



Tropentag, September 10-12, 2025, hybrid conference

“Reconcile land system changes
with planetary health”

Socio-ecological damage and its implications for africa: pathways for remediation

CLARIETTA CHAGWIZA¹, MAANO RAMUTSINDELA²

¹*University of Pretoria, Future Africa, South Africa*

²*University of Cape Town, Geography,*

Abstract

The African continent is endowed with natural resources, including water, fertile land, diverse ecosystems, and rich minerals, and most of its population depends on these resources for their livelihoods. However, the reality of the climate crisis and environmental degradation is already visible in Africa. Ironically, Africa contributes the least to global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and other environmentally harmful practices, yet it bears a disproportionate share of the consequences. By declaring 2025 as the year of reparations and justice for the African people, the African Union (AU) amplifies the urgency of addressing the continent's socio-ecological crises. This policy paper examines the root causes and far-reaching impacts of socio-ecological damage in Africa, while exploring viable pathways toward remediation. Specifically, it seeks to answer three critical questions: 1) What factors perpetuate socio-ecological damage in Africa? 2) What are the environmental and societal implications of this damage? and 3) What options exist to remediate the harm and promote environmental and social justice?

Our analysis identifies several interrelated factors that perpetuate socio-ecological damage across the African continent, including the inequitable access to natural resources, weak governance structures, unsustainable and short-term development plans, inadequate regulation of foreign investment activities, and the behaviour of industries and external actors. The paper foregrounds various forms of environmental damage from water and soil contamination through to extractive activities and their impact on society.

The paper goes beyond analysing these consequences to suggest three pathways for reparative action: 1) Promoting new ways of looking at environmental problems and community empowerment for grounded ecological stewardship 2) Harnessing the power of technologies and innovations to enhance environmental monitoring, analysis, and adaptive management, and 3) Strengthening the role of science, particularly citizen science to promote inclusive ecological stewardship, and 4) Suggesting options for reparations to Africa by countries and companies in the Global North as the baseline for sustainability on the continent.

Keywords: Africa, reparations, socio-ecological damage, sustainability