

“This is fundamentally an issue of procedural justice”

Interview with Mithika J. Mwenda on climate justice and the voice of marginalized communities

What is the main purpose behind the Pan African Climate Justice Alliance?

The Pan African Climate Justice Alliance just celebrated its 10th anniversary last year. We came together as African civil society organisations, bringing together smallholder farmers, fisher folk, forest communities, women and small business-owners. The starting point was the fact that we did not have a voice in the international discourse on climate change. Africa was really not represented at international climate change conferences. This is fundamentally an issue of procedural justice and we have been talking about this for a long time. If you want to influence you

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must participate. Over the last ten years we achieved a lot in this regard. The other aspect is to see how those at the very bottom who do not have voice are given a voice so that they can be able to shape decisions that determine our future. We have been really lobbying for that and now we have grown into a massive movement of around 150 000 organisations from 48 African countries. So we are trying to ensure that there is a conversation around the issues that affect people, about solutions to climate change that help people at the very local level, and we want to make sure that women, youth, indigenous people and those people at the frontline of the climate crisis have a voice at the national or international level.

What strategies do you use for influencing the public and decision-makers?

We apply various strategies. Of course, we work constructively with governments. What this means is that we talk as partners in this effort, bearing in mind that climate change requires unprecedented levels of

cooperation between government and non-governmental actors and between different regions in the world. There is no single country which can solve the climate crisis, including the most powerful, the United States. There is no individual who can solve the climate crisis. There is no sector which can solve the climate crisis. We need all of us. However, if we realize that it is very difficult for policy makers to accept what we want and the voices of the people, then we apply what civil society is known for. We use protests, processions, petitions and many other tactics. And these tactics are very effective. Because if we really want to change people, particularly at civil society level, we need to reach a critical mass. And this is what we are building at the very local level. Because governments are generally conservative. They will only listen to people if it makes political sense for them and that's why social movements on climate justice are very important, particularly youth movements which are really rocking the world right now.

“We want to make sure that people at the frontline of climate crisis have a voice.”

Is there something that Fridays for Future and your organisation can learn from each other?

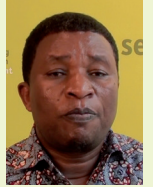
Fridays for the Future is a spontaneous movement that emerged from the inaction of policy makers. While the planet is heating and heating, policy makers are still living in their comfort and they are just making promises and promises. Fridays for Future is a reaction to this passivity. My hope is that we are going to have a sustained campaign that eventually is more than a spontaneous reaction. So, one of the things that Fridays for the Future can learn from PACJA is

how to keep a movement alive because climate change is not going to be solved any time soon, not even by the current generation. PACJA has managed to keep going and putting pressure on policy-makers for ten years. At the beginning, we were written off. But we continued and continued until now where we are the dominant movement on climate change in Africa. We are recognized as the top environmental policy organisation by the African Union. So, we build up a reputation and we are really dominating the African policy space now, so much that other organisations are learning from us and our way of doing policy campaigns

“My hope is that we are going to have a sustained campaign.”

Mithika J. Mwenda

Currently the Executive Director of Pan African Climate Justice Alliance (PACJA) and the Chair of the Institutional Collaboration Platform for Climate Research for Development in Africa (CR4D), Dr Mwenda has distinguished himself as a strategic thinker, dynamic, consummate networker and team builder, with wide experience working and catalyzing transformative change in communities, civil society and other sectors he has worked.



In 2019, he was named as one of the most influential people in the world on climate policy (<https://apolitical.co/lists/most-influential-climate100/>).

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