Inclusive Climate Policy Integration in Africa: Comprehensive Analysis of Multi-level Frameworks and AU–EU Synergies on Nature-based Solutions, Climate Services, Gender inclusion, and Indigenous Knowledge Systems

Insights from Ghana, Kenya, Tanzania, Madagascar and South Africa

POLICY BRIEF

January 2026

Executive Summary

This policy brief synthesizes findings from the ALBATROSS Horizon Europe project, based on a multi-level policy analysis of over 250 national and sub-national policy documents and regional and transboundary frameworks across five Sub-Saharan African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, South Africa, and Tanzania.

Figure 1:Community training on mangrove nursery establishment under ALBATROSS project: Morondava Hub Madagascar. Photo by Christian Monja. OXFAM SA. June 2025.

The analysis assessed the level of integration of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Nature-based Solutions (NbS), Climate Services, Gender and Social Inclusion, and Indigenous and Local Knowledge (IKLK) into environmental and climate policy frameworks. It also identified key gaps, opportunities, and strategic recommendations to strengthen policy coherence and implementation, while leveraging synergies between African and EU frameworks.

This policy brief is designed to inform and guide policymakers, development planners, and practitioners in developing evidence-based frameworks to address pressing environmental and climate challenges.

Findings show strong alignment of the assessed policies with SDG priorities, particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 6 (Clean Water), however operationalization remains weak due to limited indicators and monitoring frameworks.

Nature-based Solutions (NbS) approaches are referenced in more than 70% of the assessed policies, indicating growing recognition of their vital role in addressing climate vulnerability, biodiversity loss, and environmental degradation. Integration remains limited in comprehensive cross-sectoral strategies, with only 30%, potentially hampering the coherence and visibility of NbS within policy frameworks.

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Climate services provision appears in 45% of policies, whereas comprehensive integration occurs in only 25%. Integration is strongest in climate, agriculture, water, and disaster risk management policies but often regarded and discussed as standalone data tools rather than integrated decision-support systems.

Gender and social inclusion are referenced in 65% of the assessed policies, with one-third including gender-specific actions. Land, water, agriculture, and climate policies increasingly integrate gender-responsive measures, though implementation remains inconsistent at the community level.

Indigenous and Local Knowledge (IKLK) is recognized in 50% of policies, mainly in natural resource management, climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction. Integration remains weak in legally binding regulations, with limited operational frameworks for documentation and co-production with scientific knowledge.

Strategic opportunities to strengthen existing policy frameworks include embedding SDG targets into policies with accountability, mainstreaming NbS systematically across governance levels and different sectors, with specific attention to underrepresented

Figure 2:Albatross project- mangrove seedlings with 2 leaves ready for transplanting. Place: Morondava, Madagascar. Photo By Julio, UNESCO, 4th Nov. 2025.

ecosystems, and establishing integrated national frameworks for climate services. Policy frameworks should also adopt comprehensive gender-responsive approaches linking equity to ecosystem service provision and climate resilience. Moreover, they should formally embed IKLK into legal systems while promoting co-application with scientific knowledge.

Strengthening these areas, alongside leveraging synergies with EU frameworks, will accelerate inclusive, resilient, and sustainable climate action across Africa.

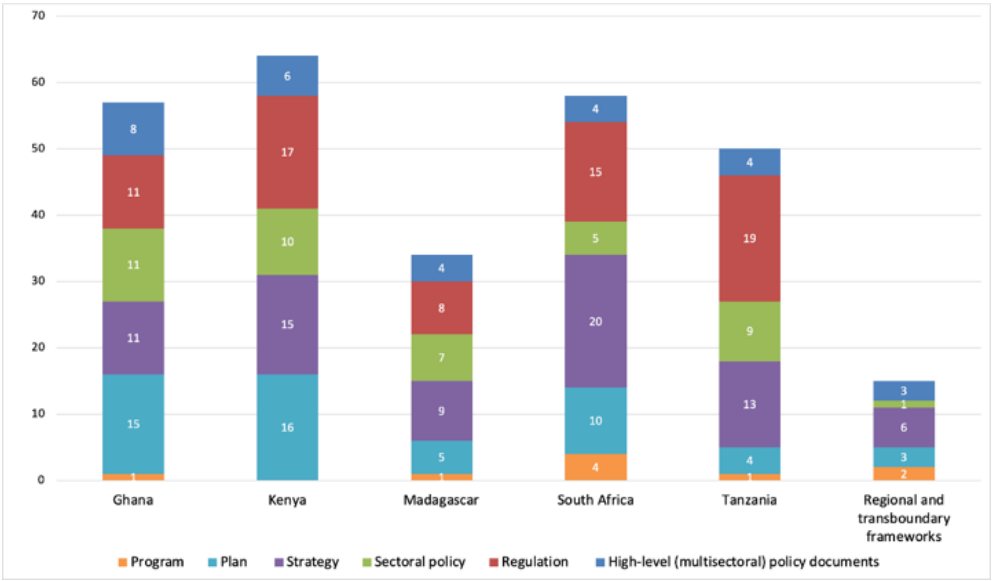

Figure 3:Type of policy instruments reviewed in the studied African countries.Source: ALBATROSS deliverable D6.1

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Overview of Results

This section provides a condensed overview of the results of the multi-level policy analysis for the selected African countries, which is based on the detailed assessment of 252 transboundary, national and subnational strategies, sectoral plans and legislations, and potential areas of synergy between African Union and European Union.

Policy Alignment with SDGs

- 70% of the analyzed 252 environmental and climate policy documents show strong alignment with various SDG themes, particularly SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 15 (Life on Land), and SDG 6 (Clean Water and Sanitation).
- However, there are gaps in the coverage of SDG 7 (Affordable and Clean Energy) and SDG 5 (Gender Equality).
- Temporal trend: 67% of documents adopted after 2015, reflecting influence of Paris Agreement, SDGs, and Sendai Framework.

Policy recommendations:

- Embed SDG targets into national and sub-national policies with clear accountability mechanisms.
- Strengthen cross-sectoral coordination to avoid fragmented implementation.
- Develop monitoring systems to track SDG-linked outcomes.

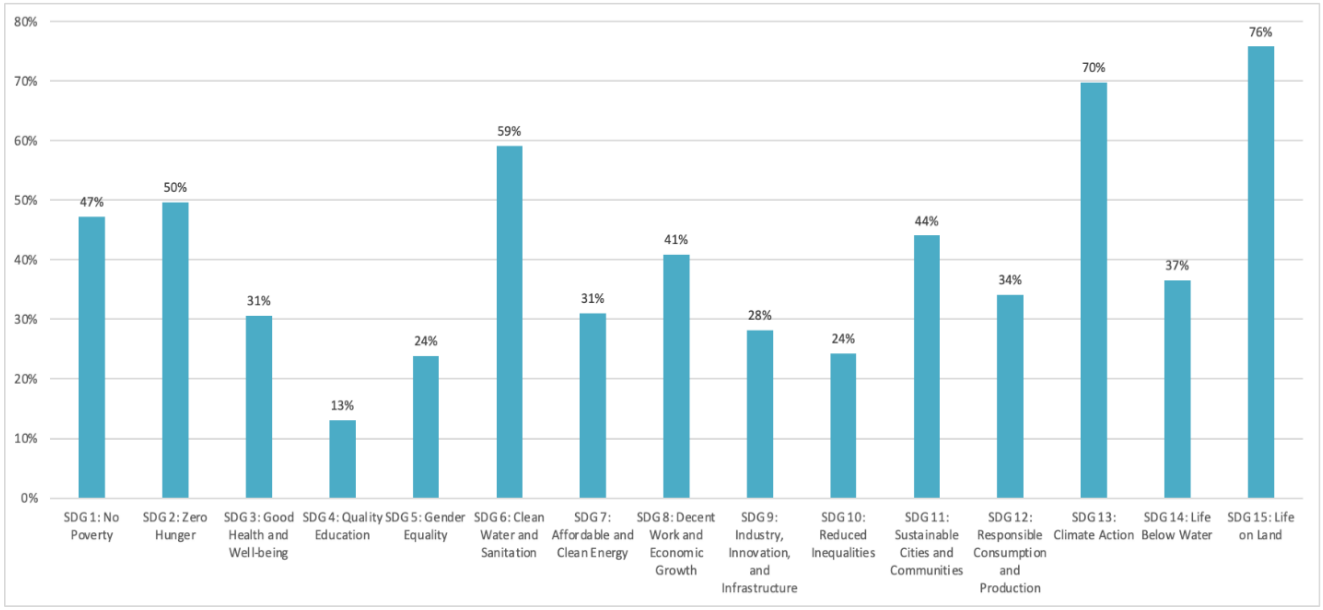

Figure 4: Distribution of SDG themes in the studied African policy documents. Source: ALBATROSS deliverable D6.1

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Climate hazards

- Drought is the most widely addressed climate hazard, referenced in 58% of policies, followed by flooding at 56%.
- Other hazards include; Wildfires – 33%, Landslides – 15%, Storm surges – 9%, Strong winds – 14%, Heat waves – 13%, Tropical cyclones – 9%.
- Climate-exacerbated risks are: Soil erosion and land degradation – 41%, Coastal erosion – 25% and Sea water intrusion – 10%.
- Notably, 25% of the policies analyzed do not explicitly reference any specific climate hazard, underscoring gaps in hazard integration.

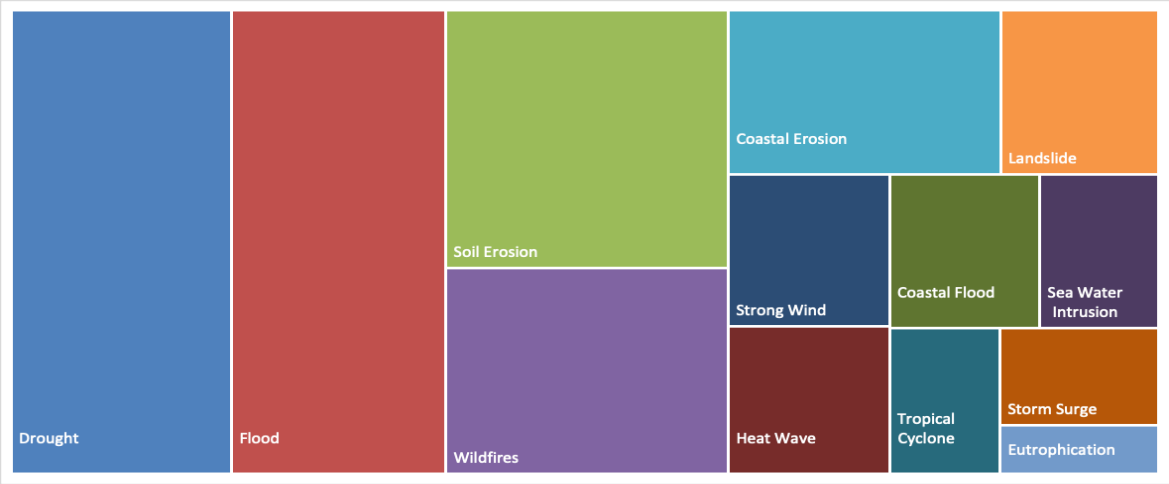

Figure 5: Proportion of main climate hazards/risks identified in environmental and climate change policies in the five countries. Source: ALBATROSS deliverable D6.1

Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)

Integration status:

- More than 70% of the assessed policies reference NbS, but comprehensive integration of detailed NbS strategies is limited to around 25% of the documents studied.
- Only 16% of analyzed policies explicitly mention “nature-based solutions” (NbS), “ecosystem-based adaptation,” or “ecosystem-based management.”
- National development policies demonstrate a substantial commitment at 90% though they use broad principles.
- Sectoral strategies (85%) and sectoral plans (82%) are more likely to include specific NbS measures.
- Regulations lag behind at 50%, often lacking concrete actions.
- Ecosystem coverage is uneven across the five countries, with freshwater (59%) and forests (49%) being the most prioritized, followed by coastal and marine ecosystems (40%), rangelands (19%), and urban areas (18%).

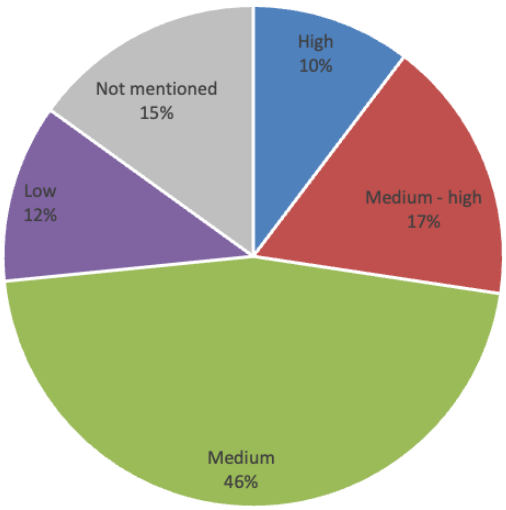

Figure 6: Level of NbS integration across the policy documents

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Policy Recommendations:

- Mandate NbS across cross-sectoral and sectoral policies as well as various governance levels, including local adaptation and disaster risk reduction plans to advance coherent implementation frameworks.
- Mainstream NbS across all ecosystems, including urban areas and coastal zones.
- Mobilize innovative nature financing mechanisms and instruments (e.g. biodiversity credits, blended finance, carbon markets, green bonds, payment for ecosystems services) and incentivize large scale NbS investments.
- Build capacity and awareness among policymakers, private sector, and local communities.
- Establish NbS-specific indicators, targets, monitoring and reporting systems to facilitate evidence-based policy development.

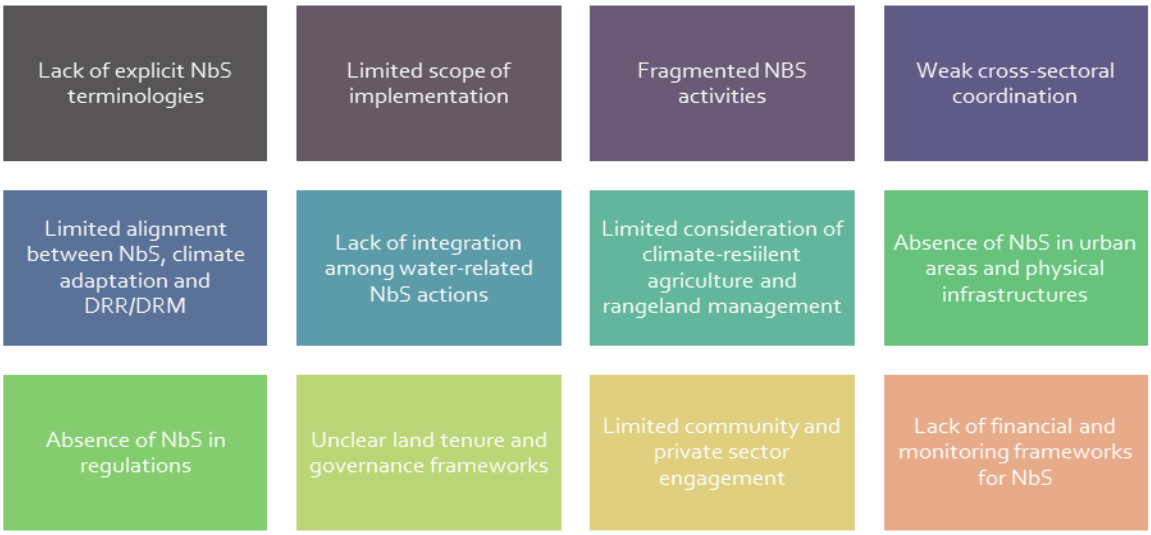

Figure 7: Overview of identified gaps and implementation challenges for mainstreaming NbS in the studied policy documents

Climate Services

Integration status:

- 45% of the assessed policies include climate services, but only 25% demonstrate comprehensive integration 25%.
- Integration is strongest in climate, agriculture, water, and disaster risk management frameworks.
- Limited cross-sectoral coordination and weak legal frameworks.
- Climate services are often treated as standalone data tools rather than integrated decision-support systems.

Identified gaps and challenges

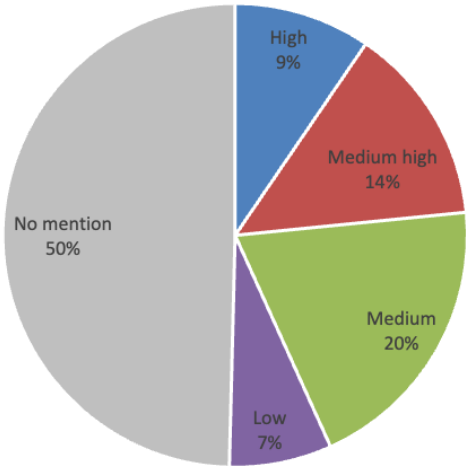

Figure 8: Level of climate services Integration across the assessed policy documents

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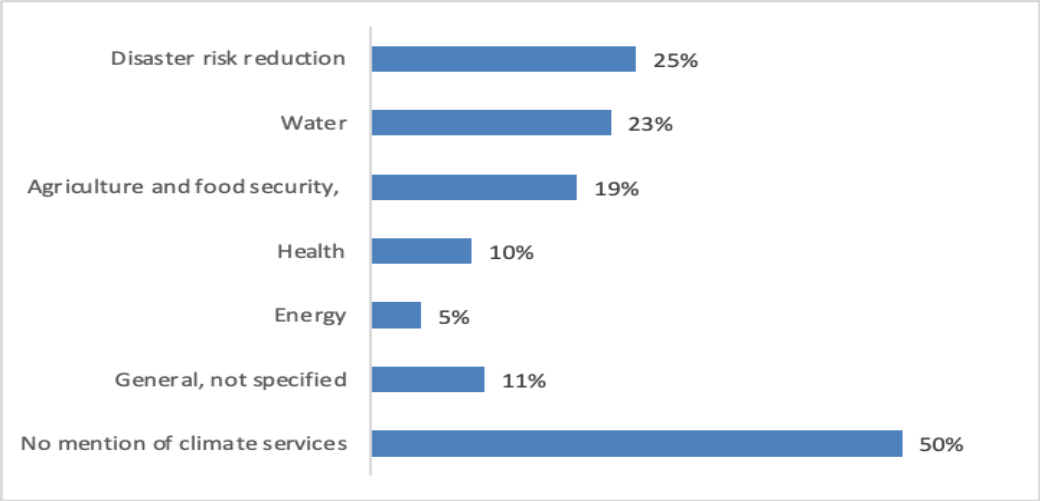

Figure 9: Percentage of sectors targeted by climate services in the studied environmental and climate change policy documents

Policy Recommendations:

- Integrate climate services into national policy frameworks.
- Strengthen legally binding frameworks for climate risk integration.
- Increase investment in climate data and observation infrastructure. i.e. hydro-meteorological, multi hazards early warning systems etc.
- Ensure gender-responsive and socially inclusive climate services.
- Position climate services as decision-support tools for policymaking.

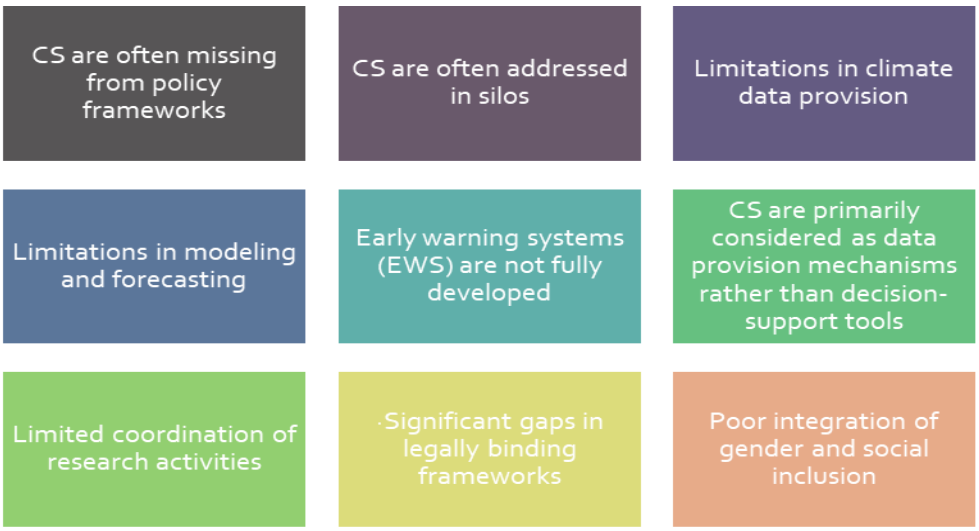

Figure 10:Gaps and challenges of climate services integration

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Gender and Social Inclusion

Integration status

- 65% of policies reference social inclusion with one-third including gender-responsive actions.
- Integration is stronger in high level multi-sectoral frameworks than sectoral policies.
- 73% of regulations did not include any gender considerations. Policies with comprehensive NbS integration were also more likely to incorporate gender-sensitive elements.
- There is inconsistent embedding of gender responsive measures and limited operationalization at community level.

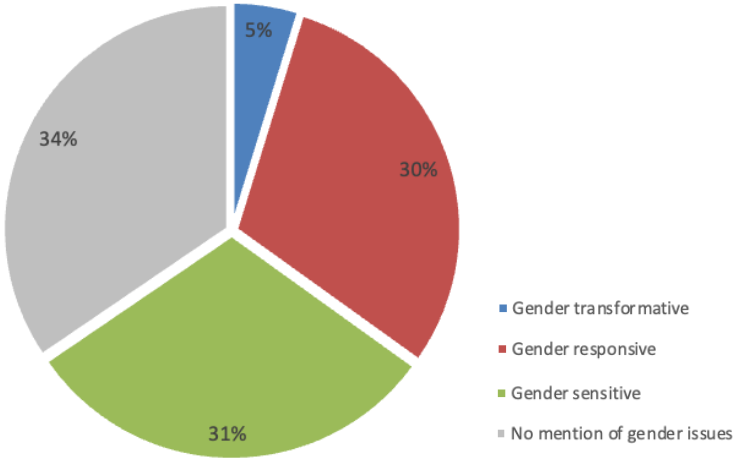

Figure 11:Gender considerations in the studied environmental and climate change policy documents

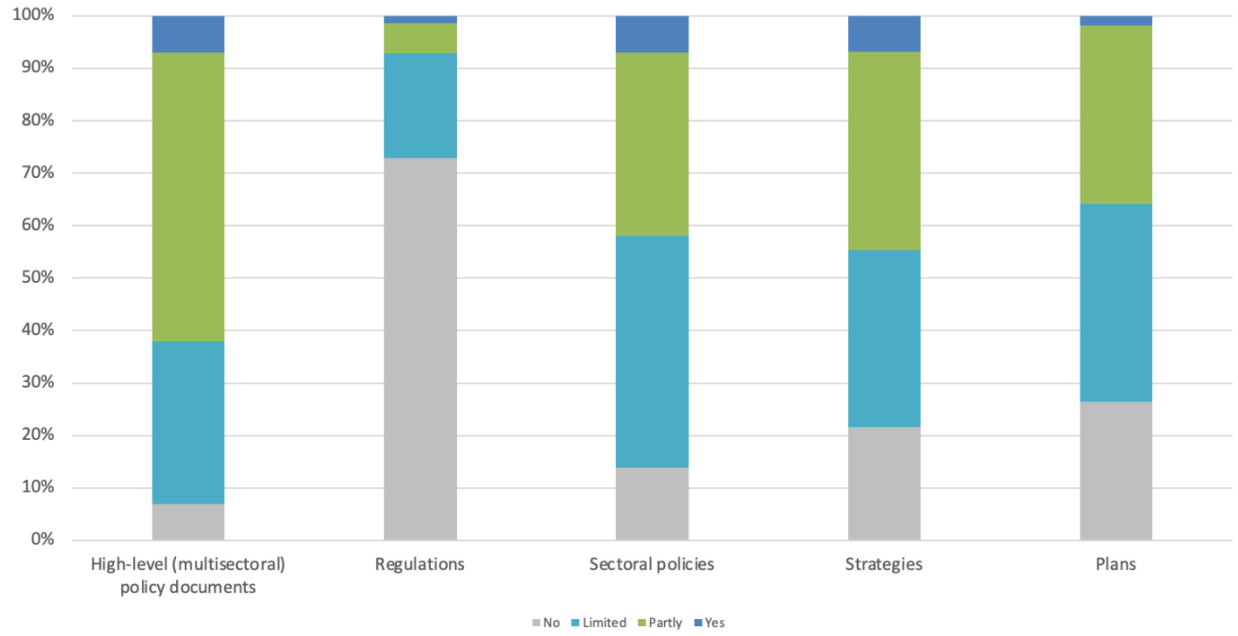

Figure 12: Gender considerations across different types of policy documents

Policy recommendations:

- Mandate comprehensive gender-responsive actions across all frameworks.
- Strengthen gender disaggregated monitoring and accountability for gender commitments.
- Expand inclusive participation in policy design and implementation.

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Figure 13: Gaps and opportunities for gender inclusion

Indigenous Knowledge and Local Knowledge (IKLK)

Integration status

- Around 50% of policies acknowledge IKLK, mainly in natural resource management, climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and sustainable agriculture.
- Strategies and plans demonstrate more frequent integration (57%- 62%), while multi-sectoral and sectoral policies consider IKLK somewhat less frequently (52% and 51%).
- Only 32% of regulations include IKLK, indicating weak formal binding integration.
- Policies with strong NbS integration are also more likely to include IKLK considerations (over 70%).
- There are weak operational frameworks for documentation and co-production with scientific knowledge.

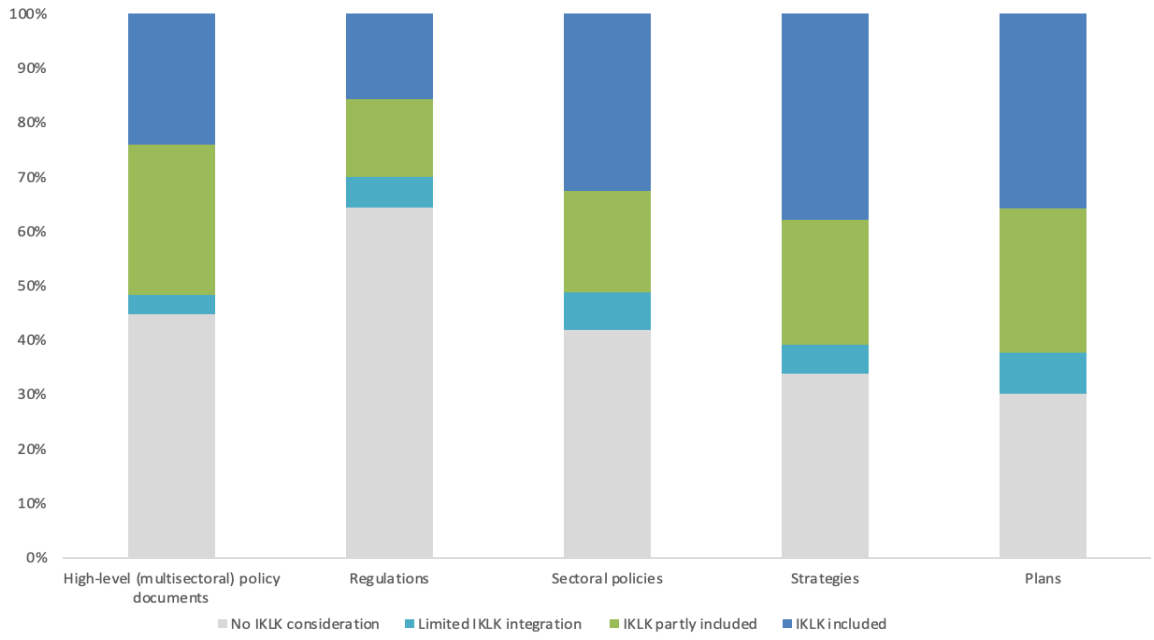

Figure 14: Inclusion of IKLK approaches across different types of policy documents

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Policy recommendations:

- Formally embed IKLK into legal and regulatory frameworks.
- Promote co-application with scientific knowledge in NbS and climate services.
- Expand IKLK to underrepresented ecosystems -e.g. urban planning, coastal and water resource management.
- Ensure Indigenous people and local communities have central roles in decision-making.

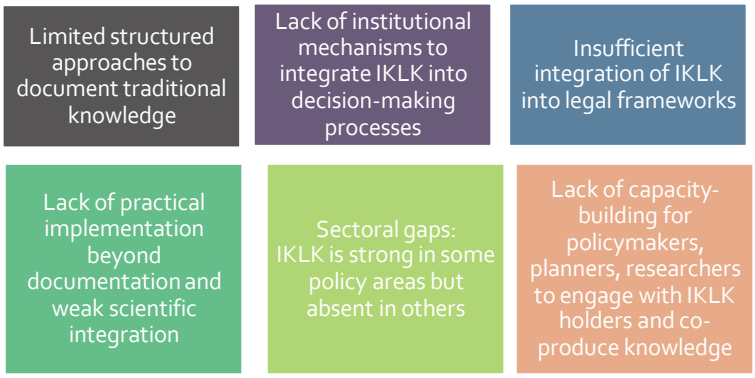

Figure 15:Gaps and Challenges for IKLK inclusion

AU-EU Strategic Framework Synergies

Key highlights

- Both AU and EU frameworks increasingly position Nature-based Solutions (NbS) as central to climate adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and sustainable development, supported by high level frameworks like African Union (AU) Agenda 2063, African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources.
- Shared commitments under the Paris Agreement and Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) highlight opportunities for joint frameworks, innovative nature financing, and knowledge exchange.
- Climate services are progressively embedded in AU and EU policies for disaster risk reduction, agriculture, and water management, though institutional capacity varies.
- Gender is acknowledged as a cross-cutting priority in both regions, but the operational linkage between gender equality and environmental/climate action remains underdeveloped.
- Both regions show growing interest in Indigenous and Local Knowledge (IKLK), though formal legal integration and co-application with science are more advanced in EU participatory frameworks.
- Opportunities for AU–EU collaboration exist in urban NbS, freshwater and coastal management, gender-responsive climate action, and IKLK mainstreaming.
- Joint innovative nature financing and monitoring mechanisms can accelerate implementation.

Policy recommendations for scaling AU–EU Synergies

a) **Mandate nature-based solutions (NbS) across governance levels**

- Establish AU–EU working groups to harmonize NbS integration into climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction (DRR), and SDG-linked policies.
- Support African countries in embedding NbS into local adaptation plans, DRR strategies, and urban zoning regulations, ensuring coherence from national to community levels.
- Align NbS with forestry, water, agriculture, and biodiversity policies, leveraging *EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 and African Union Agenda 2063*, *African Convention on the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources as guiding anchors.*

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b) **Strengthen climate services for risk-informed decision-making**

- Promote AU–EU collaboration on integrated national climate service frameworks, ensuring consistency with *EU Climate Adaptation Strategy (2021) and Africa Union Climate Change strategy* (2022-2032).
- Co-finance forecasting systems, early warning platforms, and open-access climate data hubs, enabling shared use across regions.
- Develop AU–EU guidelines to guarantee equitable access to climate information for women, youth, and marginalized groups, ensuring inclusivity in adaptation planning.

c) **Advance gender and social inclusion**

- Create AU–EU frameworks that explicitly connect gender equality with ecosystem services, natural resource governance, and climate-resilient agriculture.
- Fund training programs for policymakers and practitioners on gender-responsive NbS design and monitoring.
- Develop harmonized AU–EU indicators to track gender outcomes in climate and environmental programs.

d) **Embed indigenous and local knowledge (IKLK) into policy frameworks**

- Support African countries in formally embedding IKLK into regulatory frameworks, drawing on EU experiences with participatory governance.
- Pilot AU–EU projects that combine IKLK with scientific knowledge (e.g. agriculture, coastal, forest).
- Ensure Indigenous peoples and local communities have decision-making seats in AU–EU climate and biodiversity platforms.

e) **Expand NbS to underrepresented areas**

- Promote AU–EU collaboration on green infrastructure, urban wetlands, and climate-smart city planning.
- Jointly develop integrated freshwater and coastal management frameworks, addressing shared challenges of water security and coastal resilience.
- Scale up AU–EU programs on agroecology, soil restoration, and climate-smart agriculture, linking food security with biodiversity protection.

f) **Strengthen implementation and innovative nature financing mechanisms & instruments**

- Establish AU–EU blended finance facilities to mobilize public, private, and philanthropic capital for NbS and climate services.
- Develop shared AU–EU monitoring frameworks with transparent indicators for NbS, gender, and IKLK integration.
- Incentivize businesses through green investment taxonomies, payment for ecosystems services, carbon markets, and NbS-linked certification schemes.
- Institutionalize AU–EU policy dialogue platforms to ensure coherence across national, regional, and local levels.

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Conclusion and next steps

African countries are advancing integration of Nature-based Solutions (NbS), climate services, gender inclusion, and Indigenous and Local Knowledge (IKLK) into policy frameworks, but gaps remain in coherence, operationalization, and innovative nature financing.

Policy frameworks should aim at strengthening alignment with SDGs, embedding NbS across governance levels, institutionalizing climate services, adopting gender-responsive frameworks, formalizing IKLK integration, and establishing innovative nature financing mechanisms and instruments will support the delivery of transformative and equitable climate action.

Creating collaboration and synergies with EU frameworks provides a strategic opportunity to accelerate inclusive, resilient, and sustainable development in Africa.

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Source: This brief is based on ALBATROSS Horizon Europe Deliverable D6.1: *Multi-level policy analysis* (Nyasimi, Almassy, Muhwanga, et al., 2025). For more detailed information and supporting evidence, readers are referred to the full report and country specific summaries

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