Covenant of Mayors
in Sub-Saharan Africa

African cities shaping global climate outcomes from LLF Rio to COP30 Belém

Advocacy brief

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Ten years after the Paris Agreement, COP30 in Belém took place under a stark scientific warning: the world is heading toward a 1.5°C overshoot, with severe consequences for sub-Saharan Africa. At the same time, global recognition of the central role of cities in climate action has never been stronger. As COP30 CEO Ana Toni stated: "Cities' actions are the big news of COP30."

In Belém, the COP30 Presidency framed the moment clearly: global attention must now shift from negotiation to implementation, and implementation begins at the local level. The "global mutirão" theme underscored that tackling the climate crisis will require collective, coordinated effort across all levels of government. At the same time, COP30 unfolded during a period where multilateralism is increasingly strained, and global agreements face mounting challenges in operationalisation. This reality has direct implications for African cities, which are on the frontline of climate impacts but remain excluded from formal decision-making structures.

Against this backdrop, the Covenant of Mayors in Sub-Saharan Africa (CoM SSA) and its Regional Mayors Forum (RMF) ensured African city leadership shaped the global narrative across the Local Leaders Forum (LLf) and in Rio de Janeiro and COP30 in Belém.

1. How CoM SSA influences global climate diplomacy

Many stakeholders do not know this: CoM SSA has a direct channel into the UNFCCC through ICLEI.

What is the LGMA?
The Local Governments and Municipal Authorities (LGMA) Constituency is the official constituency representing cities and regions in the UN climate negotiations. It is recognised by the UNFCCC, alongside constituencies for youth, business, research, Indigenous peoples, and others.

ICLEI serves as the global Focal Point of the LGMA, meaning it coordinates all city and regional government engagement at COPs, interfaces with Presidencies, negotiators and the High-Level Champions, and presents the unified local government position in UNFCCC processes.

Why this benefits CoM SSA
Because ICLEI Africa hosts the CoM SSA Secretariat, African priorities feed directly into the:

- LGMA COP30 Joint Position, and
- Official subnational voice in UNFCCC spaces.

This gives CoM SSA cities a unique political advantage: African messages influence global outcomes.

2. African Mayors' unified voice: RMF priority messages

At LLF Rio and COP30 Belém, CoM SSA and the RMF championed three core priorities:

1. Devolved climate finance

African cities demonstrated readiness to deliver transformative climate solutions but emphasised that this is impossible without predictable, accessible, and decentralised finance.

2. Institutionalised multilevel governance

CoM SSA advocated for a formal UNFCCC mechanism recognising local governments as essential partners in designing and implementing NDCs.

3. Locally led responses to loss and damage

African cities are already experiencing profound loss and damage. CoM SSA called for their voices to directly influence the Loss and Damage Fund's decision-making and disbursement models.

CoM SSA RMF member, Council President of the Region Nouakchott (Mauritania), Fatimetou Abdel Malick at COP30

CoM SSA RMF Chairperson, Mayor Émile Gros Raymond Nakombo (Bangui, Central African Republic) at the GCoM Board meeting at the LLF

CoM SSA signatory, Mayor of Tswelopele (South Africa), Kenalemang Phukuntsi at COP30

3. From Rio to Belém: A unified global momentum

The LLF Joint Outcome Statement, centred on partnering in implementation, unlocking finance for local action, and making COP a process of accountability, travelled to Belém and set the tone for COP30's city-focused agenda.

COP30 repeatedly reinforced what CoM SSA has long advocated: the next phase of climate action is implementation, and implementation begins locally.

The final COP30 text, the "global mutirão", put forward several political signals relevant to African cities. It calls for tripling global adaptation finance by 2035, establishes the Belém Mission to drive collective mitigation action, and, while falling short of a fossil fuel phase-out roadmap, reinforces the global need for accelerated delivery. These signals echo the LLF Joint Outcome Statement and align strongly with CoM SSA's longstanding advocacy on finance, multilevel governance and locally led resilience.

CoM SSA Mayors, and other stakeholders, speaking at the Urban Transition MIssion Summit held in Rio after the LLF.

CoM SSA Mayors connecting with Mayors from other Global South local governments at the LLF

4. What COP30 outcomes mean for African cities (beyond expectations vs reality)

COP30 was widely expected to be the "COP of implementation." In reality, the outcomes were mixed and often weaker than hoped, particularly on fossil fuel phase-out, adaptation finance, and the formal recognition of subnational governments in the Belém Package.

However, several decisions and political signals still matter deeply for African cities, especially when seen through the lens of CoM SSA priorities. In addition to the negotiated text, COP30 also launched new initiatives intended to accelerate implementation. The "Global Implementation Accelerator", co-led by the COP30 and COP31 Presidencies, was introduced as a voluntary collaboration mechanism to help countries deliver their NDCs and National Adaptation Plans (NAPs). The FINI (Fostering Investible National Implementation) initiative was also announced, aiming to mobilise USD 1 trillion for adaptation investment pipelines by 2028 by bringing together governments, MDBs and private financiers. These mechanisms could create new openings for African cities, particularly where multilevel governance structures are strong.

This section summarises the most important outcomes African cities need to be aware of, whether or not they align directly with CoM SSA RMF messages:

4.1. A global mitigation gap that directly affects African cities

On day one of COP30, the UNFCCC released a sobering assessment of 2035 climate targets:

- Current pledges = 12% reduction in emissions (relative to 2019).
- Required to keep warming to 2°C = 35% reduction.
- Required to hold 1.5°C = 55% reduction.

This gap is catastrophic for sub-Saharan Africa, where cities are already experiencing:

- extreme heat;
- water scarcity;
- urban flooding;
- forced migration; and
- displacement.

Why this matters to African cities:
African cities are facing rapidly escalating climate impacts not of their making, reinforcing the RMF's message on Loss & Damage and the need for adequate, predictable adaptation finance.

4.2. A fragmented global landscape on fossil fuels

A progressive coalition (including Brazil, EU, Latin America, SIDS, LDCs, Australia, South Korea) pushed for roadmaps to phase out fossil fuels and end deforestation. But these roadmaps were blocked by China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia and UAE, and were therefore not included in the Belém text. Brazil has volunteered to develop the roadmaps anyway and report to COP31.

Why this matters to African cities:
The absence of a global fossil fuel phase-out increases long-term climate risks for Africa. But, the emergence of a new progressive alliance (similar to Paris 2015) offers political space for African cities to align with global high-ambition efforts.

CoM SSA RMF link:
This reinforces the importance of calling for multilevel governance, cities cannot wait for geopolitics to resolve the mitigation gap.

4.3. Weak but progress on adaptation finance

Developing countries called for tripling adaptation finance by 2035. The final language only "calls for efforts to at least triple adaptation finance".

Why this matters to African cities:

- African cities remain highly underfunded for adaptation.
- While political recognition is useful, finance remains unpredictable.
- The wording is soft; cities will need stronger commitments at COP31 and COP32.

CoM SSA RMF link:
Directly reinforces the call for devolved climate finance and stronger access mobilities.

COP30 President Andre do Lago addressing the Parties at COP30

South African Local Government Association (SALGA) representing the LGMA at the COP30 Presidency's Open Dialogue with Parties and NGO Constituencies

4.4. A controversial global goal on adaptation indicator package

The expert-proposed set of 100 indicators was replaced last-minute by a Brazilian Presidency package of 59 indicators, merging diverse concepts and weakening scientific rigour.

COP30 adopted the Belém-Addis Vision:

- a political track to "socialise" the indicators,
- a technical track to refine them by COP32 in Ethiopia.

Why this matters to African cities:

- Indicators shape what gets measured, and what gets funded.
- The rushed package risks overlooking urban vulnerability, informality, and local leadership.
- COP32 will be critical for correcting gaps, and African cities must prepare to engage.

CoM SSA RMF link:

Strengthens the case for local knowledge and locally led adaptation to shape the refinement process.

4.5. National Adaptation Plans (NAPs): Progress

Countries adopted new NAP decision text, but developing countries were dissatisfied with the lack of firm commitments on finance. The final text emphasises barriers to accessing finance, mirroring African city experiences with climate funds.

Why this matters to African cities:

- African cities can leverage NAPs to push for city-inclusive national adaptation planning.
- The explicit reference to finance barriers gives African cities evidence for national reform demands.

4.6. Climate finance architecture: three major issues

- Clarity on public finance (Article 9.1) remains unresolved
  - A two-year work programme was agreed, but without clear numbers or timelines.

- Adaptation finance tripling only partially achieved
  - Political signal, no binding commitment.

- The $1.3 trillion "Baku–Belém Roadmap" stalled
  - Barely discussed and only "noted" in final text.

Why this matters to African cities:

- No new predictable finance streams.
- However, the renewed focus on accessibility, barriers, and local delivery aligns closely with CoM SSA's mission.

CoM SSA RMF messages link:

This entire section reinforces the RMF's call for devolved, simplified finance.

4.7. Gender action: a win but not without caveats

COP30 adopted the Belém Gender Action Plan, a nine-year framework supporting:

- women's leadership,
- protection of women environmental defenders,
- gender-responsive climate policy,
- gender-disaggregated data.

But it falls short on emerging gender-climate issues (SRHR, GBV, care work) and lacks dedicated financing.

Why this matters to African cities:

Cities can now push national governments to adopt gender-responsive local climate policies consistent with the GAP.

4.8. Subnational governments: recognition without a mandate

COP30 failed to establish a formal, mandated UNFCCC mechanism for local and regional governments.

But it did:

- repeatedly reference multilevel action,
- elevate cities in ministerials,
- provide stronger language in the Mitigation Work Programme,
- and signal progress on urbanisation within the Action Agenda.

Why this matters to African cities:

There is political recognition, but cities still lack a formal seat in decision-making.

CoM SSA RMF messages link:

This directly mirrors the RMF message on institutionalising multilevel governance.

4.8b. Just Transitions and subnational leadership

COP30 adopted the Just Transition Mechanism, a significant step in operationalising equity and people-centred transitions. The mechanism emphasises international cooperation, capacity-building, finance mobilisation and inclusivity in shifting to low-carbon economies. For African cities, which are central to energy access, informal economy resilience and local labour markets, the mechanism provides a new entry point to advocate for subnational participation in national just transition frameworks. Implementation will depend heavily on local institutions.

CoM SSA RMF messages link:

This aligns with CoM SSA's emphasis on multilevel governance and the need for national frameworks that recognise municipalities as central actors in just transitions.

4.9. Loss & Damage: architecture strengthened, local leadership still missing

COP30 advanced parts of the global Loss & Damage (L&D) agenda, but not at the scale or clarity required to address the profound impacts already experienced in African cities.

What COP30 delivered

- The Loss & Damage Fund continues to receive political recognition and incremental structural strengthening.
- Discussions increasingly acknowledged the need for L&D responses that are timely, community-centred, and locally informed.
- More countries referenced the need for implementation-ready mechanisms that reach those most affected, including cities.

However:

- The final decisions did not provide a systematic role for local and regional governments.
- No commitments were made on simplified access windows or city-level channels.
- Finance remains limited, fragmented and unpredictable.
- Operational modalities for local delivery remain vague.

Why this matters to African cities:

African cities are already facing profound climate-induced losses:

- intensified flooding,
- destruction of informal settlements,
- damage to infrastructure,
- forced displacement,
- erosion of livelihoods,
- rapid urbanisation driven by rural climate impacts.

Without direct, rapid, locally led L&D finance, cities cannot protect their most vulnerable communities or rebuild in ways that reduce future risk.

CoM SSA RMF messages link:

This outcome underscores the urgency of the RMF message calling for:

- Locally led Loss & Damage responses and meaningful city participation in the Fund's governance and disbursement structures.

4.10. Culture and Heritage integrated into adaptation policy

For the first time, COP30 operationalised culture and heritage within adaptation policy, the outcome of five years of global advocacy. The decision calls on Parties to integrate cultural heritage into adaptation planning at local, regional and national levels. This is highly relevant to African cities, where cultural assets, identity, and heritage landscapes are increasingly at risk from climate impacts.

Why this matters to African cities:

- Cultural heritage is a foundation for social cohesion, tourism economies and place-making.
- Integrating culture strengthens community-led adaptation.
- This decision can unlock new policy and finance pathways, especially for coastal and heritage-rich African cities.

CoM SSA RMF messages link:

Reinforces the RMF message on locally led adaptation rooted in lived experience, knowledge systems and social resilience.

Looking ahead:

How CoM SSA will build on COP30 outcomes

The global political landscape around COP30 also intersected with major geopolitical developments relevant to Africa. The 2025 G20 Summit, the first held on African soil, reinforced alignment with the Paris Agreement, prioritised adaptation, resilience, clean cooking, food security and sustainable development finance, and elevated African leadership within global climate governance. South Africa's successful G20 Presidency lays important groundwork for an Africa-led COP32 in Ethiopia, creating strategic opportunities for CoM SSA cities and the RMF over the next three years.

Despite mixed outcomes, COP30 created political openings that African cities can use. CoM SSA will focus on turning these into concrete gains:

- Drive NDC implementation and prepare for future revisions, ensuring cities play a meaningful role in delivering national commitments and influencing the next update cycle.
- Push for devolved, accessible climate finance, working with national governments and finance intermediaries to create pathways that reach the local level.
- Advance African city leadership in the L&D Fund, advocating for city-inclusive governance and preparing urban pilot projects.
- Strengthen multilevel governance, helping countries formalise coordination between national and local government for climate implementation.
- Prepare for COP31 Türkiye and COP32 Ethiopia, ensuring African cities are organised, visible and influential as the global focus shifts toward the continent.

African cities are ready to lead. CoM SSA, through the RMF and ICLEI's global mandate, will ensure their influence continues to grow in the years ahead.