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Sustainably Growing Africa's Food Systems

# STRENGTHENING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CLIMATE ACTION

Seventy Second Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF 72)

Nairobi, Kenya

26-27 January 2026

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## Background

The Greater Horn of Africa Climate Outlook Forum (GHACOF) is the region's regular, expert forum for producing seasonal climate outlooks and translating them into actionable guidance for climate-sensitive sectors (agriculture, water, health, disaster risk, etc.). It is convened by the IGAD Climate Prediction and Applications Centre (ICPAC) together with National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) and other partners.

Generally, GHACOF runs three times per year, timed to produce outlooks for the main rainy seasons. Participants include ICPAC climatologists, NMHS forecasters, sector experts, humanitarian and development partners, researchers and decision-makers from IGAD member states and beyond. The Forum issues consolidated regional seasonal forecasts (probabilistic maps, technical statements and sectoral impact advisories), reviews recent seasonal performance and discusses implications for preparedness, early warning and anticipatory action.

Over time GHACOF has moved toward more objective, consolidated seasonal forecast procedures (in line with WMO guidelines), blending model outputs, observations and expert deliberation to produce probabilistic regional outlooks, and as such, remains a key node linking climate science to action across the region.

Meanwhile, the youth have been playing a crucial role in climate action in various ways, including through awareness creation and policy advocacy, climate-resilient innovations, climate-smart agriculture, contribution to National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), and overall, the mobilization of communities towards tangible climate solutions.

However, barriers such as weak policy frameworks, limited institutional support, restricted access to funding and climate services, and inadequate mentorship and business development services continue to constrain their potential, keeping their initiatives small in scale.

Recognizing the critical role that the youth play as key drivers of climate action, over the last decade, ICPAC has actively engaged with the youth across the region through various initiatives, including facilitating their participation in GHACOFs and organizing the East Africa Youth Climate Action Awards to recognize and support the scale up of promising youth-led climate initiatives. In collaboration with the Office of the IGAD Youth Special Envoy, which works closely with National Youth Councils across the region, ICPAC has also amplified youth voices, particularly during its high-level meetings, ensuring that youth perspectives reach policy makers. Leveraging

platforms like X and Youtube, it has also conducted awareness campaigns about youth involvement in climate action, for instance, through the “Youth for Climate Action – Voices from Eastern Africa” webinar series.

Against this background, ICPAC facilitated the participation of 10 youths from Ethiopia (1) and Kenya (9) at GHACOF 72, which was convened within the framework of IGAD’s Regional Strategy for Mainstreaming Climate Services in key socio-economic sectors for sustainable development under the theme "**Advancing Climate Services for Resilient Communities and Sustainable Development in the Greater Horn of Africa**". A higher number of youths from Kenya were selected to optimize participation within a constrained budget, given that the Forum was held in Nairobi, Kenya.

## Objectives

The main objectives of the Forum were to:

- Reflect on the performance and impacts of the October to December (OND) 2025 season.
- Present the consolidated, objective regional climate outlook for the March to May (MAM) 2026 season.
- Discuss the implications of the MAM 2026 forecast and recommend appropriate preparedness and management strategies.
- Provide a regional interaction platform for decision-makers, climate scientists, research scientists, development partners, and other users of climate information.

### The main objectives of the youth participation were to:

- Bring forward youth-led perspectives on climate risks, impacts, and solutions within the GHACOF 72 deliberations.
- Provide a platform to showcase youth innovations, highlighting practical climate-smart tools and approaches they are developing.
- Facilitate networking and collaboration opportunities with regional experts, institutions, and partners to help scale their climate initiatives.
- Promote youth empowerment and job creation by connecting their innovations to potential funding, mentorship, and implementation pathways.

## Forum format and sessions

The Forum included a number of sessions, notably a **plenary session** during which the consolidated objective climate outlook for the March-May (MAM) 2026 rainfall season was presented. All participating youths attended this plenary, gaining insights into regional climate trends and projections.

In addition, the Forum featured **sector-specific co-production sessions**. Co-production sessions essentially bring together diverse stakeholders to collaboratively develop and provide climate services that are practical, relevant, and sustainable. This approach is particularly valuable because it ensures that climate services provided are used over the long term by the intended users. By engaging both providers and users, co-production helps tailor climate information to specific needs and contexts. For instance, a farmer requires different information from a health expert, and co-production ensures that each sector receives climate services that are actionable and contextually appropriate.

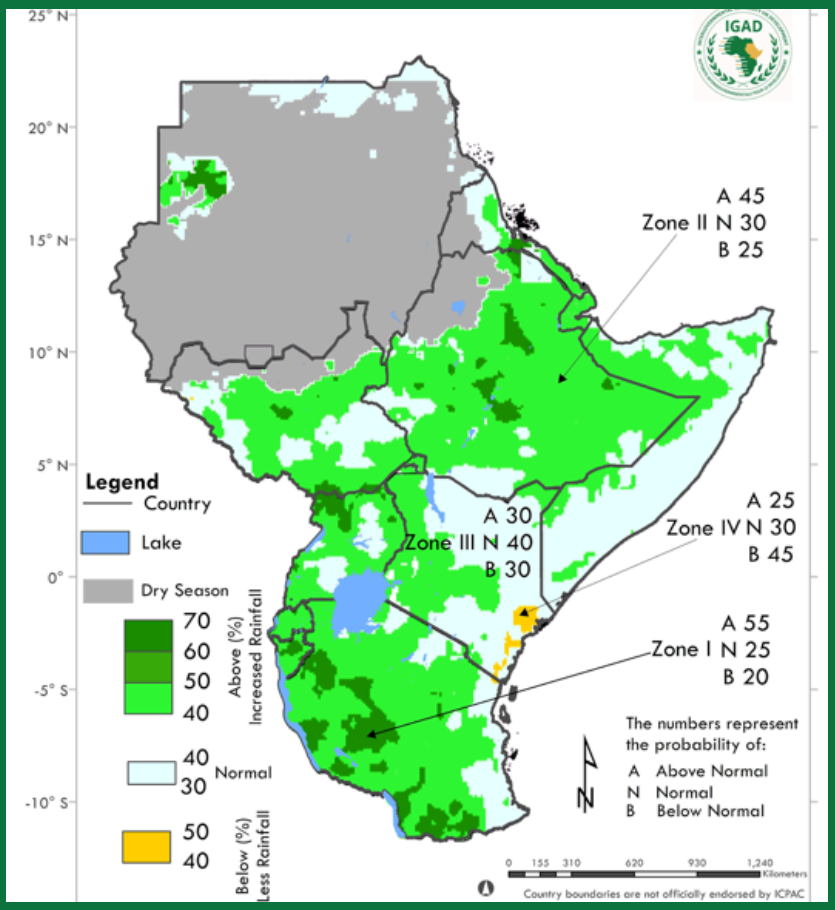
Participating youths were actively encouraged to participate in co-production sessions that aligned with their areas of work or interest, gaining practical experience in applying climate information for decision-making. The following sectoral sessions were convened:

- Agriculture and Food Security
- Livestock
- Disaster Risk Management (DRM)
- Health
- Water and Energy
- Climate security
- Climate Change

Through their engagement, youths not only contributed their perspectives, but also gained firsthand experience in bridging the gap between climate service providers and users, building their capacity to drive climate-resilient initiatives in their communities.

## Overview of the consolidated objective climate outlook for the MAM 2026 rainfall season

MAM constitutes an important rainfall season, particularly in the equatorial parts of the Greater Horn of Africa (GHA), where it contributes up to 60 percent of the total annual rainfall. The performance of the MAM season is, therefore, critical for rain-fed socio-economic sectors in the region, including agriculture, among others.



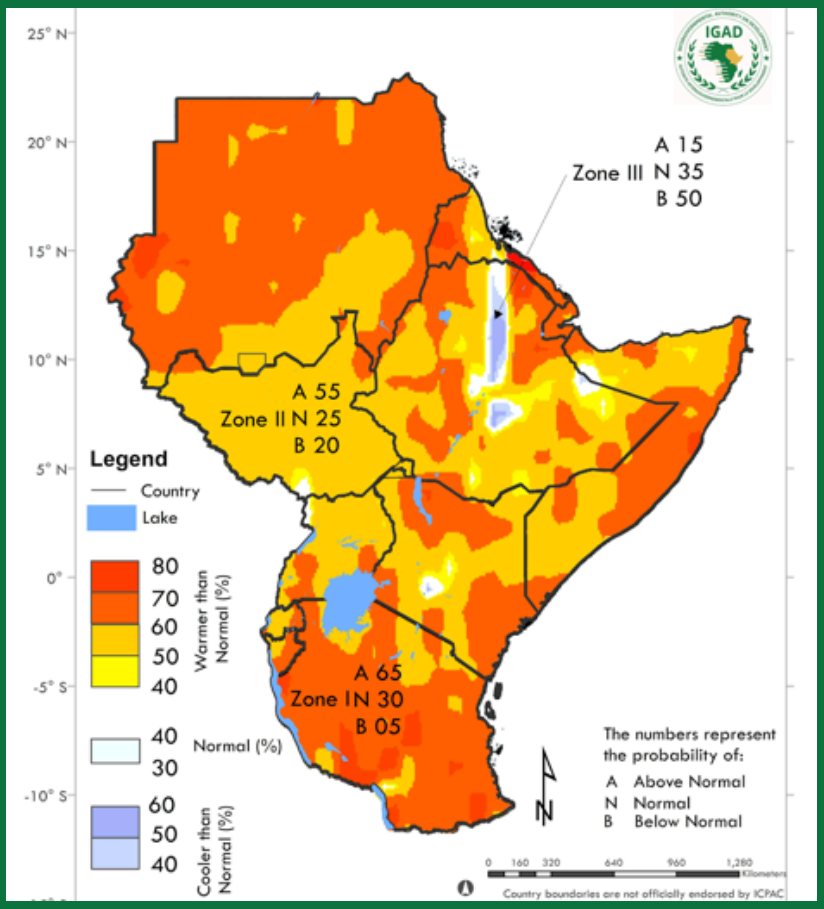

Based on the forecast, there were slightly raised probabilities (40 percent) for near-normal conditions over much of Somalia, northern and eastern Kenya, coastal and parts of northern Tanzania, eastern and western South Sudan, a few regions in western Ethiopia and parts of Uganda. However, in these regions, the probabilities for below-normal and above-normal were not markedly lower, with both equal at 30 percent, indicating that either outcome remained plausible and should be accounted for in contingency planning.

In contrast, the forecast indicated enhanced probabilities for above-normal rainfall over Burundi, Rwanda, most of Tanzania, western Kenya, much of Uganda, South Sudan, and Ethiopia. Forecast probabilities favoured drier-than-usual conditions, specifically for parts of the coastal areas of Kenya.

The forecast probability of seasonal rainfall exceeding user-relevant thresholds indicated that there was over 70 percent chance of exceeding the 300mm threshold over southwestern Ethiopia, western Kenya, southern South Sudan, much of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Tanzania. Comparison of the forecast probabilities with the climatological probabilities for this threshold indicated

that the predicted probability of exceeding 300mm was higher than the climatological chance over much of the western parts of the region. In contrast, probabilities of exceeding 300mm were lower or similar to climatological chances over the eastern sector.

In terms of onset, forecast probabilities favoured an early or normal onset timing over most parts of the region, except for a few localised areas. Raised chances of an early onset were indicated over much of Rwanda, Burundi, and the cross-border areas of Ethiopia and Somalia. On the other hand, higher chances for a delayed onset were indicated over localised areas in South Sudan as well as in parts of western Ethiopia and central Somalia.




Regarding temperature, the forecast showed a high probability of above-normal temperatures across most of the region. This likelihood exceeded 60 percent over most parts of Sudan, Tanzania, eastern Burundi and Rwanda, parts of Ethiopia, Eritrea, Djibouti, central Somalia, and northern, western, and eastern Kenya. In contrast, below-normal temperatures were anticipated for the northern highlands of Ethiopia.

While the MAM season, compared to other seasons, contributes a larger fraction to the annual rainfall total for much of the region, seasonal anomalies are generally less predictable compared to other seasons. The low predictability of the MAM season was reflected in the forecast probabilities, which are generally less shifted from the climatological tercile probabilities of 33 percent. This contrasts with more predictable seasons, such as October–December (OND), where forecast probabilities are typically more strongly shifted. This is largely due to the weak linkage between rainfall and global large-scale modes of variability such as the El Nino Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD).

## General advisories to users


### Scenario planning

Given the low predictability of the MAM season, reflected in forecast probabilities that remain close to climatological tercile values (33 percent) compared to more predictable seasons, users were advised to consider multiple scenarios in their planning.

### Integrated use of forecasts

Use of the regional outlook alongside the national and sub-national forecasts issued by National Meteorological and Hydrological Services (NMHSs) to inform decision-making.

### Ongoing monitoring

Closely monitor updated seasonal forecasts, as well as sub-seasonal and short-range forecasts, to facilitate timely adjustments in planning and response.

### Preparedness and anticipatory actions

Scale up preparedness efforts and anticipatory actions to mitigate potential negative impacts, protect lives and livelihoods, and safeguard critical infrastructure.

## Youth participation and contributions

To help the youth better understand the purpose of their participation at the Forum, their expected roles, and the anticipated follow-up after the event—especially in relation to their climate action initiatives within their communities—a brief presentation was delivered on the project "**Enhancing the Preparedness of African Countries| Regions for Climate Change Solution Planning and Implementation Capacity**". The presentation placed particular emphasis on Work package 1 "**Youth engagement in climate-resilient food systems**".

ENHANCING PREPAREDNESS OF AFRICAN COUNTRIES AND REGI
CHANGE SOLUTION PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION

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WP1: YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CLIMATE-RESILIENT FOOD SYSTEMS

Contributions

- Awareness creation
- Policy advocacy
- Innovative solutions
- Community mobilisation

Challenges

- Weak policy frameworks
- Limited institutional support
- Limited access to funding
- Limited access to climate services
- Inadequate mentorship and business development services

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OUTCOME 1

Empowered youth driving climate action through climate-resilient agrifood systems, green job creation and advocacy

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During the Forum, participating youth actively contributed across multiple sessions:

- In the plenary session, one youth delivered a presentation on “The Role of Youth in Advancing Climate Services for Resilient Communities,” setting the tone for youth-led participation throughout the Forum.
- In the co-production sessions, the youths engaged meaningfully:
    - In the Climate change session, one youth helped lead discussions, offering insights into innovative adaptation strategies.
    - In the Agriculture and food security session, another presented his work, through the Greening Mua Environmental Initiative (GMEI CBO), highlighting efforts to strengthen resilient agri-food value chains in his community.
    - In the Health session, another showcased the intersection of climate and health, sharing her initiatives, through Green Health Africa, in promoting food safety and addressing climate-related health risks.

Deliberations from the co-production sessions were captured and summarised at “sector cafes”, where each sector’s advisories and recommendations were presented. Youth participants also took an active role in presenting outputs at these cafes, particularly in the Health and Climate Change sector cafes.

- Several shared youth-led innovations showcased creative approaches to climate adaptation:
    - One youth innovator shared an initiative he’s a part of, which places live trees in libraries, each tagged with a QR code. When scanned, the codes provide information on the tree’s optimal growing conditions and its benefits across the value chain, demonstrating how innovation can support climate adaptation and local resilience efforts.
    - Another youth working on the nexus between climate and mental health, through Ignite254ke, brought new perspectives to the Forum, by emphasizing the importance of integrating psychosocial well-being into climate adaptation strategies, noting that climate variability and extreme events can have significant mental health impacts, particularly on communities reliant on agriculture-based livelihoods.

Through these engagements, the youths not only deepened their understanding of regional climate services and adaptation strategies but also demonstrated leadership, innovation, and the practical application of their community-based initiatives to advance climate resilience across multiple sectors.

## Youth reflections from the Forum

**1.** The Forum provided a valuable platform to exchange ideas and strategies with diverse stakeholders. It enhanced my knowledge, broadened my understanding of regional climate services, and improved my knowledge, particularly in linking technology and climate information to practical, community-level solutions. Engaging with other youth participants and learning about their initiatives in their communities was both inspiring and motivating, reinforcing the importance of collaboration, peer learning, and meaningful youth engagement in advancing climate action.

A key reflection from the Forum relates to the accessibility and usability of climate forecasts. While seasonal predictions are available, a critical question remains how to we ensure that timely forecasts effectively reach local actors, and in a manner that they can understand. In this respect, discussions with the media stakeholders highlighted the urgent need to strengthen communication channels and translation of technical forecasts into actionable advisories.

Equally important is the systematic consideration of these forecasts by different organisations in their planning processes as well as resource mobilisation efforts as a means to bridging the gap between climate information and practical decision-making, which remains essential for strengthening resilience at the community level.

From a health perspective, the discussions underscored the strong interlinkages between climate variability, food systems, and public health outcomes. This is considering that climate shocks directly affect food production, storage, and distribution, with implications for food safety, nutrition, and disease risk. For example, temperature variability and extreme events can increase food contamination risks, disrupt cold chains, and exacerbate malnutrition. Integrating food safety considerations into climate

adaptation strategies is, therefore, critical to safeguarding both livelihoods and health.

Potential areas for future collaboration include:

- Co-designing of youth-focused programs that emphasize food safety as a critical component of climate-smart agriculture.
- Strengthening joint advocacy efforts through co-hosted events and coordinated engagement at major regional and global platforms such as Conference of Parties (COPs) and Africa Climate Summits.
- Providing technical support to governments, including in integrating health, food safety, and agriculture considerations into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), ensuring that climate strategies reflect cross-sectoral linkages.
- Establishing a Pan-African Youth Climate-Health-Agriculture Coalition to amplify youth voices, foster knowledge exchange, and promote innovative cross-sectoral solutions for climate resilience.

**Beza Mandefro, Ethiopia**

**2.** The Forum strengthened my capacity in applying evidence-based approaches to climate resilience.

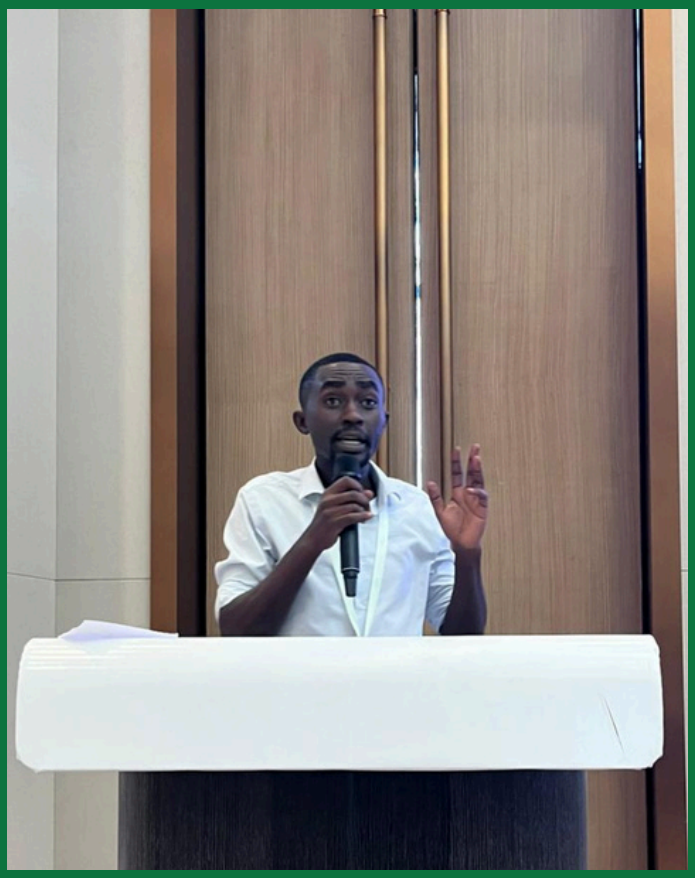
Through the sectoral sessions, I gained valuable insights into innovations in renewable energy, sustainable farming, and climate-smart tools that are shaping resilient development pathways across the region.

Leveraging the Greening Mua Environmental Initiative (GMEI) model which integrates training hubs, demonstration farms, and water management systems to strengthen community resilience, I presented on the role of community-led climate change centres in advancing resilient agri-food systems during the Agriculture and food security co-production session. Within this, I highlighted how these centres serve as critical bridges between climate forecasts and farmer decision-making by translating seasonal outlooks into practical, locally relevant action.

I also shared advisory frameworks tailored to different rainfall scenarios – for example, promoting Farmer Managed Natural

Regeneration (FMNR) during drought conditions, strengthening storage facilities during surplus seasons, and encouraging crop diversification in contexts of erratic rainfall. These practical, scenario-based approaches were well received and generated meaningful discussion. The development of sector advisories and policy briefs aligned with National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), particularly at the Climate change session, reinforced the importance of linking technical discussions to policy commitments and action.

Sessions on artificial intelligence (AI) demonstrated the transformative potential of emerging technologies in climate services. AI-driven rainfall forecasting models and data rescue initiatives are reshaping how climate information is generated and communicated.



Generally, the Forum offered a strong platform for networking and knowledge exchange. Engagements with diverse stakeholders, including government representatives, climate scientists, academia, civil society, researchers and media, fostered integrated dialogue and collaboration.

Youth voices were strongly represented throughout the Forum, showcasing climate-smart innovations in both plenary and sector co-production sessions. However, it was evident that persistent barriers, including limited funding, mentorship gaps, and weak institutional support, continue to constrain the scaling up of youth-led solutions.

The facilitation of youth participation was therefore pivotal in ensuring that our perspectives reached regional experts and policymakers. Moving forward, through GMEI's climate centre model, I aim to support the translation of forecasts into practical, community-level solutions that can help improve food security and enhance resilience.

**Muindi Maingi, Kenya**

**3.** I actively advocated for the integration of youth perspectives into climate resilience and food systems planning during the Climate Change co-production session on “Co-planning the implementation of NAPs and NDCs in the IGAD region,”

The Climate Security Sector discussions also resonated with me, illustrating how climate impacts exacerbate resource-based conflict, drive displacement, and undermine livelihoods. Understanding these dynamics helped expanded my perspective on the intersection of climate, security, and food systems.

My key takeaways were that seasonal forecasts alone are not enough – they must be combined with practical adaptation tools such as drought-tolerant seeds, agricultural insurance, and digital innovations like mobile platforms that can provide real-time forecasts and advisories, hence bridging the gap between high-level climate science and the daily realities communities. Equally critical is the need for user-friendly climate communication strategies, ensuring that forecasts and advisories are both accessible and actionable at the community level.

I return to my organization not merely as an attendee but as an empowered advocate, equipped to integrate climate services into my work, amplify youth voices in decision-making, and advance practical solutions that build resilience, safeguard livelihoods, and strengthen community-level adaptation.

**Bravin Onditi, Kenya**

**4.** My key takeaway as a youth was that we have a critical role in driving climate action – from dissemination of climate information through technologies which we are familiar with and up-to-date on, to leveraging other nodes of the agri-food systems value chain for income generation and job-creation, not just for ourselves but others as well.

Further, building on our innovation of embedding QR codes in trees, which, when scanned, provide detailed information about the tree, we are eager to contribute to the development of the Youth-focused digital solutions for climate services, ensuring that young people remain central to designing and implementing these kinds of tools.

**Kaara Waithaka, Kenya**

**5.** This was my first opportunity to engage directly with experts and content on regional seasonal forecasts, early warning systems, and anticipatory action to strengthen preparedness and decision-making for farmers. As a small-scale farmer, this information will help me, my family, and fellow villagers, who rely on subsistence farming, to plan more effectively, optimise harvests, and improve our food security.

The Forum also provided valuable opportunities to network with experts from other countries, share information, and build avenues for future collaboration. I was inspired by innovative solutions developed by other young people, including initiatives like the Greening Mua Environmental Initiative (GMEI CBO), which advances resilient agri-food systems and strengthens value chains within its community.

Additionally, I participated in a focused engagement with other youth participants, sharing perspectives on climate risks, their impacts, and potential solutions to challenges such as food insecurity and climate change. These interactions broadened my understanding of how young people are actively contributing to climate-smart practices and community resilience.

**Peter Thini, Kenya**

**6.** I participated in the Agriculture and food security co-production session, where I shared practical insights on how innovative technologies can support farmers better manage climate-related risks and improve productivity.

I also connected directly with over 10 experts from different organisations, exchanging ideas and experiences on innovative and sustainable farming practices.

My key takeaways from the Forum included the strong potential of digital tools and innovation to enhance agricultural productivity, as well as the critical role of partnerships in this respect. Building on these insights, I aim to deepen my interest and interaction with digital tools to strengthen early warning systems, ensuring that climate information is timely and accessible to both communities and other decision-makers.

**Samwel Ochieng, Kenya**

**7.** Youth inclusion at GHACOF may not come with dramatic headlines, but its implications are far-reaching. By opening the doors of climate outlook forums to young people, ICPAC and AGRA are helping align climate science with the lived realities of the generation that will inherit the region's agrifood systems.

As climate risks intensify across the Greater Horn of Africa, the future of agriculture will depend not only on better forecasts but on who has access to them, and who is trusted to act on them.

Bringing youth to the climate table signals a recognition that resilience is not built by institutions alone, but by informed, empowered communities, led by those who will farm, innovate, and advocate long into the future.

Read the full article by Victor on Climate Lens News at the link below:

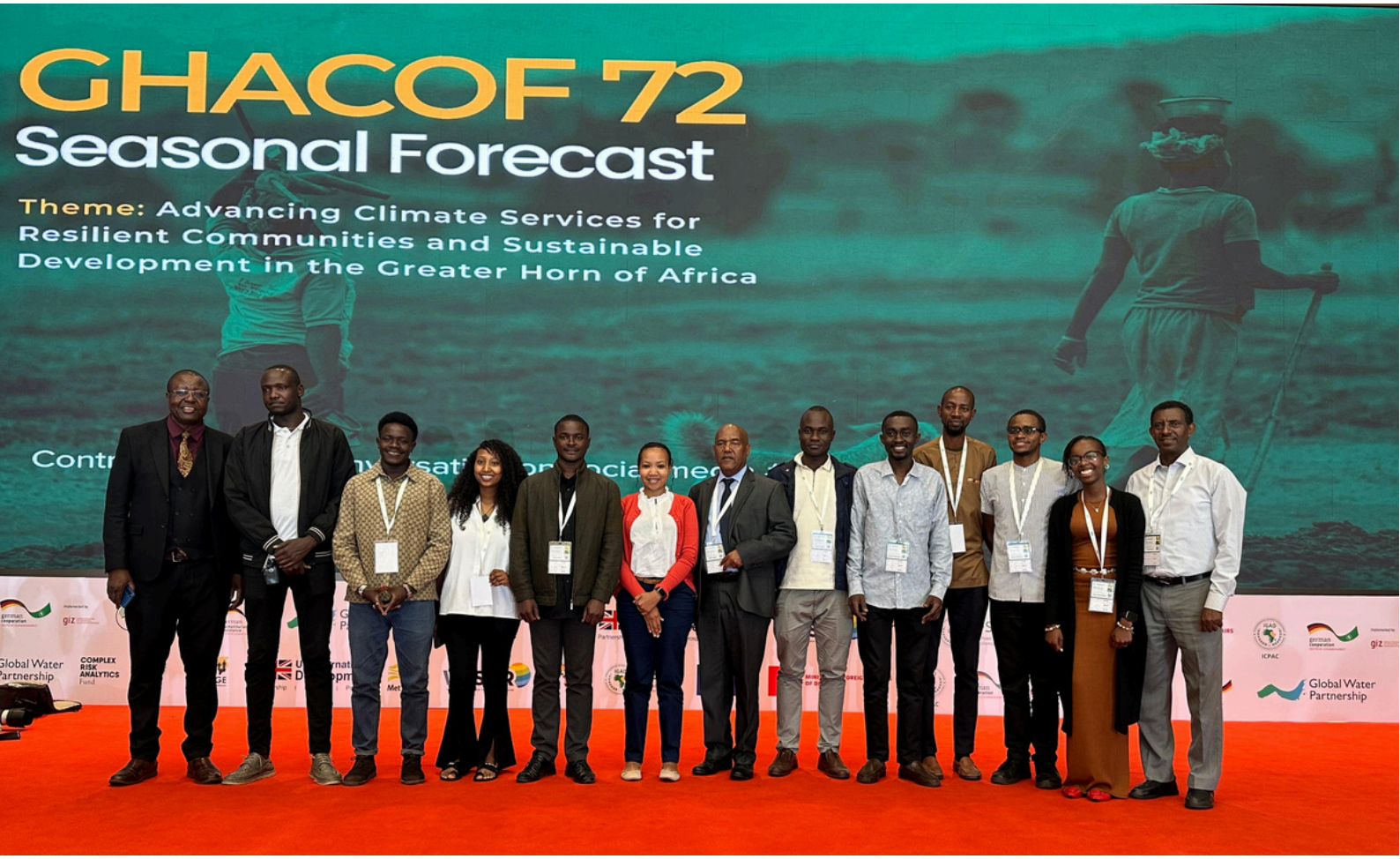
Bringing youth to the climate table: How GHACOF 72 is reimagining agriculture's future

**Victor Kwabe, Kenya**

# Annex

List of youth participants

| | Name | Country |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Innocent Makau | Kenya |
| 2 | Angel-Mary wangui | Kenya |
| 3 | Beza Mandefro | Ethiopia |
| 4 | Bravin Onditi | Kenya |
| 5 | Samwel Ochieng | Kenya |
| 6 | Peter Thini | Kenya |
| 7 | Samuel Mue | Kenya |
| 8 | Muindi Maingi | Kenya |
| 9 | Victor Kwabe | Kenya |
| 10 | Kaara Waithaka | Kenya |

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