



Smallholder Farmers and CSOs Position on the EAC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2026-2036



September 2026

1 Rationale of the EAC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2026 - 2036

The EAC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2026–2036 provides a regional framework for coordinated climate action across the East African Community. It responds to the increasing impacts of climate change on agriculture and food systems, water resources, ecosystems, infrastructure, health, livelihoods and regional economic development. It is intended to strengthen cooperation among EAC Partner States while aligning regional climate action with evolving continental and global climate frameworks.

The new Strategy is particularly important because climate risks have intensified while the international climate-policy architecture has evolved considerably since the previous EAC Climate Change Strategy. The draft therefore seeks to strengthen adaptation and resilience, mitigation, climate finance, technology, capacity and knowledge and cross-cutting considerations, while improving coordination and implementation across Partner States. The Strategy recognizes that climate change disproportionately affects livelihoods and vulnerable groups, including those dependent on rain-fed agriculture.

2 Background/ Historical Development

○ Phase I – EAC Climate Change Strategy 2011–2016

The first EAC Climate Change Strategy (2011–2016) established a regional framework for implementing the EAC Climate Change Policy, focusing on strengthening regional cooperation and Partner States' responses through adaptation, mitigation, climate finance, technology transfer, capacity building and knowledge management.

The first phase was implemented alongside other regional instruments, particularly the EAC Climate Change Policy and EAC Climate Change Master Plan, which helped translate regional climate priorities into programmes and interventions. However, implementation experienced challenges related to financing, institutional capacity, coordination, domestication at Partner State level, monitoring and the translation of regional commitments into action at local level.

The EAC Climate Change Strategy 2011–2016 has the following six Strategic Objectives:

Objective 1: To enhance climate change adaptation through vulnerability reduction, building socio-economic resilience, DRR and adaptation.

Objective 2: To enhance sustainable development through climate change mitigation through green economy and low carbon development pathways.

Objective 3: To strengthen climate change knowledge generation through research, monitoring, detection and prediction

Objective 4: To enhance climate change education and public awareness through communication, training, information and knowledge and social empowerment including gender

Objective 5: To build climate change response capacity through institutional strengthening, technology transfer, resource mobilization and partnership building

Objective 6: To ensure a sustainable Financing Mechanism for climate change.

Phase II – EAC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2026–2036

The proposed second phase covers 2026–2036, giving the region a 10-year climate action framework. A major difference from the previous Strategy is that the new framework integrates the Strategy and Action Plan, providing strategic objectives alongside proposed actions, responsibilities, implementation arrangements and monitoring mechanisms.

It also responds to major developments that occurred after the previous Strategy, particularly the Paris Agreement, NDC implementation, Loss and Damage, carbon markets and Article 6 mechanisms, increasing emphasis on climate finance, technology and digital transformation, and stronger attention to gender, youth and social inclusion.

Importantly for smallholder farmers, the draft incorporates issues such as climate-resilient agriculture, agroecology and sustainable land management, early-warning systems, resilient livelihoods, water management and Loss and Damage

The draft EAC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan is structured around seven key thematic areas, as outlined below:

Strategic Priority 1 Climate change Adaptation and Resilience

Strategic Priority 2 Climate Change Mitigation

Strategic Priority 3 Climate Finance and Investment

Strategic Priority 4 Technology Transfer

Strategic Priority 5 Governance, Capacity Building and Knowledge Management

Strategic Priority 6 Cross Cutting Issues

Overall Smallholder farmers and CSOs Position

Smallholder farmers and CSOs welcomes the development of the EAC Climate Change Strategy 2026–2036 and particularly its recognition that agriculture and food systems are highly vulnerable to climate change. Smallholder farmers and CSOs also commend the proposed actions in strategy including: climate-resilient agriculture, agroecology, sustainable land management, climate change fund, early warning systems, ecosystem-based adaptation, climate finance, indigenous knowledge and stakeholder participation including women and youth.

The Strategy correctly recognizes that agriculture is highly exposed to rainfall variability and temperature extremes and that climate change threatens food security and rural livelihoods. It consequently proposes climate-resilient agriculture and specifically identifies strengthening agroecology and sustainable land management practices as a strategic intervention.

Smallholder farmers and CSOs, however, calls upon the EAC and Partner States to strengthen the Strategy by ensuring that smallholder farmers are not treated merely as beneficiaries of climate interventions, but as rights-holders, knowledge holders, investors, innovators and decision-makers whose participation must be institutionalized throughout implementation of the Strategy.

Smallholder farmers and CSOs therefore proposes the following priority 13 considerations for the EAC:

i. Align the EAC climate strategy with other continental and regional frameworks

Including the CAADP Kampala Declaration and EAC Regional Agri-food Systems Investment Plan: The EAC climate strategy should be harmonized with the frameworks to strengthen policy coherence, support coordinated implementation and simplify monitoring and reporting across regional and continental frameworks.

ii. Institutionalize Smallholder Farmer Participation in Climate Governance

Establish clear and inclusive structures for the planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the EAC CCSAP from regional to national and subnational levels. These structures should ensure meaningful representation and participation of smallholder farmers and their organizations, particularly women, youth, vulnerable groups and resource-poor farmers, throughout the Strategy's implementation and periodic reviews.

iii. Make agroecology a central pathway for agricultural adaptation

Smallholder farmers and CSOs strongly welcomes the explicit commitment to “strengthen agroecology and sustainable land management practices.” This should be translated into tangible measurable actions and budgets supporting farmer-managed seed systems, crop diversification, soil fertility, agroforestry, integrated crop-livestock systems, ecological pest management, water harvesting and locally appropriate practices.

iv. Get climate finance down to farmers and communities.

The Strategy identifies a major financing imbalance: adaptation receives approximately 47% of international public climate finance despite a stated 70% target, while mitigation receives around 53%. Smallholder farmers and CSOs calls for a clearly defined share of EAC and national adaptation finance to reach local actors, particularly farmer organizations, women, youth and community institutions. The proposed EAC Climate Change Fund should therefore include a dedicated locally led adaptation window with simplified access for farmer organizations, rather than requiring every community intervention to become a large “bankable project.” The Strategy already proposes simplified small-grant mechanisms for grassroots women and youth organizations; this principle should be extended to smallholder farmer organizations.

v. Call for partner states to start allocating funds for climate change from own coffers due to change of geopolitics and donor funding priorities

Call on EAC Partner States to progressively allocate adequate and predictable resources from national budgets for climate change adaptation, Loss and Damage, and resilience-building, rather than relying predominantly on external donor funding. This is increasingly important given changing geopolitical dynamics, declining and shifting development assistance and changing donor priorities. Domestic climate financing should particularly prioritize actions that directly benefit vulnerable communities and smallholder farmers, including agroecology, climate-resilient agriculture, early warning systems, water management and locally led adaptation.

vi. Invest in Climate Preparedness and Finance Resilience Before Disasters

Call on EAC Partner States to shift from reactive disaster response towards proactive investment in climate preparedness and resilience, ensuring adequate financing is available before climate shocks occur. This should include investments in early warning systems, climate-resilient agriculture, agroecology, water management, resilient infrastructure, disaster preparedness and community adaptation, particularly for smallholder farmers and other vulnerable communities.

vii. Take climate information to the last mile

Smallholder farmers and CSOs supports the Strategy's proposal to scale up early warning systems, climate information services and community-based disaster risk reduction. However, information sitting at meteorological agencies or national capitals does not protect crops, livestock and fisheries. EAC and partner states should establish a farmer-centered last-mile climate information system, translating forecasts into local languages and practical agricultural advisories and delivering them through farmer organizations, extension services, community radio, SMS/mobile systems and local institutions.

viii. Establish and Operationalize an EAC Regional Loss and Damage Fund

Building on the Strategy's proposal for a comprehensive regional framework on Loss and Damage, Smallholder farmers and CSOs recommends the establishment and operationalization of a dedicated EAC Regional Loss and Damage Fund with accessible financing for affected communities. The framework should explicitly recognize agricultural losses and damages, including crop failure, livestock losses, destruction of seed stocks, soil and land degradation, water scarcity, damage to productive assets and loss of livelihoods. Smallholder farmers and their organizations should be actively involved in assessing, documenting and reporting these losses and damages, ensuring that regional data, financing decisions and response mechanisms reflect realities on the ground.

ix. Put strong safeguards around carbon markets and Nature-based Solutions

Smallholder farmers and CSOs recognizes the potential of ecosystem restoration, community forestry and carbon finance but cautions that climate action must not dispossess communities of land or transfer control of natural resources to outside investors. The Strategy itself identifies risks associated with land-tenure conflicts, land-tenure security, weak benefit-sharing arrangements and undervalued carbon credits. EAC should therefore establish safeguards for land tenure, Free, Prior and Informed Consent where applicable, transparent contracts, equitable benefit sharing, grievance mechanisms and community rights before scaling Article 6 - carbon-market or nature-based solution projects.

x. Strengthen Public and Local Investment in Locally Led Adaptation

Smallholder farmers and CSOs calls for increased public and domestic investment in locally led adaptation, rather than over-reliance on commercial and multinational private finance. While private-sector investment has an important role, adaptation for vulnerable smallholder farmers cannot be driven primarily by commercial returns. Public climate finance should prioritize essential public goods and locally driven solutions, including agricultural extension, water and irrigation systems, community seed systems, soil and ecosystem restoration, climate information and early warning services, and farmer capacity development. Given the persistent financing gap for adaptation, domestic agriculture and climate budgets should also be systematically tracked alongside international climate finance to strengthen transparency, accountability and investment in farmers' resilience.

xi. Strengthen Farmer-Led Social Accountability and Monitoring Mechanisms

Smallholder farmers and CSOs recommends that the Strategy institutionalize social accountability mechanisms that enable smallholder farmers and their organizations to independently monitor climate commitments, budgets, financing and implementation at regional, national and local levels. This should include approaches such as Community Scorecards, Social Accountability Monitoring (SAM), Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS), participatory budget monitoring and citizen feedback mechanisms. Farmer organizations should be meaningfully involved in reviewing implementation progress, tracking whether allocated climate resources reach intended communities, identifying implementation gaps, and engaging responsible institutions to demand corrective action. Findings from these processes should feed into the EAC's annual reporting, review and evaluation mechanisms, strengthening transparency, responsiveness and accountability to communities.

xii. Establish an annual EAC Farmers' Climate Dialogue

The Strategy's communication framework recognizes farmers, pastoralists and indigenous knowledge holders among its broader audiences and acknowledges the need for stakeholder participation at regional, national and sub-national levels. Smallholder farmers and CSOs recommends institutionalizing an Annual EAC Smallholder Farmers' Climate Dialogue, linked to relevant EAC technical and ministerial processes. Its recommendations should be formally transmitted to EAC decision-making structures and should contribute to regional positions ahead of UNFCCC COPs.

xiii. Promote Farmer-Friendly Digital Technologies and Responsible Use of AI

The EAC should promote affordable, accessible and locally appropriate digital and AI technologies that strengthen smallholder farmers' climate resilience. Priority should be given to localized weather and early-warning information, planting advisories, pest and disease alerts, and soil and water management information, accessible through simple channels such as SMS, USSD and radio services. AI should complement rather than replace farmers' knowledge and extension services, with safeguards for farmers' data, privacy, ownership and informed consent and ensuring inclusion of women, youth farmers with limited digital connectivity.

This position was developed through a regional webinar consultation held on **21 September 2026**, which brought together more than **300 participants**, including smallholder farmers, civil society organizations (CSOs), media representatives, government officials, representatives of the East African Community (EAC) Secretariat, and international partners, whose contributions and recommendations helped shape the final position.

Scan the QR code to watch highlights from the webinar



Watch the full webinar



This position was developed ahead of the Regional Validation Meeting on the EAC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan held from 29 September to 3 October 2026 in Machakos, Kenya, during which EAC Partner States validated the proposed EAC Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2026–2036, paving the way for its subsequent consideration and adoption at the **12th Meeting of the EAC Sectoral Council on Environment and Natural Resources**.

For more information

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