

InfoNote

Bridging the 2-Degree Gap with NDCs 3.0: West Africa's Climate Commitment and Lessons from the First Global Stocktake

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Key messages

- The Paris Agreement mandates Parties to regularly enhance their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), ensuring that their climate commitments remain ambitious, transparent, and progressively improved.
- The West Africa Regional Hub of the Independent Global Stocktake (iGST WA Hub) brings together over 500 non-state actors of the 15 West Africa countries, to complement countries in enhancing their contributions toward achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement.
- As part of a young fellowship program targeting civil society organizations (CSOs) within iGST WA Hub, a youth-led regional assessment of West African countries' NDCs (including AICCRA countries) has been conducted.
- The youth-led regional assessment reveals that, while several issues remain outstanding, West African Parties have made notable efforts to enhance their climate ambitions, including setting more ambitious targets and allocating 30% of domestic resources as overall unconditional commitments.
- The climate commitments of West African countries, however, do not meet the expectations of the first Global Stocktake (GST) outcome for strengthening adaptation action, such as national inventories of climate impacts over time which were not explicitly addressed in most NDCs.

- AICCRA supported a regional validation workshop in which participants, including UNFCCC and NDC Partnership focal points from 14 West African countries, strongly recommended that the findings serve as evidence to inform for both national and regional policy processes, particularly in the development and implementation processes of NDCs 3.0
- AICCRA could contribute to bridge the climate finance gap identified by leveraging its research and partnerships to package its validated, on-the-ground innovations as bankable projects, thereby attracting investment for West African countries' conditional commitments and facilitating the technology transfer needed for transformative climate action.

Background

Climate change is one of the most significant challenges facing the world today, demanding urgent and coordinated global action. According to the World Bank (2020), it could push over 100 million people into poverty by 2030, with sub-Saharan Africa among the most affected regions. In West Africa, although countries contribute minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, they are disproportionately vulnerable due to their reliance on rainfed agriculture (Bezner Kerr et al., 2022; Carr et al., 2022; Trisos et al., 2022). The Sahel region has experienced rising temperatures and erratic rainfall, exacerbating food and water



insecurity—particularly in countries like Burkina Faso, where 80% of the population relies on agriculture (Bezner Kerr et al., 2022; Trisos et al., 2022; World Bank, 2020). On the other hand, coastal nations such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Benin face rising sea levels, erosion, and frequent floods, damaging infrastructure and livelihoods (Akponikpè et al., 2019; Bezner Kerr et al., 2022; Trisos et al., 2022). Limited infrastructure, finance, and political instability further constrain the region’s resilience (AfDB, 2017).

The Paris Agreement (UNFCCC, 2015), which aims to limit global warming to well below 2°C—preferably 1.5°C— offers a pathway of hope for West Africa,. Its key mechanism, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), outlined in Articles 3 and 4 of the Agreement, defines each country's mitigation and adaptation plans. All 15 West African countries are required to develop submit, and implement their NDCs, supported by initiatives like the NDC Partnership. Additionally, Article 14 introduces the Global Stocktake (GST)—a pivotal five-year review process, with the first cycle concluding in 2023 during the 28th Conference of Parties (COP28)—to assess the collective progress and inform the enhancement of future NDCs (UNFCCC, 2015). The NDCs and the GST are therefore complementary mechanisms within the Paris Agreement that work together in a cyclical, mutually reinforcing process to drive global, regional, and national climate action. Their complementarity lies in how each informs, supports, and enhances the effectiveness of the other—the GST provides a collective benchmark for progress, while the NDCs operationalize its goals through national commitments and actions. To fully leverage this complementarity in West Africa, a regional assessment of countries’ collective commitments—considering the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake—is essential. Such an assessment is crucial for understanding the region’s overall progress, strengthening regional strategies, informing the revision of NDCs, and guiding the advocacy efforts of civil society organizations (CSOs). It will also help identify best practices and supports more inclusive ambitious climate action across the region.

Coordinated by the West African Science Service Centre on Climate Change and Adapted Land Use (WASCAL), the West Africa Regional Hub of the Independent Global Stocktake (iGST WA Hub) brings together non-state actors of West Africa, including researchers, to provide complementary support to the countries in enhancing their contributions toward achieving the goals of the Paris Agreement. To advance this objective, the

iGST WA Hub launched a Young Fellowship Program, which supported six young fellows to conduct a regional assessment of the climate commitments of West African countries, as reflected in their NDCs, vis-à-vis the outcome of the first GST. The technical report on the regional assessment provides a comprehensive analysis of the NDCs West African countries by examining their sectoral commitments and the role of non-state actors in the development and implementation of NDCs. Additionally, it evaluates the extent to which the West African NDCs align with the outcome of the first GST.

To disseminate and validate the findings of this youth-led regional assessment, a regional workshop was convened, bringing together 35 participants, including UNFCCC and NDC Partnership focal points from 14 West African countries, members of the iGST WA Hub including representatives from its existing seven national networks (Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Nigeria, Senegal, and Togo). During the regional validation workshop, the young fellows had the opportunity to present their findings and collected inputs, comments, and recommendations from UNFCCC and NDC Partnership representatives.

Technical and financial support for the operation of iGST WA Hub and its Young Fellowship Program is provided by the ClimateWorks Foundation, and the Alliance Bioversity International and CIAT through the Accelerating Impacts of CGIAR Climate Research for Africa (AICCRA) initiative. This info note documents the key outcomes from the regional assessment and the regional workshop, outlining key actionable recommendations for creating more ambitious, inclusive, and transformative NDCs in West Africa. This knowledge product contributes to AICCRA objectives of generating evidence that informs climate policies and actions in Africa.

Rationale for the regional assessment of Parties commitments to climate change mitigation and adaptation

The first GST was concluded in 2023 during COP28 following the provisions in Decision 19/CMA.1 (UNFCCC, 2019) and Article 14 (Paragraph 2) of the Paris Agreement. The Decision 1/CMA.5 “Outcome of the first global stocktake” (UNFCCC, 2023) provides guidance and follow-up mechanisms on mitigation, adaptation, and means of implementation and support for Parties and non-Party stakeholders in West Africa and beyond to consider in the development and submission of more ambitious, third set of NDCs

(NDCs3.0), ideally 9-12 months before CMA.7 in November 2025.

Consequently, countries in West Africa – all of whom are Parties to the Paris Agreement – albeit delayed submission of their NDCs 2.0 and related revised versions, are assessing their current climate policies and progress, identifying gaps, and exploring pathways to enhance ambition across mitigation, adaptation, and means of implementation. Many of them are engaging in inclusive, whole-of-society approaches, involving civil society, the private sector, subnational actors, and indigenous communities in the revision process.

The youth-led regional NDCs' assessment through its technical report provides a complementary input into the NDCs revision processes to help ratchet up national ambitions toward climate action in West Africa.

Objectives of the youth-led regional assessment

The regional assessment of West African NDCs aims to:

- Analyze the sectoral commitments of West African countries to climate change mitigation and adaptation.
- Assess the contributions of CSOs to the NDCs development processes.
- Conduct a comparative analysis between the Parties' commitments as mentioned in their NDCs and the outcomes of the first GST.

Conceptual framework and approaches

The conceptual framework for the regional assessment consists of analyzing the commitments of the target countries in climate mitigation and adaptation. This framework includes the target sectors, objectives, alignment with the Paris Agreement, targets and measures for both mitigation and adaptation, means of implementation, changes in policy, and the involvement of relevant stakeholders.

Secondary and primary data were collected by the young fellows according to the following steps:

- **Desk review:** Secondary data were collected through extensive review of the countries' NDCs, national adaptation plans, national communications on climate change, and other related documents. The desk review provided critical insights that are central to the analysis of NDCs including the

conditionalities of sectoral commitments for mitigation and adaptation as well as financial investments, technological, and capacity-building needs.

- **Stakeholder surveys:** Structured surveys and semi-structured interviews were conducted using digital forms with key Parties representatives, including the focal points of UNFCCC and NDC partnership of 14 out of 15 West African countries, as well as climate experts, researchers, and 164 CSOs drawn from the members of the iGST WA Hub. These surveys were designed to capture nuanced perceptions and insights from the development processes, challenges, and priorities of the NDCs.

After collecting the relevant policy documents and extracting key information into a structured template, the data were synthesized by identifying patterns, gaps, areas of progress, and collective trends across the submissions. This synthesis process enabled the generation of new insights and informed the development of evidence-based conclusions and recommendations, as illustrated in Figure 1

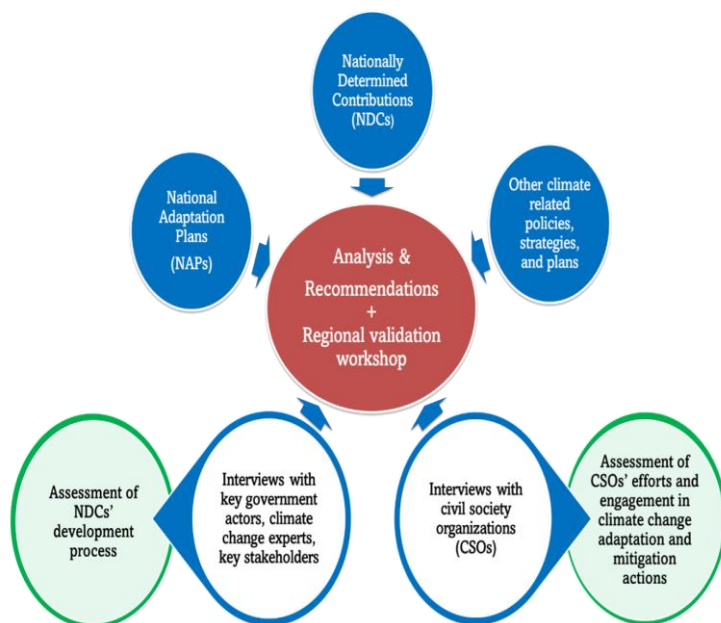


Figure 1. Synthesis framework

Key findings from the youth-led regional assessment of countries' NDCs

The regional assessment reveals that West African countries have made notable efforts to enhance their climate ambitions, with many revised targets reflecting more ambitious commitments aimed at achieving greater impact across the region.

However, despite these notable efforts, several issues remain outstanding, including the following:

- **Important unconditional commitments (fully depending on domestic resources) have been made by West African countries which constitute a notable progress. However, they are insufficient to address the escalating climate challenges as they represent only about 28.0% and 33.0% of the total resources required for adaptation and mitigation, respectively.** With about 70% conditional commitment (fully depending on external financing) to climate change adaptation and mitigation, the region has expressed a clear position to put a third of its domestic resources on the table while expecting the gap to be filled with funds from external sources.

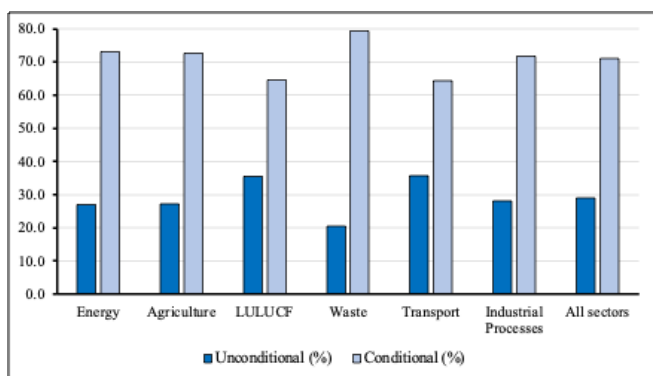


Figure 2. Sectoral greenhouse gas reduction commitments

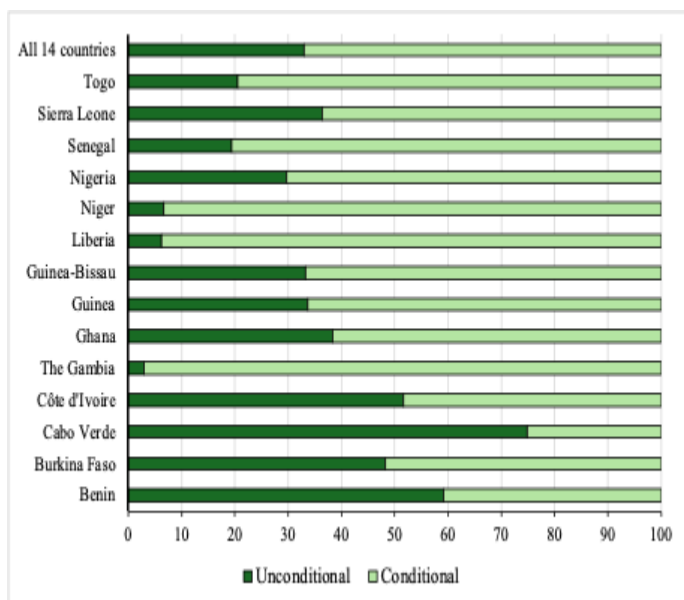


Figure 3. Conditionality proportions of mitigation commitments. Mali is missing because its NDC does not provide the information.

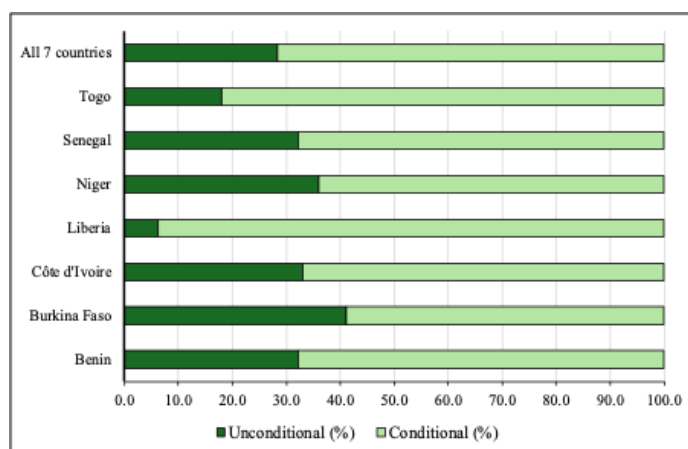


Figure 4. Conditionality proportions of adaptation commitments. The countries missing here did not provide the information in the NDCs.

- **Shortfall in climate finance flows is a barrier to the fulfilment of conditional commitments.** Despite increased international climate finance, the current financial flows into the region are insufficient to enable the countries to fulfil their conditional commitments to address critical climate challenges. According to the Climate Policy Initiative, West Africa's annual climate finance needs through to 2030 are projected at \$ 35.2 billion. However, actual financial flows reached only \$ 7.1 billion (20.74%) in 2019/2020 and \$ 10.9 billion (30.97%) in 2021/2022. Thus, there is a big gap between the financial needs expressed in the NDCs and the actual inflow of climate finance to the region.
- Technology transfer needs are great for all countries and are expressed across all sectors, but the weak enabling environment is likely to be a hindrance. Barriers to effective technology transfer and adoption in the region include domestic policy challenges, infrastructure limitations, and weak governance. Additionally, insufficient attention and priority are given to the already identified technology transfer needs.
- **Variations in NDC content, structure, and formats across the region.** West African NDCs show wide variations in content, presentation structure, formats and units, with many countries providing limited information on sector-specific commitments. In addition, some countries have detailed adaptation and mitigation budgets categorized into unconditional and conditional funding, while others have not.

- **Low involvement of civil society in some countries.** Civil society, as recognized by the Paris Agreement, plays a crucial role in climate action in varying proportions across different sectors, but this study reveals that across West Africa their involvement in NDC formulation in some countries was either perceived as insufficient.
- **Like other regions, West Africa's current ambitions do not meet the key expectations of the first GST outcome.** Across both mitigation and adaptation, the region faces gaps that need to be addressed in the next round of NDCs. Although the GST decisions are global in nature, finding alignment in all regions signifies collective progress towards the achievement of the long-term goals of the Paris Agreement. Findings reveal that West African countries' commitments as mentioned in their NDCs do not meet the expectations expressed in the outcome of the first GST, particularly regarding mitigation and adaptation ambitions. For example, the GST outcome highlights several key expectations for strengthening adaptation action, such as national inventories of climate impacts over time, which are not explicitly addressed by most countries in their NDCs.
- **Increase unconditional commitments.** By reallocating national budgets and promoting domestic investments in climate-vulnerable sectors through fiscal policies and instruments, West African countries can strengthen their unconditional commitments, but also potentially attract greater external support for conditional commitments.
- **Strengthen institutional and technical capacity.** Strengthening institutional climate units, local research institutions, and monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems will improve NDC implementation and enable localized, data-driven policymaking rooted in both scientific and socioeconomic realities of West African countries.
- **Use the GST outcome, the provisions of the Convention, and the Paris Agreement as a benchmark.** In line with the GST outcome, the provisions of the UNFCCC, and the Paris Agreement, future NDCs of West Africa should integrate insights from the first GST, particularly in the areas of adaptation, mitigation, and means of implementation. This will ensure alignment with global climate goals while remaining responsive to local and national contexts, enabling the region to advance toward climate-resilient, low-emission development.
- **Enhance collaboration between Parties and non-Parties stakeholders.** West African Parties should establish closer, stronger and institutionalized partnerships with CSOs grounded in shared climate objectives. This could include involving them in advisory bodies and formalizing their roles in steering committees in the mechanisms of NDCs development and implementation.

Actionable recommendations from the youth-led regional assessment for more ambitious, inclusive, and transformative NDCs in West Africa

Based on the findings of the regional assessment and the outcomes of the regional workshop, the young made the following actionable recommendations for West African countries, CSOs, and their international partners to support more ambitious, inclusive, and transformative NDCs in the region.

Recommendations for West African countries

- **Enhance ambition and transparency of NDCs.** West African countries should prioritize the standardization and transparency in their next NDCs by adopting harmonized NDC templates that clearly define commitments based on targets, baselines, and conditionalities across sectors, in line with UNFCCC guidelines. This will foster trust among national and international stakeholders and establish more robust accountability mechanisms.

Recommendations for civil society organizations

- **Build internal capacity on GST and climate policy.** CSOs should invest in capacity-building efforts to deepen their understanding of international climate mechanisms. Additionally, developing simplified toolkits and resources can help translate complex policy processes into locally relevant narratives that resonate with communities.

- **Strengthen participation in the revision process of the NDCs.** CSOs must move beyond marginal consultation toward the co-development of NDCs by providing data-driven inputs and evidence-based policy recommendations, with a focus on representing local and community priorities, particularly those of vulnerable populations.
- **Monitor and report local-level implementation.** By establishing community-based MRV systems, CSOs can document independent data and uncover local innovation, informing reporting processes and future NDCs revisions.

Recommendations for international partners

- **Align financing with conditional commitments.** International partners should prioritize financing the clearly articulated conditional commitments in West African NDCs, particularly in high-impact sectors like renewable energy, land restoration, and early warning systems. Financial instruments should be tailored to each country's specific needs, offering streamlined access, and capacity-building support for proposal development.
- **Facilitate technology transfer and innovation.** International partners should respond to the already identified technology needs of countries in the region by facilitating the development and transfer of climate technologies that are tailored to the ecological, social, and economic conditions of West Africa, while also supporting the upscaling of existing technologies to drive digital transformation and regional development.
- **Strengthen capacity building initiatives.** Capacity building should move beyond short-term workshops and focus on comprehensive, long-term institutional strengthening to effectively implement the Paris Agreement. They should focus on capacity gaps, governance and coordination, technical assessment and modelling, as well as strategic policy formulation and implementation.
- **Facilitate GST-responsive policymaking.** International partners must assist West African countries in translating the insights from the first GST into concrete national policies and strategies that emphasize equity, ambition, and long-term climate

resilience, while ensuring that their voices are adequately represented in international negotiations.

- **Leveraging the foundation and unique position of AICCRA.** AICCRA could contribute to bridge the significant climate finance gap identified by leveraging its research and partnerships to package its validated, on-the-ground innovations as bankable projects, thereby attracting investment for West African countries' conditional commitments and facilitating the technology transfer needed for transformative climate action.

Feedback on the youth-led regional NDC assessment report from the regional workshop

During the regional workshop, participants discussed the quality, relevance, and practical applications of the technical report, reflecting on how it could inform the ongoing development process of NDCs 3.0. During the discussions, participants collectively made significant inputs, providing detailed feedback, including the addition of data and contextual clarifications, as well as recommendations to improve the content, quality, accuracy, and clarity of the technical report. The identification of challenges and the formulation of targeted, actionable recommendations in the report were found to be beneficial for refining the ongoing NDC development processes.

The discussions also highlighted the report's potential to inform policies, share replicable good practices, and promote more inclusive approaches, particularly regarding the involvement of CSOs. The report was recognized for its role in shaping more realistic and achievable ambitions, enhancing a deeper understanding of unconditional targets, and supporting the integration of GST1 outcome into NDCs 3.0. The utilization of the technical report in academia and policy dialogue was endorsed by all the groups, with a particular emphasis on the necessity for future research.

Proposed topics for future research

Participants identified several priority areas for future research to fill knowledge gaps, inform evidence-based policymaking, and strengthen the overall effectiveness of climate strategies. These areas reflect emerging themes, persistent challenges, and evolving needs in the climate policy landscape. Suggested priority topics include youth and gender inclusion, vulnerable

populations, inclusive adaptation strategies, NDC stocktaking, greenhouse gas inventories across sectors, and the quantification of efforts at national and regional levels. Additional areas of focus include the synthesis of new NDCs, MRV systems, just energy transition, access to climate finance, territorial governance, assessment of loss and damage in NDCs, evaluation of technological needs, crisis management and local resilience measures, implementation of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, and country-specific case studies.

Other key outcomes of the regional workshop

Other key outcomes of the regional workshop are summarized as follows:

- The findings of the regional assessment were greatly valued and considered as a credible basis for informing consultations, engaging stakeholders, and identifying opportunities to enhance ambition in their NDCs 3.0.
- There was a unanimous consensus regarding the relevance of the technical report as a reference instrument for both national and regional processes, particularly for the development processes of NDCs 3.0.
- Support was expressed for science-policy and inter-country dialogues to facilitate regular sharing of knowledge, best practices, and challenges.
- There is a strong support for greater involvement of relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, youth, and local governments, in the development and implementation of NDCs.

Recommendations

During the regional validation workshop, a session was convened to present and discuss the ongoing development processes of NDCs 3.0 across different countries in the region. From the discussions, the following points become evident.

- Most countries have initiated consultation and stocktaking processes of NDC 3.0.
- Most countries are optimistic about submitting their updated NDCs before COP30.
- Most countries confirmed the addition of new themes and targets including fresh water, children and youth, as well as loss and damage in NDCs 3.0.
- Stakeholder engagement remains uneven, particularly for non-party actors.

- Data limitations and resource constraints challenge monitoring and ambition-raising.

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