complicit within the capitalism system that puts profit above people, and they will try as much to push false solutions, which allows them to carry on business as usual and being complicit as usual.

Terry Otieno (Specialist on Civil Society Engagement in Sustainable Development, Kenya)

For every action or inaction, there is a consequence and the concept of climate justice clearly demonstrates this, holding every one of us responsible over the current climate-change situation. Eastern Africa is in the Global South, which bears the brunt of climate change, leading many of us into activism to call out those we know and see as the leading perpetrators of the climate crisis. We continue to converge in various settings including climate

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conferences that result in written agreements that demonstrate the perspective of whistleblowing over and over again. Not to undermine the essential role that whistleblowers play, but I believe we have reached a saturation point. While a few of us can maintain this role, many should shift focus onto the next area. But what are the next key areas?

Summit of the future

As a policy advisor with a decade of working with civil society in the humanitarian context, I have grown from a youth to a professional expert engaging across the 17 Sustainable Development Goals' (SDGs) follow-up and review platforms, which have seen me facilitating projects at local levels, collaborating with various experts at regional levels, and drawing position papers that feed into global policy frameworks. Most recently, I facilitated the participation of 17 nonstate actor groups in the Summit of the Future as a Project Officer of the Stakeholder Engagement Mechanism, under a grant offered by the United Nations office for Disaster Risk Reduction. The summit was a high-level event that provided an opportunity to reimagine the multilateral system and steer humanity on a new course. We spent over a year in the policy-making process of the Pact of the Future – the outcome document of Summit of the Future.

As civil society actors, we wrote and submitted countless position papers and appeared in readings and negotiation meetings as well as lobbied through the UN member states to get our perspectives on how to chart a new course of humanity. I deep dived and evaluated the Pact of the Future after it was adopted in September 2024 to find noteworthy resilience building strategies that we had advocated for as a mechanism of nonstate actors in Disaster Risk Reduction, and the article of my findings was published on UNDRR's prevention web. Having been on both sides of projects and policies at various levels, it is with confidence that I know for sure that the next key area that activists and policy makers should focus on is Localization of Projects! Thus, the following are three important perspectives that activists and policy makers should remember in their works.

Adopt a multistakeholder and intergenerational perspective

Activism and the development of policy documents will always be needed, but advocating for how the latter is conducted is essential as policies are the foundation of the project designs that can transform our planet. The UN provides avenues for stakeholders to share knowledge on diverse global issues. What many see as conferences, are actually the final parts of long-term negotiation processes between various stakeholders including civil

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society and the UN member states to select critical matters. A conference, therefore, is a key process for a select agenda; like Summit of the Future's agenda was to accelerate efforts to meet existing international commitments and taking concrete steps to address emerging challenges and opportunities. For a conference to be held, it takes months that can run over a year to table, discuss and debate the way forward and strategies to address a select issue. The agreed upon notions are combined into a written document referred to as the outcome document. These documents usually get named as I explained above, for example the outcome document for Summit of the Future is referred to as 'Pact of the Future'.

To date, the UN negotiates with member states on all the key issues of sustainability. Yes, the UN has made tremendous steps to include civil society, including the annual UN Civil Society Conferences as well as dialogues and consultations that form a part of the conferences and submission of position papers that are considered during the formulation of zero drafts of the outcome documents for these key processes-conferences, but ultimately, the member states scrutinize and approve the particulars in the outcome documents of the key processes. Activists and policy makers should advocate for multistakeholder approaches at all levels, including having civil society representatives, through the Major Groups and other Stakeholders (MGoS) that provides an organized structured way for civil society actors to engage with the UN, with voting powers just like the member states in the adoption processes that require voting for the outcome documents. Notably, having these voting powers would mean having the ability to negotiate the content directly and more strongly without necessarily having to lobby through member states. Likewise, we must advocate for intergenerational inclusion to not only ensure activists of different age groups and stakeholder groups are included in these key spaces, but for vulnerable populations including women and girls and those living with disabilities to have reserve spots that are not for show, but have true influence and power that comes with voting rights.

Build resilience across sectors and be aware of negative cascading effects

Resilience is the ability of systems to function in the face of disturbance. Activists and policy makers should embrace the concept of resilience and embed it into their works. This would mean acting more intentionally to anticipate occurrences that allow us to create systems that can absorb, recover, adapt and transform amidst uncertainties such as a shift of governance policies, a change of the ecosystem, or access to funding among others. With this renewed perspective, activists and policy makers can advocate for projects that provide long-term gains. Resilience allows us to shock proof the developmental gains we get from projects. The more projects we have,

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the more realistic we make the call for climate justice. Advocate to design projects that allow you to not only frame it in a more context-specific way, but also use the design phase to scan the project to avoid any negative cascading effects, where one project causes a chain or bad reaction across other sectors.

Bridge global frameworks and localization

Climate justice calls for fairness which in an Eastern African context, is long overdue. Eastern Africa faces a rapidly growing population that is driving unplanned urban development that puts our livelihoods and the ecosystems at risk. As we continue to face the effects of climate change, the Eastern African population becomes vulnerable as the ecosystem deteriorates. While there are numerous global frameworks such as the Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, Agenda 2030, Transforming our World: the 2030 agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the Paris Agreement under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, localization of projects must be context specific. This is why this book is essential. It highlights the perspectives of Eastern Africans working across the climate-justice sector, bridging the gap between intellectual and practical knowledge of global frameworks and localization.

Luwedde JulietGrace (UNCCD Youth Caucus, Uganda)

If I were to speak directly to the next generation of climate activists and policy makers, there are three most important learnings I would pass on. Firstly, climate justice must be rooted in local lived experiences. Climate change doesn't just affect ecosystems, it disrupts everyday lives, livelihoods and entire cultures. My work with rural and periurban youth during my time at both the African Youth Initiative on Climate Change and the Media Challenge Initiative showed me that solutions must be designed with the communities they intend to serve. This means cocreation, not consultation, and valuing Indigenous knowledge alongside scientific expertise.

Climate justice is not abstract; it must be grounded in the real and often unequal consequences people face, and at the same time, it's important for each individual to define for themselves what environmental justice means to them. To me, environmental justice means ensuring that all communities regardless of socioeconomic status, geographic location, or identity have the right to live in healthy, sustainable environments and meaningfully participate in decisions that affect them. It is about recognizing the disproportionate burden of environmental harm placed on marginalized and under-resourced communities, while working intentionally to dismantle the systems that

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allow these injustices to persist. Growing up in Uganda, in a single parent household, I have seen firsthand how climate change, deforestation, pollution and land degradation impact rural and urban communities differently. While some can adapt or escape, others are left behind, often without the tools, information or platforms to voice their needs. This has led me to have the understanding that ultimately, environmental justice is about power, who holds it, who shares it and how it is used.

Recognize youth tenacity

When I think about youth leadership, I think about tenacity. Personally, I've had to fight to be in certain spaces and prove that I belonged in certain rooms. I remember, just a few years ago, struggling to get policy makers to listen to me or even acknowledge that my contribution mattered. But I didn't let that discourage me. Deep down, I knew that as a young person determined to work in policy spaces, I didn't need anyone's permission to begin. I kept showing up. I kept knocking on doors. I kept reaching out until eventually, they gave me a seat at the table.

When I started working with the African Initiative on Climate Change, I knew I had to demonstrate the value of youth perspectives and why our engagement was not optional, it was essential. One of the first big steps I took was reviewing Uganda's Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC1). At the time, my goal was simple: to understand how youth were reflected in my country's climate action plan. Were we mentioned at all? Did the plan speak to the needs of our communities? After conducting my analysis, I shared it with Uganda's UNFCCC National Focal Point. Their response was encouraging: 'This is good, maybe you should start joining these conversations.' That moment opened a door for me, not because I waited for it, but because I showed that youth leadership is not a nice to have. It's essential and this brings me to my second reflection. Young people in Eastern Africa are not waiting to be invited; they are already organizing, innovating and leading change. Through my role in the UNCCD Youth Caucus and various grassroots initiatives, I've witnessed the power of youth networks to mobilize communities, hold institutions accountable, and reimagine our future. But their contributions are often under-resourced or tokenized. The next generation must insist on meaningful inclusion from design to decision making.

Justice is rooted in intersectionality

Justice must be intersectional because when I think about justice, I think about it from my perspective as a young woman from the Global South, specifically, from Uganda. I think about it through the lens of someone

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who grew up in a society where girls' education was often frowned upon. In my own household (my dad should never read this) education was a priority for the boys. Even when he wanted to support my sisters and me, he didn't have the financial resources to do so. That meant I had to drop out of school. My third reflection, therefore, is that justice must be intersectional. Gender, age, economic status, land access and geography all shape how people experience the impacts of climate change and inequality. Not having the opportunity to gain formal academic qualifications could have closed many doors for me but it didn't. Instead, it pushed me toward activism, a space where I didn't need a degree to show up, speak out, and take action. All I needed was passion, drive, and a commitment to making a difference. Over time, I've carved out space for myself in this field and have had the privilege of doing meaningful, impactful work. Through my current work on gender and youth engagement, it's clear to me that young women and marginalized communities are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, but they are often excluded from the very decision-making spaces shaping their futures. For future activists and policy makers, justice must be more than a buzzword. It must be rooted in intersectionality. No-one should be left behind in the journey toward a just transition, regardless of their age, economic background, academic qualifications or where they come from.

Fund youth and prioritize land rights

Over the next 10 years, the climate-justice movement must prioritize two critical areas that I've seen repeatedly emerge through my work: land rights and tenure security for women and youth, and scaling of youth-led innovation through sustainable financing mechanisms.

Eastern Africa is full of youth-led climate solutions: brilliant, community-rooted and context specific. From regenerative agriculture practices to circular economy models that turn waste into energy, I've seen young people lead with creativity and courage. But the truth is, most of these initiatives remain stuck at the pilot stage because they lack sustainable financing and institutional support. The gap is never in ideas, it's in access. Therefore, we need to move beyond token youth inclusion and start funding youth as long-term partners and leaders. This means building financing pipelines that are accessible, flexible and tailored to the realities of young entrepreneurs and organizers. The future of climate resilience in our region depends on whether we invest in these solutions today.

Through my advocacy within the UNCCD Youth Caucus and our ongoing work to localize the Decision 26/COP.14 on land tenure, I've seen how policy can shift power. This is especially the case for the part spelling out that Parties must legally recognize equal use and ownership rights of land for women and the enhancement of women's equal access to land and land tenure security, as

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well as the promotion of gender-sensitive measures to combat desertification/land degradation and drought and achieve land degradation neutrality, while taking into account the national context. But policy alone is not enough. Case in point, without secure access to land, it is nearly impossible for communities to build lasting climate resilience. This is something I've witnessed time and again in Uganda, where I work closely with youth networks and rural communities. For many young people and women, legal and cultural barriers continue to limit our ability to own or control land. Yet, when these barriers are removed even partially, I've seen how quickly communities begin to invest in land restoration and sustainable practices. What we need now is implementation that centres those most affected, particularly young women because when women and youth have control over land, they also gain a stronger voice in decision making, access to resources, and the ability to plan for the long term. These two focus areas – financing youth-led innovation and advancing land rights – are not just policy priorities. They are pathways to justice, agency and transformation for the communities I stand alongside every day.

Eastern Africa is a source of leadership

Climate justice cannot be fully understood or meaningfully achieved without centring those of us who live its consequences every day. As a young woman from Uganda, I've witnessed first hand both the harsh realities of climate impacts and the incredible strength of communities responding to them. Eastern Africa is not just a region of vulnerability; it's a region of resilience, innovation, and deep-rooted environmental wisdom. Across the region, I've seen young people, women, farmers, pastoralists and local changemakers lead the way in driving real solutions from restoring degraded land to shaping national policy conversations. These stories matter. Yet too often, they're drowned out by narratives from the Global North that frame Africa only through the lens of crisis. That's why this book is so important. By amplifying the voices of Eastern African researchers, activists and practitioners, it helps correct that imbalance and creates space for new, more just ways of thinking and doing. The world must stop treating Africa as a site of intervention and start listening to it as a source of leadership.

Obed Koringo (CARE International, Kenya)

There is power in numbers. Strengthening alliances is essential in the fight for climate justice. No single actor can address the climate crisis alone. Building and working within alliances and partnerships amplifies collective voices, enhances influence and drives systemic change. When diverse groups unite, they gain greater decision-making power, which can be used to demand accountability, push for equitable climate policies, and ensure that the most

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affected communities are not left behind. These collaborations build trust, foster shared leadership, and lay the foundation for long-term, just climate action. Collaboration with key allies and strategic partners/networks, and when it is done in an inclusive manner and grounded in collective action, can play a pivotal role in shaping policies and ensuring fair representation in decision-making processes.

Pay attention to diversity, inclusion and intersectionality

Climate justice begins with working alongside and truly listening to the communities on the frontlines of the climate and environmental crisis. These communities are not just victims, but they hold knowledge, experience and solutions that are central to shaping climate responses. A just approach requires that decision-making processes are inclusive and grounded in local realities. This also involves paying close attention to diversity, inclusion and intersectionality while ensuring that the voices of the most vulnerable and marginalized are heard, and that power is not concentrated in the hands of a few. This is the only way we can avoid elite capture and build solutions and contribute to policies that are fair, effective and rooted in justice.

Fund and support youth networks

Youth networks are essential to advancing climate justice and must be adequately funded and supported through strong, equitable partnerships. Youth-led and youth-centred initiatives have the unique ability to connect grassroots and frontline communities with national and international climate efforts. These networks serve as crucial bridges, amplifying the voices and priorities of marginalized groups and ensuring that community realities shape climate policies. To achieve true climate justice, young people must be meaningfully and equitably included in high-level decision-making spaces, not just as symbolic participants, but as influential actors shaping transformative solutions. Sustained investment and strategic collaborations are necessary to equip youth networks with the resources and skills they need to drive systemic change.

A fair and just energy transition

A just energy transition in Africa is one of the most pressing issues in today's climate debate. Despite rich renewable resources, nearly three-quarters of the continent's population still lacks access to energy. The Eastern Africa region is no exception. Additionally, investment in renewable energy has been alarmingly low and current statistics indicate that Africa has received less than 2 per cent of global renewable energy funding over the

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past 20 years. Energy, climate and development are deeply connected. While energy is vital for meeting basic needs and driving progress, the continued reliance on fossil fuels across Eastern Africa and beyond is a major contributor to the climate crisis. The push to expand fossil fuel extraction (such as oil and coal) in countries like Uganda and Kenya threatens to lock the region into carbon-heavy pathways, with projects at risk of becoming stranded assets.

At the same time, African countries are caught in global energy power plays, as foreign nations compete to access the continent's fossil gas, hydrogen and critical minerals. This rush echoes colonial patterns: raw materials leave Africa while the value and profits stay abroad, keeping African economies dependent and stuck at the bottom of the value chain.

The climate-justice movement must step up to ensure Africa's energy transition is fair, equitable and centred on people, one that brings lasting benefits to communities and doesn't repeat the mistakes of the past.

Ensure carbon markets do not become instruments of exploitation

Governments across Eastern Africa and beyond are increasingly entering carbon market agreements, often without the necessary safeguards to ensure equity, transparency and accountability. Without careful design and oversight, these markets may risk causing significant harm to vulnerable communities while violating fundamental human rights, among other things. For instance, we have witnessed eviction of some Indigenous groups from their ancestral lands to pave way for carbon offsetting schemes. Currently, most of these carbon market mechanisms operate with limited transparency, minimal community involvement, and insufficient independent oversight. The creation of a complex technocratic system and methodologies further shifts power away from people and local governments and communities, and towards a global elite that are the principal cause of the climate crisis, and the main beneficiaries of carbon credits. Furthermore, there is a risk of enabling greenwashing, allowing high-emitting countries to avoid real emissions reductions. The climate-justice movement's work is already cut out by playing a central role in shaping these frameworks to ensure that carbon markets do not become instruments of exploitation. Instead, they must channel benefits directly to frontline communities and support climate solutions that are just, inclusive, and genuinely transformative.

Locally led adaptation is a cornerstone of climate justice

For far too long, decisions about climate action have been made in distant boardrooms and global forums, which are often dominated by elites and

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without meaningful participation of those most impacted. This top-down approach has left vulnerable communities marginalized from processes that directly affect their lives and futures. Moving forward, we must shift power and agency to the local level. Locally led adaptation (LLA) must be a cornerstone of climate justice. This means that more than just implementing projects at the local level, there's a need to put local communities in the driver's seat of planning, prioritizing and implementing climate responses. For adaptation to be effective and equitable, finance must flow directly to these communities, through accessible, transparent and accountable mechanisms.

Kenya offers an important example. Its devolved governance system has enabled county governments to set up county climate-change funds, ensuring that adaptation finance reaches grassroots levels. Programmes like the Financing Locally-Led Climate Action (FLLoCA) initiative show that when local governments and communities have the resources and authority to lead, the results are more relevant, sustainable and just. By focusing on this, we move closer to a climate-justice movement that is not only about reducing emissions or securing finance, but about shifting power, building resilience and restoring dignity to those on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

What climate justice means in practice

Climate Justice in Action focuses on climate justice in Eastern Africa, which is important because climate justice remains a relatively misunderstood concept for many people. This book can help close that knowledge gap by providing a clear and contextual understanding of what climate justice means in practice. It serves as a valuable resource for policy makers, practitioners, communities and scholars by offering insights into the region's unique climate challenges and how different actors are affected as well as responding. Additionally, the book serves as a platform to document and highlight climate injustices as well as the justice efforts led by a range of stakeholders, including local communities, youth, and civil society organizations. By capturing both successes and challenges, it not only raises awareness but also promotes learning and the replication of effective practices across the region. Listening to the voices of Eastern African researchers, activists and practitioners is essential because they bring first-hand knowledge of the region's climate challenges and social dynamics. Their insights are critical to shaping solutions that are context specific and truly responsive to the needs of the most affected populations, including women, youth and marginalized communities. Moreover, they also serve as a vital link between scientific research and practical action and their lived experiences ensure that climate policies and solutions are not only evidence based but also grounded in the realities of those most impacted.

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Notes

[1] For more information, see equal-victims.lifelineempower.com
[2] For more information, see ja4change.org/

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