

Hellen Munyasa stole the show with her initiative that transforms plastic waste into durable climate-smart construction materials and essential household products.

BY SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

Uganda cemented its growing reputation as a regional hub for climate innovation this week as young African entrepreneurs, policy leaders, researchers, and development partners converged in Kampala for the 2025 African Climate Innovators Challenge (ACIC) late last month.

The gathering showcased some of the continent's most promising youth-led solutions to the climate crisis, with Uganda emerging as a strong leader both in participation and innovation quality. The event, which was organised by the Green Africa Youth Organisation (GAYO), in partnership with 3E's4Africa e.V. and Start-up Lounge Africa, brought together delegates from more than 20 African countries.

Since its inception, ACIC has been a flagship continental platform designed to nurture, mentor, fund, and spotlight environmental entrepreneurs under the age of 35.

But this year's edition was particularly remarkable, delivering the most competitive pitch session to date and demonstrating how Africa's youthful ingenuity is redefining climate resilience.

Showcasing climate leadership

While the event attracted innovators from across the continent, Uganda stood out, both as host and as a leader in the climate innovation space.

Several Ugandan start-ups presented solutions rooted in community resilience, waste transformation, and renewable energy, signalling the country's growing influence in Africa's green enterprise ecosystem.

Among the standout participants was Hellen Munyasa, founder of Helton Traders Limited, who captured widespread attention with her ground-breaking approach to tackling Kampala's escalating plastic pollution.

Munyasa's initiative transforms plastic waste into durable climate-smart construction materials and essential household products, offering a marketable solution to one of Uganda's most persistent environmental challenges.

"Plastic is often seen as waste, but through the right technology and mindset, it becomes a resource," she said.

She adds that her project not only reduces landfill burden but also creates employment opportunities for vulnerable youth and women, placing Uganda firmly on the map as a champion of circular-economy innovation.

Convergence of African ingenuity

This year's ACIC celebrated a broad spectrum of climate solutions anchored in indigenous knowledge, modern technology, and local community engagement.

Other finalists presented innovations ranging from clean-energy systems and climate-smart agriculture to waste

Uganda shines as Africa holds climate innovators challenge



Young African entrepreneurs, policy leaders, researchers, and development partners who converged in Kampala City for the 2025 African Climate Innovators Challenge (ACIC) late last month. PHOTOS/SHABIBAH NAKIRIGYA

20
COUNTRIES IN
ATTENDANCE

management tools and digital monitoring platforms.

Mr Sameul Opoka, the Chief Executive Officer of Start-up Lounge Africa, said the diversity of ideas reflected Africa's unique climate challenges and the home-grown solutions required to address them.

"This platform is not just about awarding winners, it is about nurturing a generation of young Africans who are building the continent's climate future through creativity, technology, and community-driven innovation," he said.

Mr Opoka echoed this sentiment, praising the Challenge for elevating youth voices and integrating them into broader climate policy dialogues.

"The African youth, who is the continent's largest demographic, must take a central role in climate governance if Africa is to achieve long-term resilience," he said.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Nwanne Vwede Abahor described ACIC as a continental game changer, arguing that its training, mentorship, and seed funding components are helping to build profitable green enterprises capable of addressing urgent environmental issues.

"These issues include waste management, renewable energy, water conservation, and climate-smart agriculture," he said.

Togo's Robaloto wins grand prize

In a tightly contested competition, the Shs36m (\$10,000) grand prize went to Robaloto from Togo.

His innovation, a bioenergy system powered by agricultural waste, impressed judges with its potential to expand across rural Africa.

Designed to provide clean, affordable cooking energy, Robaloto's system directly addresses health and environmental risks associated with charcoal and firewood.

The prototype reduces deforestation, limits exposure to toxic smoke, and promotes the use of renewable energy all



Hellen Munyasa, founder of Helton Traders Limited, holding a Uganda flag, stood out in the climate innovation space.

EXPERTS WEIGH IN

“

Future initiative. Finance gap.
"This platform is not just about awarding winners, it is about nurturing a generation of young Africans who are building the continent's climate future through creativity, technology, and community-driven innovation,"
Mr Sameul Opoka, CEO of Start-up Lounge Africa

“

"The brilliance we see here proves that Africa has the solutions, what our youth need is support, visibility, and capital. And that is exactly what we are providing,"
Mr Paul Dankwa, programme Manager for Green Africa Youth Organisation Front Ghana

while relying on locally available materials.

Mr Aymane Gbadamassi, one of the winners, said his project is a comprehensive business model, community-focused implementation strategy, and potential for large-scale production.

"I am grateful for this opportunity and this funding will help scale production and reach more communities that urgently need clean, reliable, and affordable energy," he said.

Morocco's Fatima El Khou takes second place

The second-place award was secured by Fatima El Khou from Morocco, whose Artificial Intelligence (AI)-driven agricultural advisory platform was celebrated for its impact on food security.

Her innovation uses real-time soil monitoring and climate data to help farmers in arid regions adapt to changing rainfall patterns.

She said the platform offers guidance on water use, crop choices, and early warning climate alerts, making it es-

CLIMATE FINANCING

In March 2023 the government of Uganda, in partnership with the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) and the Global Green Growth Institute (GIGI), established a Climate Finance Unit in the Ministry of Finance. Since then several initiatives have been launched to boost climate finance access, including the £39 million (Shs184 billion) Climate Smart Jobs (CSJ) programme. The programme aims to promote sustainable land use and diversify incomes for smallholder farmers as a pathway to climate resilience.

pecially useful for smallholder farmers who are highly vulnerable to climate shocks.

"This recognition is not just mine; it belongs to the farmers who inspire me every day to develop solutions that safeguard their livelihoods," she said.

Mr Paul Dankwa, the programme Manager of Green Africa Youth Organisation Front Ghana, emphasised that ACIC is not only an annual competition but also a growing continental movement focused on unlocking the climate innovation potential of African youth.

"The Challenge supports collaboration across regions, enabling young innovators to exchange knowledge, challenge assumptions, and build enterprises rooted in environmental sustainability," he said.

He added that the platform's long-term mission is to help young Africans create income-generating solutions that respond to local climate challenges, while also reducing unemployment through green entrepreneurship.

"The brilliance we see here proves that Africa has the solutions, what our youth need is support, visibility, and capital. And that is exactly what we are providing," he said.

Uganda's climate future

For Uganda, the 2025 ACIC offered more than just a chance to host an event. It reaffirmed the country's leadership in climate innovation.

Ugandan entrepreneurs gained visibility, mentorship, and the opportunity to showcase scalable solutions that could transform the region's environmental landscape.

The performance of innovators like Munyasa demonstrated Uganda's growing capacity to lead climate adaptation efforts through youth-driven enterprises. Government agencies and development partners that attended the event acknowledged the importance of strengthening national support for young innovators working on environmental conservation and green economy development.

As Africa faces intensifying climate risks from extended droughts to devastating floods, the need for locally informed, youth-led climate solutions has never been more urgent.

The 2025 African Climate Innovators Challenge made it clear that the continent's young people are prepared to lead this transformation.