

African consumers are ready to take climate action: How can corporates help them?

By [Nomava Zanazo](#)

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Although Africa's contribution to global carbon emissions remains negligible, the continent is already feeling disproportionate effects from climate change and will bear most of its consequences in the coming years. And African consumers are starting to worry about that.



Image source: Pop Nukoonrat – [123RF.com](#)

Our 2022 pan-African survey of consumer sentiment shows that “effects of climate change” is among the top three concerns of African consumers, with two thirds of consumers declaring that they worry about its effects on economies and communities, in line with the global average. But they don’t just worry about it. They also feel that it is their personal responsibility to address it, far more than their global counterparts. Will this sense of responsibility translate into action? I’m not sure given the affordability imperative, but companies who play the social and sustainability card will clearly appeal to this feeling.

Last October, we asked 6,000 consumers in South Africa, Kenya, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Morocco, and Egypt about their economic and social concerns. While inflation topped the list, a majority of consumers in all six countries cited the effects of climate change as a major worry, especially in countries that were severely hit by natural disasters in the past years. Drought and flood were the effects consumers mentioned most, followed by high temperatures, famine, water shortages, and lack of safety.

In Kenya, where droughts are threatening food security, the effects of climate change worried 83% of consumers, ranking second among their concerns. In South Africa, where devastating floods were witnessed, it ranked third (62%), after concerns about the recent price increase of goods and services (85%) and worries about personal finances (71%).

Most strikingly, however, the African consumers we surveyed are far more likely than their global counterparts to believe that it’s their responsibility to act in the face of climate change. In South Africa, nearly 60% of consumers feel responsible to act, compared to 80% in Nigeria and 76% in Kenya. Almost 60% of those surveyed told us that they feel this obligation, well above the 20% who said so in global peer countries. This may be because African consumers see every day the effects of climate change on their communities. Or because they are less confident than their global counterparts that their governments will take action. Or because sustainability claims by corporates operating in Africa remain shy. Or all of the above.



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Building on this sense of responsibility

It is true that willingness to act, however, is not the same as taking action. But African consumers are telling us that sustainability can be a selling point. So how can governments and corporates build on this sense of responsibility?

Clearly not by making sustainability pledges on decarbonisation, net zero and recycling only. Africa produces 3.8% of global emissions, and 65% of people living in Africa still need access to electricity and robust infrastructure. African consumers' concern is not about reducing emissions and sustainable consumption; it is more related to supporting their local communities, especially in rural areas, who keep suffering from the effects of climate change.

Our global research revealed that nearly 3 out of every 4 consumers admitted to feeling wary of corporate sustainability claims and commitments and that only 1% to 7% have paid a premium for sustainable purchases. While our global survey confirmed that most consumers are ready to embrace sustainable products, it's clear that companies still have a long way to go to inspire the consumer action needed to help reach global climate ambitions.



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Corporate incorporation

In developing countries, corporates can succeed by making strong ESG pledges, but these cannot be the same kinds of pledges they're making in more mature countries. Corporates too should be working toward adaptation rather than mitigation. Those adaptations must focus on making sustainability accessible and affordable.

Companies must understand why consumers hesitate to adopt sustainable products and services, and then either innovate to remove real barriers or use communication to address perceived barriers. For example, many consumers think sustainable alternatives to products and services simply don't exist, even when they are plentiful on the market. And consumers who are aware that sustainable products and services exist may assume that they are a lot more expensive than they actually are. Consumers who are on the fence about making sustainable purchases for cost reasons need to see clearer price communication to combat this misperception.

By understanding consumers' core needs, and by removing real or perceived barriers through innovation and

communication, companies can significantly increase sustainable outcomes.

Locally, strategies can include exploring and emphasising local and more seasonal products and providing support to the communities most affected by climate change. Emphasising local goods, in fact, will be among the most important ways of providing support to these communities, fuelling a virtuous sustainability cycle.

African consumers will welcome the opportunity to make sustainable choices. The most successful companies will find new and creative ways to make those choices available.

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