

East African Participation in the Global Green Regime

Andrew Prado-Alipui*

Abstract: *This research is centered around the participation of the East African Community in UN environmental treaties. It utilizes historical, political, and social developments in the region to explain differences in treaty participation. This text argues that differences in participation are tied to factors such as civil society, political stability and historical considerations. It features Rwanda, South Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, and UN environmental treaties.*

Keywords: *East African Community, Environmental Protection, Treaty Participation*

The Global Green Regime

The global environmental protection regime, also known as the global green regime, seeks to protect biodiversity and mitigate the effects of climate change via the establishment of multilateral treaties. The United Nations has opened 18 such treaties to address environmental concerns between 1979 to 2018. Although the East African Community shares a common climate policy, there is a lack of unified participation in UN environmental treaties.

In the past year, the African continent warmed faster than the global average temperature over land and ocean combined.¹ Without increased cohesion and active participation in the environmental protection regime, the effects of climate change on the continent, especially in the East Africa region would be disastrous. The EAC now must take steps towards climate action, starting with increased participation in the environmental protection regime which would in turn lead to a more unified approach in combating climate change.

* Andrew Nicholas Prado-Alipui is a senior at Syracuse University studying International Relations with a topical focus on International Law and Organizations and a geographical focus on Sub-Saharan Africa. He currently works as a geopolitical risk analyst with Foreign Brief.

¹ World Meteorological Society, "State of the Climate in Africa," WMO-No.1275, (2020), https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10854

This research hypothesizes that factors such as political stability and the presence of a strong civil society were the primary differentiators for participation among East African Community members in the environmental protection regime. Despite being a “green state”, Rwanda was held back by treaty participation because of political repression and limitations on freedom of expression, which prevented civil society groups from effectively advocating for climate action. Political and social instability due to civil war was a significant obstacle to treaty participation in South Sudan. In Uganda, leaders like Hilda Flavia Nakabuye and Vanessa Nakate are part of active climate groups that put pressure on their governments and encouraged environmental treaty participation. In the case of Tanzania, environmental protection has been an integral part of its history and struggle for independence.

The East African Community and a promise of regional integration

The EAC is a regional intergovernmental organization comprised of 6 partner states in the East Africa region: the Republics of Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda, South Sudan, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.² The treaty establishing the East African Community was signed on November 30th, 1999 and entered into force on July 7th, 2000 after it was ratified by the three original Partner States – Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda.³ Headquartered in Arusha, Tanzania, the EAC’s mission is to widen and deepen economic, political, social and cultural integration to improve the quality of life of the people of East Africa through increased competitiveness, value added production, trade and investments with the ultimate goal of becoming a political federation.⁴ In a step towards this transformation into a political federation, the community announced in 2022 that by 2024 the East African Monetary Union (EAMU) will be established,

² “EAC Overview,” East African Community, (n.d.), <https://www.eac.int/overview-of-eac>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

requiring a high degree of economic convergence. Although the EAC has made strides in economic integration, environment and natural resource management has not seen the same level of cohesion despite the EAC treaty outlining a common policy framework for cooperation and coordination in environmental protection. This has left the region at the mercy of climate disasters without unified adaptation and mitigation strategies.

Background: Climate change in East Africa

President Samia Suluhu Hassan of Tanzania declared that “[t]he challenges of climate change are affecting food security, livelihoods, and income of our people” adding that “our actions today determine the future of our planet in terms of climate change.”⁵ In 2020, East Africa recorded precipitation above the long-term 1981-2010 average except in northeastern Somalia, southern parts of Kenya and Lake Victoria.⁶ Flooding across the region was extremely destructive, especially in Sudan and Kenya with 285 deaths in Kenya, 155 deaths and over 800,000 people affected in Sudan.⁷ Approximately 12 percent of global displacements occurred in the East and Horn of Africa region with over 1.2 million new disaster related displacements and almost 500,000 conflict related displacements.⁸ In Burundi, 31,000 people had been displaced by climatic events.⁹

Nearly half of Africa’s population is below the poverty line and depends on climate sensitive activities such as rain-fed agriculture, herding, and fishing.¹⁰ Periods of extended

⁵ “Tanzania President Hon. Samia Suluhu Calls for Climate Change Actions at the UN Summit,” Tanzania Natural Resource Forum, (2021), <https://www.tnrf.org/en/content/tanzania%E2%80%99s-president-hon-samia-suluhu-calls-climate-change-actions-un-summit>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ World Meteorological Society, “State of the Climate in Africa,” WMO-No.1275, (2020), https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10854.

⁹ World Meteorological Society, “State of the Climate in Africa,” WMO-No.1253, (2020), https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10421.

¹⁰ Ibid.

droughts or floods could have catastrophic implications for African economies. Food insecurity is one of the major issues in the Eastern and Horn of Africa regions, severely exacerbated by climatic events.¹¹ According to the Global Report on Food Crises of the World Food Programme, 98 million people suffered from acute food insecurity, an increase of 40 percent from 2019.¹²

Measures of Treaty Participation and Climate Vulnerability

This research utilizes UN environmental treaties as a proxy measurement of green regime participation. Participation in such treaties is essential to climate action because they give party states access to policy frameworks, assist in the composition of cohesive plans and solutions, and create a systematic monitoring mechanism to track progress and to identify success factors. Active participation ensures that the EAC has a unified voice and presence on the international negotiation table. In order to assess climate vulnerability, this paper uses the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) INFORM Risk Index which quantifies climate vulnerability, to measure states' probability of exposure to environmental hazards, social vulnerability, and coping capacity with a range of 1-10. The values allow for a comparison of climate risks and trends between countries, with higher values indicating higher vulnerability. Most states scored above a 5 while the states with low participation scored 3.2 (Rwanda) and 6.8 (South Sudan).

Treaty Signatures and Cohesion of Policy

Many implementation strategies and projects tied to UN environmental treaties remain in progress. In 2002, EAC Partner States finalized the draft Framework for Joint Participation in and Implementation of Regional and Multilateral Environment Agreements in order to ensure the implementation of UN environmental treaties to which they are party. The EAC is also in the

¹¹ World Meteorological Society, "State of the Climate in Africa," WMO-No.1275, (2020), https://library.wmo.int/doc_num.php?explnum_id=10854.

¹² Ibid.

process of institutionalizing the Joint Participation in International Conventions and Treaties on Environment and Natural Resources Management.

Other key strategies and projects underway include the EAC Post Rio + 20 Plan of Action, and the development of regional position papers for international policy discourse on Biological Diversity, Climate Change and Disaster Risk Reduction. Finally, the EAC has made progress on an EAC Biosafety Policy framework to ensure a common policy for biosafety measures in line with the Cartagena Protocol. The aforementioned projects all remain incomplete and contribute to a lack of a collaborative approach to climate change in East Africa. If the region is to effectively combat climate change, these strategies must be implemented and institutionalized.

Struggles for the Environment in Tanzania

As the headquarters of the East African Community and one of its founding members, it is unsurprising that Tanzania is a leader in EAC participation in the environmental protection regime. Tied with Uganda, Tanzania has signed 14 UN environmental treaties, indicating the highest levels of treaty participation in the EAC. Tanzania's INFORM Risk Index value was 5.3, the second lowest of EAC Partner States. Tanzania's INFORM score indicates relatively low climate vulnerability, due to slightly more resilient communities and improved infrastructures in comparison to other Partner States. Treaty participation in Tanzania is related to the country's national identity and history of environmental struggles, illustrated by conflict with the British Colonial Empire at the Arusha National Park.

Droughts have had devastating impacts on agricultural output, food security and hydro-power generation, affecting millions of Tanzanians due to poor crop yields.¹³ Like droughts,

¹³ "Climate Knowledge Portal," World Bank Group, (n.d.), <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/tanzania-united-republic/vulnerability#>.

floods affect agricultural output and food security, but they also can severely affect health systems and groundwater supplies.¹⁴ Increased precipitation creates conditions suitable for insects such as mosquitoes that transfer diseases like malaria to areas that have historically been unaffected such as Tanga, Kilimanjaro, and Arusha Highlands.¹⁵ Tanzanians also suffer from displacement due to climate disasters. In 2020, the number of cases of internally displaced persons and persons displaced due to climate disaster was 57,000.

President Hassan addressed the UN at COP26 in Glasgow, discussing the consequences of climate change on Tanzania's landscapes: "[o]ur pride, the Mount Kilimanjaro, is drastically becoming bald due to glacier melting. Our exotic and beautiful archipelago, Zanzibar, is struggling with temperature rises, saltwater intrusion and inundation, thus impacting its tourism ecology."¹⁶ President Hassan added, "we Tanzania determine to take swift actions as our inaction means risking our development agenda and prosperity, we have in place the national climate change response strategy and the nationally determined contributions aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions"¹⁷ Before closing her speech, President Hassan posed the question, "Excellencies, if we developing countries have shown such leadership, why are larger major countries are lagging behind?"¹⁸ In this statement, President Hassan asserts Tanzania's position as one of the leaders on climate issues. Tanzania has had a long history of environmental protection. As is true in the present day, Tanzanians have long struggled to preserve their livelihoods and natural landscapes. The natural environment and biodiversity are a strong component of Tanzania's national identity, as in the Tanzanian flag, the color blue represents the

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "President Samia's COP26 Address in Glasgow, Scotland," *The Citizen*, filmed November 2021 at COP26, <https://www.thecitizen.co.tz/tanzania/video/president-samia-s-cop26-address-in-glasgow-scotland-3605272>

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

waters of Tanzania, the green is symbolic of Tanzania's fertile lands and the yellow is for the country's mineral deposits. Some examples of the importance of the environment and biodiversity in Tanzania's Coat of Arms are an elephant tusk held up by a man and a woman, a spear signifying defense of freedom, and Mount Kilimanjaro in addition to a gold portion symbolizing mineral resources, a red portion symbolizing fertile soil and a blue and white flag celebrating the seas and lakes of Tanzania.¹⁹

Tanzania's conflicts with the British colonial administration were rooted in the British Empire's desire to impose a European ideal of pristine wilderness in order to attract tourists, hunters, geologists and geographers.²⁰ One of the battlegrounds between Tanzanian communities and the British empire was Arusha National Park, in northern Tanzania. Arusha National Park embodies all of the political-ecological dilemmas facing protected areas throughout Africa, with significant clashes between the British colonial administration and Meru peasant communities who resided on Mount Meru. These natural landscapes have significant symbolic meanings to various social groups, as the African people who lived in what became Arusha National Park lived and hunted there for generations. Colonial conservation discourse centered around the "unsportsmanlike" nature of African hunting practice²¹, which led the British government to conclude that Africans could not be in charge of their own resources, and that they must be placed in the hands of state bureaucracies.²² From the earliest colonial years on Mount Meru, African people resisted natural resource laws in the Meru Forest and game reserves. African people continued to hunt, allowed their livestock to graze on land, and put enormous amounts of

¹⁹ "The National Symbols," Embassy of Tanzania in Rome, (2021), <https://www.embassyoftanzaniarome.info/en/about-tanzania/national-symbols>.

²⁰ Roderick P. Neumann, *Imposing Wilderness: Struggles Over Livelihood and Nature Preservation in Africa*, Vol. 4., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

pressure on the colonial government, making it difficult to enforce laws and punish violations.²³ The British tried to resolve this by recruiting Meru judges, headmen, and forest guards, but this was only met with further resistance as cases of trespass were dismissed, and guards looked the other way as villagers encroached on the reserve. These resistance efforts by the Meru people required planning, organization, and tactical movements to regain land from the reserve without the British government noticing.²⁴ The case of Arusha National Park and the resistance of the Meru people is one of many examples of Tanzania's national identity being linked to the environment.

Outspoken Leaders in Uganda

Uganda's participation in the environmental protection regime is tied for first with Tanzania in the EAC. It ratified or acceded to 14 of 18 environmental treaties. Uganda's INFORM Risk Indicator value was 5.9, only lower than South Sudan's value of 6.8 and the second highest value within the EAC. Uganda's high INFORM value is related to struggles with coping with climate disasters and weak infrastructures that are generally not well equipped to deal with climate hazards. Active treaty participation was tied to climate activists and an engaged civil society aware of Uganda's desperate situation, putting pressure on the government in order to take action.

Flooding is a significant risk to Uganda, with up to 50,000 people affected each year and losses of over USD 62 million in GDP.²⁵ Increased rainfall also causes soil erosion, water logging of crops, and crop yields,²⁶ all of which can have devastating effects on a nation that relies heavily on rain-fed agriculture. Epidemics are another natural hazard in Uganda

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

exacerbated by the effects of climate change. Much like Tanzania, increased rainfall provides a suitable habitat for insects like mosquitoes that spread malaria. With increasing temperatures, droughts occur more frequently, and this can result in human and livestock deaths as well as crop failures.²⁷ Between 2004 and 2013, 2.3 million people were affected by droughts, and drought conditions in 2010 and 2011 caused an estimated loss and damage value of USD 1.2 billion, equivalent to 7.5 percent of Uganda's 2010 GDP.²⁸

On November 30th, 2015, at the Paris Summit, Vice President Edward K. Ssekandi of Uganda stated that climate change is “one of the challenges threatening the survival of humanity and mother earth”.²⁹ Ssekandi's decision to call earth “mother” evokes family and closeness to the planet and humanizes the earth. He also declared support for the adoption of a legally-binding instrument on climate change and urged countries to make a firm commitment on reductions of greenhouse gases to meet the 2°C temperature goal.³⁰ At COP26, President Museveni of Uganda evoked religious rhetoric to emphasize the scourge of climate change and its impacts: “These sins committed by irresponsible, greedy, ignorant or anti-God rebellious Ugandan actors result in damage to the environment but also into climate change...”³¹ For President Museveni, the destruction of the environment is a sin, and Ugandan sinners need to be removed from temptation. Both Ssekandi and Museveni utilized powerful imagery and strong

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ H.E. Edward K. Ssekandi, “Statement by H.E. Edward K. Ssekandi Vice President and Head of the Uganda Delegation at the Leaders Event of the 21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change/ 11th Session of the Conference of the Parties Serving as a Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol,” Transcript written November 2021, https://unfccc.int/files/meetings/paris_nov_2015/application/pdf/cop21cmp11_leaders_event_uganda.pdf.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Yoweri Kaguta Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, “Statement by H.E. Yoweri Kaguta Museveni President of the Republic of Uganda at the 265h United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP 26) during the World Leaders Summit,” Transcript written November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/UGANDA_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

language to emphasize the urgency of climate action and the severity of environmental degradation.

Uganda has made significant strides in recent years in order to combat climate change. It was the first African country to submit its NDC Partnership Plan in June 2018, and it has made significant commitments, such as reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 22 percent and building up climate resilience in vulnerable industries. A strong civil society composed of 81 NGOs with consultative status in the UN³² in addition to leadership from individuals such as Hilda Flavia Nakabuye could potentially explain Uganda's active participation in environmental protection. Hilda Flavia Nakabuye is a prominent climate activist in Uganda who started Fridays for Future Uganda in which students skip school on Fridays to protest and advocate for climate justice. Vanessa Nakate is another well-known climate activist in Uganda who has made tremendous efforts to center activists from the Global South and give them a platform.³³ At COP26, she declared, "1.2C is already hell for us. It's already destruction. It's already suffering. It's already disaster. Any rise will only make things worse" later imploring business and finance leaders to enact change for the sake of the planet.³⁴ This activism is often met with arrests from the Ugandan government, on October 22nd, 2021, six Ugandan rights campaigners were arrested for speaking out against Uganda's deal with Total, a major oil company.³⁵ In September 2020,

³² "United Nations Civil Society Participation – Consultative Status," United Nations, (2021), <https://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayConsultativeStatusSearch.do>.

³³ "Ugandan Climate Activist Vanessa Nakate Provides a Voice for the Global South," Earth Day, (2020), <https://www.earthday.org/ugandan-climate-activist-vanessa-nakate-provides-voice-for-the-global-south/>.

³⁴ "Vanessa Nakate takes an African voice to Cop26," African Business, (2021), <https://african.business/2021/11/energy-resources/cop26-ugandas-vanessa-nakate-brings-an-african-voice-to-the-climate-crisis/>.

³⁵ "Environmental Watchdogs Slam Arrest on Uganda Activists Protesting Total Oil Project." *RFI*, Accessed October 23, 2021, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20211023-environment-watchdogs-slam-arrest-of-ugandan-activists-protesting-total-oil-project>.

Ugandan activists were also arrested for demanding further climate action.³⁶ Clashes between the police and environment activists draw attention to questions about climate change and further increase pressures on the Ugandan national government to participate in the environmental protection regime.

Political Repression in Rwanda

Rwanda's participation in the environmental protection regime was second to last for EAC members, with just 9 of 18 UN environmental treaties ratified or acceded to. Rwanda's INFORM Risk Indicator value was 4.6, the lowest of the EAC states. Rwanda was not as vulnerable to climate hazards as EAC Partner States and had stronger infrastructures and institutions that were better equipped to support communities. Treaty participation in Rwanda was relatively low, marked by struggles with political repression and limitations on freedom of speech.

Floods and droughts made up half of natural hazard occurrences in Rwanda between 1900-2018.³⁷ The most vulnerable regions to floods are in northern, southwestern, and western Rwanda.³⁸ Another hazard that affects Rwanda is earthquakes. The majority of Rwanda's population is exposed to magnitude 6.0 earthquakes.³⁹ Rwanda's hilly landscape makes it susceptible to landslides with 40 percent of the population exposed to landslides due to residing in highly vulnerable areas.⁴⁰ These hazards put immense pressure on the nation's agriculture sector, which is already negatively impacted by inconsistent precipitation, extreme floods and

³⁶ Richard Wetaya, "Ugandan Police Arrest Activists Demanding Climate Action.," *Alliance for Science*, Accessed September 30, 2020, <https://allianceforscience.cornell.edu/blog/2020/09/ugandan-police-arrest-activists-demanding-climate-action/>.

³⁷ "Country: Rwanda," Climate Change Knowledge Portal, (n.d.), <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/rwanda/vulnerability>.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

droughts. A large portion of Rwanda's population works in agriculture, with almost 90 percent of households practicing subsistence farming.⁴¹ Rwanda's institutional and policy framework for dealing with climate change includes the Rwanda Environment Management Authority, which oversees its three Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) projects⁴², as well as its National Urbanization Policy, Economic Development and Poverty Reduction Strategy, National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan, and National Strategy for Transformation.⁴³ Rwanda's momentum to create an environmental policy framework, indicates that it has made strides to combat climate change and improve infrastructures.

Despite low participation in UN environmental treaties, Rwanda's highly ambitious NDC indicates strong political will to combat climate change domestically through various policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms. Rwanda did not make a statement at the Paris Agreement, but at COP26, Prime Minister Dr. Ngirente stated that, "We are falling short of our duty to both people and the planet if we don't urgently address climate change"⁴⁴ adding that Rwanda is committed to "reducing carbon emissions by 38% in the next decade, and reach Net Zero by 2050."⁴⁵ Another indicator of Rwanda's commitment to combating climate change was the creation of Rwanda's Green Fund, which was developed to support green investments and climate resilience initiatives across the country.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² James Forole Jarso, "The East African Community and the Climate Change Agenda: An Inventory of the Progress, Hurdles, and Prospects," *Sustainable Development Law & Policy* 12, no.2 (Winter): 19-24, 56-62. <https://digitalcommons.wcl.american.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1510&context=sdlp>

⁴³ "Climate Risk Profile: Rwanda (2021)," World Bank Group, (2021), https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/sites/default/files/2021-09/15970-WB_Rwanda%20Country%20Profile-WEB.pdf.

⁴⁴ Edouard Ngirente, "Republic of Rwanda National Statement World Leaders' Summit by the Rt. Hon. Prime Minister Dr. Edouard Ngirente at the 26th Conference of Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change – COP26/CMP16/CMA3," Transcript written November 2021, https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/RWANDA_cop26cmp16cma3_HLS_EN.pdf.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Rwanda was one of the first countries to ban plastic bags and has been praised as a leader on green growth. As one of the fastest-growing economies in Africa, Rwanda has seen overall improvements in living standards, access to services and human development indicators.⁴⁶ The main challenges to implementation of Rwanda's policy and institutional framework for environmental challenges are poor governance, lack of transparency and insufficient coordination among government agencies. Some of the well-known environmental organizations in Rwanda include the Rwanda Environmental Conservation Organization (RECOR), Rwanda Environment Awareness Organization (REAO). Rwanda has a civil society of 53 NGOS with consultative status in the UN⁴⁷ and Rwanda's Association des Amis de la Nature (ANA – Rwanda) had observer status at COP26 in 2021. Rwanda also experiences severe limitations on freedom of expression, with civil society actors and journalists being forced to stop working on sensitive political or human rights issues.⁴⁸ Political repression is also a major issue in Rwanda with threats, intimidation, mysterious deaths, and disappearances making it difficult for opposition parties to remain active or make public comments regarding government policies.⁴⁹ It is important to note that the information on political repression in Rwanda that was encountered is limited to human rights in general and was not centered specifically on environmental concerns. In 2019 three members of the unregistered Forces Démocratiques Unifiées (FDU)-Inkingi opposition party were reported missing or found dead.⁵⁰ In September 2019, Syldio Dusabumuremyi, the party's national coordinator was found dead. In March 2019, Anselme

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ "United Nations Civil Society Participation – Consultative Status," United Nations, (2021), <https://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayConsultativeStatusSearch.do>.

⁴⁸ "World Report 2020: Rights Trends in Rwanda," Human Rights Watch, (2019), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/rwanda#>.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Mutuyimana, an assistant to FDU-Inkingi's then-leader Victoire Ingabire, was found dead with signs of strangulation.⁵¹ Very few civil society organizations document and expose human rights violations by state agents.⁵² Rwandan journalist, Constantin Tuyishimire was reported missing in July while he was supposed to be on a reporting trip to Gicumbi District.⁵³ In October of 2021, Rwandan authorities arrested six people including a journalist and members of an opposition party accused of publishing rumors intended to spark an uprising.⁵⁴ Due to high levels of political repression, and limitations on freedom of the press and expression, Rwanda leaves little room for environmentalists and activist groups to put pressure on the national government.

Civil War in South Sudan

Of the EAC Partner States, South Sudan has ratified the fewest environmental protection treaties, with only 6 treaties signed out of 18. South Sudan's INFORM Risk Indicator value was 6.8, the highest of the EAC Partner States. South Sudan's communities were the most vulnerable to climate hazards, mainly because of extremely fragile institutions and a lack of effective infrastructures. Low treaty participation was tied to political instability as a result of civil war in the country, making environmental protection less of a priority.

Floods made up most of South Sudan's natural hazard occurrences between 1900-2018.⁵⁵ In addition to floods, South Sudanese are also vulnerable to epidemics such as malaria, bilharzias and sleeping sickness.⁵⁶ Flooding in South Sudan usually occurs between July and September,

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Clement Uwiringiyamana, "Six People Arrested in Rwanda, Accused of Spreading Rumours," *Reuters*, Published October 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/news/picture/six-people-arrested-in-rwanda-accused-of-idUSKBN2H42C8>

⁵⁵ "Country: South Sudan," Climate Change Knowledge Group, (n.d.), <https://climateknowledgeportal.worldbank.org/country/south-sudan/vulnerability>

⁵⁶ Ibid.

leading to flooding of the Nile River tributaries.⁵⁷ In October 2021, South Sudan experienced its worst floods since 1962, with over 700,000 people negatively affected.⁵⁸ South Sudan is home to the world's third worst refugee crisis (after Syria and Afghanistan) with over 4.4 million people displaced.⁵⁹ A dependency on agriculture, oil revenues, lack of institutional capacity, and lack of mechanisms to combat the effects of climate change makes it one of the most vulnerable countries in East Africa.

On September 21st, 2021, South Sudan submitted its second NDC. South Sudan's priorities included improving environmental resource management, the promotion of sustainable nature-based tourism to protect biodiversity and provide livelihood opportunities to local communities, improve waste management, increase access to water, and improve infrastructure.⁶⁰ South Sudan's second NDC also called for an increase in the use of clean and renewable energy, with numerous energy projects such as a 20MW solar photovoltaic plant, wind turbines, Fula hydro and small hydropower plants that have yet to be implemented, mainly because of high costs and because South Sudan does not have a legal framework for its electricity sector.⁶¹ Security concerns and inter-communal conflicts are another major hindrance to South Sudan's energy projects, such as the Fula Dam project.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ "U.N. Blames Worst South Sudan Floods since 1962 on Climate Change," *Reuters*, Published October 19, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/un-blames-worst-south-sudan-floods-since-1962-climate-change-2021-10-19/>.

⁵⁹ "South Sudan Climate Vulnerability Profile," USAID, (2019), https://www.climate-links.org/sites/default/files/asset/document/USAID_The%20Cadmus%20Group_South%20Sudan%20Climate%20Vulnerability%20Profile%20to%20Improve%20Resilience.pdf.

⁶⁰ "South Sudan's Second Nationally Determined Contribution", South Sudan Ministry of Environment and Forestry, (2021), <https://www4.unfccc.int/sites/ndcstaging/PublishedDocuments/South%20Sudan%20Second/South%20Sudan%27s%20Second%20Nationally%20Determined%20Contribution.pdf>.

⁶¹ Hellen Toby, "Energy-short South Sudan powers up – but with fossil fuels" *Reuters*, Published November 26, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southsudan-energy-climate-change/energy-short-south-sudan-powers-up-but-with-fossil-fuels-idUSKBN1Y01P0>

⁶² Ibid.

South Sudan's lack of participation in the environmental protection regime could be attributed to a number of developments, the most significant being political and social instability in the country, partly due to South Sudan's civil war that has been taking place since 2013. The civil war has been characterized by severe human rights abuses such as indiscriminate attacks against civilians, aid workers, unlawful killings, beatings, arbitrary detentions, torture, sexual violence, and destruction of property.⁶³ The conflict is intensified due to South Sudan's ethnic tensions. In essence, in such a war-torn country, protecting the environment is not a top priority.⁶⁴ Despite violence and political instability, climate and environment activists are still active in South Sudan amidst the violence and dangers to civilians. Numerous youth groups have come together to combine environmental protection with a call to end the brutal civil war, this has led to a social movement called #NadafaLeBeledna, which means "cleaning our nation." This group goes into South Sudan's capital city of Juba and picks up garbage everywhere they go.⁶⁵ This is especially important because South Sudan does not have an official garbage collection and disposal system, meaning that the majority of trash is left outside to rot, causing health risks for citizens. South Sudanese activists have also put pressure on the government by protesting oil facilities. Protesters blocked the doors of at least two oil companies and shut down roads and the airstrip in Palouch.⁶⁶ Efforts made by activists seem not to be quite enough to urge the South Sudanese government to participate more in the environmental protection regime, likely because of the intensity and brutality of the civil war.

⁶³ "World Report 2020: Rights Trends in South Sudan," Human Rights Watch, (2019), <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2020/country-chapters/south-sudan>.

⁶⁴ Katharina Wecker, "South Sudan's Youth Collect Trash to Protest Civil War," *Deutsche Welle*, Published October 26, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/south-sudans-youth-collect-trash-to-protest-civil-war/a-45954260>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ David Mongo Danga "South Sudan Residents Protest Oil Facilities," *VOA*, Published August, 27 2020, https://www.voanews.com/a/africa_south-sudan-focus_south-sudan-residents-protest-oil-facilities/6195077.html.

Conclusion

UN Treaty participation is contingent on a number of factors, such as the strength and presence of a state's civil society and political stability. The findings in this paper suggest that if states are to participate more in environmental protection treaties, they must strengthen civil societies and give voices to concerned citizens. Mixed participation in the UN environmental treaties prevents further, more effective adaptation and mitigation strategies while incomplete implementation strategies are another obstacle to effective climate action.

Tanzania's active participation can be attributed to its role as a leader in the organization and its history of environmental protection, especially during its colonial struggle against the British Empire. Rwanda has made strides towards implementing domestic climate policies. In Rwanda, High political repression and limited freedom of the press created challenges for Rwanda's activists and civil society and made it difficult to put pressure on the Rwandan government to participate in the environmental protection regime. Uganda's comparatively high participation in the environmental protection regime is likely because of its strong civil society with a number of prominent climate activists who put immense amounts of pressure on the Ugandan government by advocating, protesting, and drawing attention to climate issues in Uganda. South Sudan was the EAC Partner state with the lowest participation in the environmental protection regime, in large part due to intense violent conflict, political repression and political instability. South Sudan's civil society is relatively weak, but climate activists remain active and make strong efforts to enact change and put pressure on their government to implement climate and environmental policy.

Moving forward, the East African Community will have to give more priority to environmental protection and develop adaptation and mitigation strategies tailored to struggles

faced within the region. UN environmental treaties are the first step towards this process, as these treaties offer policy and legal guidelines for party states. As the EAC moves closer towards a political federation, Partner States will need to uplift the voices of citizens and allow civil society actors to speak out about key issues. Other regional economic blocs will likely have to follow suit as the globe increasingly becomes affected by climate-induced disasters.