



A RAIA profile on: Climate Activist

Vanessa Nakate

Third part of a six-part series on climate leaders ahead of the 2026 United Nations Climate Change Conference

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List of Abbreviations

UNICEF - United Nations Children's Fund
FFF - Fridays for Future
UNFCCC - United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
COP - Conference of the Parties
AP - Associated Press
ND-GAIN - Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative
SPI - Standard Precipitation Index
VCI - Vegetation Condition Index
EACOP - East African Crude Oil Pipeline
NEMA - National Environment Management Authority
UN - United Nations
WEF - World Economic Forum
UGX - Ugandan Shilling
IUCN - International Union for Conservation of Nature
KBA - Key Biodiversity Area
EACJ - East African Court of Justice
GHG - Greenhouse Gas
WWF - World Wide Fund for Nature
CSCO - Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas

Vanessa Nakate

Introduction

Vanessa Nakate – a Ugandan youth climate justice activist – was born in 1996 in Kampala. Having formally started her advocacy in 2019, Nakate was appointed as a United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Goodwill ambassador in 2022 in recognition of her outstanding global advocacy for the inclusion of the African continent in climate justice discussions. As of July 2026, she remains a prominent figure in climate activism, especially in Africa, as she continues to advocate for marginalised communities who suffer the dire consequences of the climate crisis.¹

Nakate's advocacy targets marginalisation of the -mid to -low income countries within the framework of climate discourse, drawing on such structural issues as racism, gender, poverty, and inequality relating it to the broader issue of climate justice. She repeatedly highlights the need for effective and immediate responses for the communities already affected by climate change, especially those from low- and middle-income countries, arguing that the international attention brought upon such issues is not adequate enough.² Rather than focusing on mitigation targets alone, Nakate continuously frames the climate crisis as a humanitarian one.

Nakate started as a lone protester, holding a climate strike outside of the Ugandan Parliament on January 6, 2019, after being inspired by the Fridays for Future (FFF) movement that calls for political action on global warming. Her intervention focused on the need for urgent action to address the consequences of climate change, particularly the increasing droughts and floods resulting in food scarcity and housing destruction experienced by Ugandans. She also launched her activism online through social media platforms such as "X" (formerly known as Twitter) and Instagram. She continued this initial engagement by organising community cleanups and educating primary school students about the effects of climate change. In the same year, the Ugandan National Environment Act 2019 addressed pending ecological threats and established legal protections for nature. Nakate highlighted the gap between what the policy

¹ UNICEF, 'UNICEF Appoints Climate Activist Vanessa Nakate as Goodwill Ambassador', press release, 2022 September 15., <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/unicef-appoints-climate-activist-vanessa-nakate-goodwill-ambassador> (accessed 27 July 2026).

² A. Suliman. 'A Ugandan Climate Activist Works to Hold Global Superpowers Accountable', The Washington Post, 2025 February 6. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/post-next/interactive/2025/vanessa-nakate> (accessed 11 July 2026).

has promised and the realities lived by marginalised communities who receive little to no help from national actors.³

She further moved her advocacy from a national level to the international one, starting to receive invitations to speak in climate-related forums. Notably, in October 2019, Nakate was invited by the Rotary Club of Bugolobi, Uganda, to participate in the 25th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), in Madrid, Spain. Nakate's speech highlighted that Africa was often disregarded in the climate discourse, despite being the continent with many communities affected and being the one least responsible for global emissions. For example, she argued that deforestation of the Congo Basin Rainforest⁴ faces little international attention compared to the Amazon one, not due to a comparatively smaller problem but because the communities affected were African.⁵

Nakate rose into prominence when she was cropped out of a photo taken by an Associated Press (AP) photographer at the 2020 Davos World Economic Forum. This incident gradually opened up her cause to a broader audience, sparking online discourse on issues regarding media bias and racism towards people of colour.^{6 7} As a reflection on the matter, she authored a book entitled "A Bigger Picture: My Fight to Bring a New African Voice to the Climate Crisis" in 2021. The memoir discussed the intersection of climate and racial justice and gender equality, affirming the need for structural policy reforms to support the climate agenda.

She then received the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation Goalkeepers Campaign Award in 2022 in recognition of her work as the voice of the young women in Africa who experience the disproportionate impact of climate change. Additionally, she was also honoured with the TIME CO2 Earth award in 2023 that acknowledged Nakate's global leadership in the youth climate movement.

Nakate has started moving her advocacy into the public policy domain after graduating from the University of Oxford's Master in Public Policy in 2025. As of July 2026, she is progressing into political consulting and strategy concurrently

³ Acts Supplement. (2019). THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT ACT, 2019
<https://www.nema.go.ug/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/National-Environment-Act-No.-5-of-2019.pdf>

⁴ Congo Basin Rainforest is the second largest rainforest globally.

⁵ V. Nakate, "Vanessa Nakate Wants Climate Justice for Africa," Time Africa, September 2025,
<https://africa.time.com/climate-change/vanessa-nakate-wants-climate-justice-for-africa/>

⁶ M. Hasan, "Symbolic Annihilation: Analyzing Associated Press's Erasure of Vanessa Nakate and Marginalization of Black Women Activists," Journal of Black Studies 55, no. 3 (December 2023): 253–267, doi:10.1177/00219347231220679

⁷ BBC News, "Vanessa Nakate: Climate Activist Hits out at 'racist' Photo Crop," January 2020,
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-51242972>

balancing it with her ongoing activism.⁸ Overall, she mainly focuses on campaigns and projects that reduce the impact of loss and damage in communities, deforestation and energy poverty, and movement against harmful business subsidies such as fossil fuels.⁹

Vanessa Nakate's role in climate leadership is that of a climate activist. As an individual, she is an agent of change outside of formal public policy institutions in climate governance. Activism plays a crucial role in climate leadership as it utilises public opinion and persuasion to mobilise the masses and pressure institutions to communicate and act on environmental concerns.¹⁰ The role centres on the ability to be transformational, to be able to push for change, using moral authority and influence so that global citizens are influenced to participate in their cause.¹¹ In this context, Nakate's activism calls leaders from high-emitting countries to take accountability for their harmful emissions, foster inclusion for countries most vulnerable in global climate policy, and recognise urgency to aid the existing loss and damage already suffered by people from low-middle income nations.¹²

This report therefore proceeds in five sections. The first section highlights the stakes internally and externally influencing Nakate's standing, contextualising her advocacy. The second section explores the 2020 Davos photo incident and examines its impact on her standing as a climate leader. The third section then analyses three working pillars of her agenda: the Vash Green Schools projects, the Rise Up movement, and her role in a global agenda regarding fossil fuels, specifically in #stopEACOP. The fourth section analyses the impact of her efforts, situating her influence in a wider trajectory of global climate policy. The last section provides recommendations on how Nakate can deepen her impact and navigate existing constraints.

⁸ Vanessa Nakate: From Climate Activism to Policymaking for a Better Future" (Blavatnik School of Government) <<https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/spotlight/vanessa-nakate>

⁹ "Vanessa Nakate | LinkedIn" (LinkedIn.com 2026)
<<https://www.linkedin.com/in/vanessa-nakate-465988260/>> accessed June 25, 2026

¹⁰ L. Thomas-Walter, E. G. Scheuch, A. Ong and M. H. Goldberg, 'The Impacts of Climate Activism', *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences*, 63 (2025), 101498, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cobeha.2025.101498>.

¹¹ N. Nässén, & K. Rambaree. "Greta Thunberg and the Generation of Moral Authority: A Systematic Literature Review on the Characteristics of Thunberg's Leadership" (2021) 13 *Sustainability* 11326 <<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/20/11326>, accessed June 12, 2026

¹² "How Vanessa Nakate Mobilizes the Masses" (Atmos, April 14, 2022) <https://atmos.earth/art-and-culture/how-vanessa-nakate-mobilizes-the-masses/>.

Vanessa Nakate's Environmental Stake

Uganda is considered one of the most vulnerable countries to the climate crisis, despite contributing minimally to the global greenhouse gas emissions. Uganda's ranking based on 2023 Notre Dame Global Adaptation Initiative (ND-GAIN) – the 14th most vulnerable country globally and 163rd in climate readiness¹³ – reflects the country's limited capacity to adapt. Climate change is already altering Uganda's temperature: rising by around 1.3 degrees Celsius over the last 50 years and increasing erratic rainfall. In particular, the historically bimodal rainfall pattern has been progressively becoming less predictable, upsetting agricultural cycles and decreasing the amount of available water. The Standard Precipitation Index (SPI) and Vegetation Condition Index (VCI) frequently indicate severe dryness, with seasonal droughts now tending to be more severe, especially in areas that rely on rain-fed agriculture.¹⁴

Wetlands

Wetlands are among the most important natural resources in Uganda. They store water and carbon, regulate floods and protect biodiversity. However, wetland coverage in Uganda decreased from 15.6% of its land area in 1994 to 13% in 2022, primarily because of agricultural encroachment, industrial development and sand mining.¹⁵ According to the World Bank, 40% of Uganda's wetlands have been destroyed since 1994, mostly due to urbanisation, poor environmental governance and conversion to agricultural land.¹⁶ Water catchment areas, swamps and green spaces have been reclaimed for construction projects without efficient enforcement of environmental regulations.

There are also concerns over wetland destruction, water pollution and habitat fragmentation from oil and gas developments around Lake Albert, including the East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP). Given that wetlands are crucial for flood control and water quality, their loss increases susceptibility to extreme weather

¹³ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

¹⁴ REACH, *Uganda Climate Hazard Assessment: Obongi District* (Geneva: REACH Initiative, April 2026), published by ReliefWeb, <https://reliefweb.int/report/uganda/uganda-climate-hazard-assessment-obongi-district-april-2026> [accessed 5 June 2026].

¹⁵ National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), *National State of the Environment Report 2024* (Kampala: NEMA, 2024), <https://www.nema.go.ug/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/National-Status-of-the-Environment-Report-NSOER-2024.pdf> [accessed 4 June 2026].

¹⁶ *Uganda's environmental journey: Key insights from the 2024 national state of the environment report* (2025) UNDP. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/uganda/blog/ugandas-environmental-journey-key-insights-2024-national-state-environment-report> (Accessed: 2 June 2026).

events and lowers the resilience of ecosystems. Biodiversity is also under threat as protected ecosystems become increasingly fragmented, weakening tourism and the ecosystem services on which livelihoods depend.¹⁷ Ultimately, as more than 80% of Uganda's population directly depend on natural resources for their livelihoods, the continuation of wetland degradation poses a threat to socio-economic development and environmental sustainability.¹⁸

Deforestation

Deforestation is recognised by the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) as one of the key causes of environmental degradation and climate vulnerability in the country.¹⁹ ²⁰ Forest cover reduced drastically, falling from 24% of the total land in 1990 to 13.3% in 2022,²¹ with the country losing almost half of its forests in three decades.²² The main causes are charcoal production, high demand for firewood, urbanisation, agricultural development and illegal logging on forest reserves. A lot of forest loss is also driven by dependence on biomass energy. More than 90% of Ugandan households cook with firewood or charcoal, with some 66% of the firewood being unsustainably sourced.²³ This pressure is compounded by demographic growth, with the population projected to increase from approximately 46 million in 2024 to nearly 100 million by 2050, roughly doubling. In turn, it further pushes demand for land, timber and exerts pressure on energy resources.²⁴

¹⁷ Addressing constraints to upscaling wetland conservation in Uganda (2024) Agence française de développement (AFD), <https://www.afd.fr/en/research-projects/addressing-constraints-upscaling-wetland-restoration-uganda> [accessed 4 June 2026]

¹⁸ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

¹⁹ Bertelsmann Stiftung, *BTI 2024 Country Report: Uganda* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2024), available at: <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-report/UGA> [accessed 9 June 2026].

²⁰ National Environment Management Authority (NEMA), *National State of the Environment Report 2024* (Kampala: NEMA, 2024), <https://www.nema.go.ug/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/National-Status-of-the-Environment-Report-NSOER-2024.pdf> [accessed 4 June 2026].

²¹ *Uganda's environmental journey: Key insights from the 2024 national state of the environment report* (2025) UNDP. Available at: <https://www.undp.org/uganda/blog/ugandas-environmental-journey-key-insights-2024-national-state-environment-report> (Accessed: 2 June 2026).

²² National Environment Management Authority on NEMA, *National State of the Environment Report 2024* (Kampala: NEMA, 2024), <https://www.nema.go.ug/en/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/National-Status-of-the-Environment-Report-NSOER-2024.pdf> [accessed 4 June 2026].

²³ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

²⁴ *Uganda's environmental journey: Key insights from the 2024 national state of the environment report* (2025) UNDP. Available at:

Forests are important carbon sinks – systems that absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than they release, reducing the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere.²⁵ They are also essential for regulating rainfall, protecting soil and biodiversity. Their loss adds to land degradation that already affects more than 40% of Uganda's land area, primarily through soil erosion, overgrazing and unsustainable farming practices. Decreasing forest cover also reduces resilience to climate change, as it increases the risk of droughts, floods, and landslides.²⁶ Although recent government reports indicate a slight recovery in forest cover from 10.7% in 2010-2011 to 13.3% in 2021-2022, the progress is not substantial enough considering the scale of historical losses. With weak enforcement, limited funding and institutional constraints, this remains a challenge for conservation, climate mitigation, and well-being of thousands.

Extreme Weather Events

Furthermore, landslides and floods are becoming more brutal and severe. Heavy rainfall, droughts, floods and other climate hazards affect an average of 200,000 Ugandans annually.²⁷ Floods in particular take place every other year and create approximately \$140 million in average economic losses per year.²⁸

Seasonal rivers and mountainous regions near the River Nile are most vulnerable to these events, damaging homes, roads and agricultural land which the Ugandans depend on massively. Agriculture contributes approximately 24% of the country's GDP and employs around 70% of the population, while most farming is rain-fed. Increasing temperatures and unpredictable rains increase crop failures, animal losses, food insecurity and rural poverty.²⁹ According to Afrobarometer surveys, the vast majority of Ugandans who are aware of climate change think that living conditions are getting worse. Some 80% of them support immediate

<https://www.undp.org/uganda/blog/ugandas-environmental-journey-key-insights-2024-national-state-environment-report> (Accessed: 2 June 2026).

²⁵ European Commission (Eurostat), 'Glossary: Carbon Sink', *Statistics Explained*, https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Glossary:Carbon_sink [accessed 7 July 2026]

²⁶ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

²⁷ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

²⁸ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

²⁹ Ramon Tindimwebwa, 'What 2026 Means for Climate Justice in Uganda', *Greenwatch*, 31 January 2026, <https://greenwatch.or.ug/blog/what-2026-means-climate-justice-uganda> [accessed 6 June 2026].

government action, even if it comes with financial costs, while 76% think that high-income countries should fund Uganda's efforts to adapt to climate change.³⁰

Finally, Uganda's goal to grow its economy from about \$50 billion US dollars in 2023 to \$500 billion by 2040 under its Ten-Fold Growth Strategy³¹ is threatened by environmental deterioration and climatic shocks. Contrary to the set objective, unless adaptation measures are sufficiently put in place, climate change could cause Uganda's GDP to drop by as much as 5.6% by 2050.³²

These environmental challenges are central to Nakate's climate justice activism. She believes they pose a direct threat to the future of Uganda in particular and other African countries in general. The widespread damage of wetlands, deforestation and extreme weather events all compromise economic opportunities, health, and the livelihoods of millions of people.

Vanessa Nakate's Defining Moment

A leader's character and their achievements are a result of different personal and professional moments that hone their cause and mission. For this research, that specific moment shall be referred to as their "defining moment". In this context, the defining moment is to be considered as an event or personal experience that becomes central to explaining a leader's unique actions and contributions to the climate agenda.

Vanessa Nakate's involvement in climate justice started as a passion cultivated through personal formation and realisations about the effects of climate change suffered by the very people she is surrounded by. On a family level, Nakate's upbringing in Kampala Uganda and witnessing her father's involvement in their local Rotary Club deeply inspired her cause for climate activism.

On a personal level, Nakate started to become drawn to climate activism in 2018 after being exposed to local news about floods in the Swathes of East Africa and experiencing the phenomenon itself in Kampala, and witnessing the effects it had on the communities inhabiting it. She also noted in her memoir how the recurring Karamoja droughts between 2016 and 2017 in the northeastern region of Uganda

³⁰ Afrobarometer, *Summary of Results: Uganda, Afrobarometer Round 10 Survey, 26 February 2025* (Accra: Afrobarometer, 2025), <https://www.afrobarometer.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Summary-of-results-Uganda-Afrobarometer-R10-26feb25.pdf> [accessed 19 June 2026].

³¹ Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

³² Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development (Uganda), *Uganda Country Climate and Development Report* (Kampala: Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development, 2025), <https://www.finance.go.ug/sites/default/files/reports/Uganda%20CCDR.pdf> [accessed 3 June 2026].

eventually led to food insecurity.³³ She emphasised a shift of perspective, wherein she started looking at the climate disasters as an immediate reality for livelihoods faced by many people in Africa. Additionally, she mentioned how frustrated she felt over the lack of education and institutional response people had over climate matters.³⁴

In reiteration, Nakate's distinction as a global climate leader lies in the symbolic significance she possesses, as a woman of colour in the pursuit of change in a westernised landscape. Arguably, her pre-existing advocacy for the inclusion of already suffering communities into the climate agenda gained more visibility after the 2020 Davos, WEF, photo cropping incident. This report identifies the incident as her defining moment that brought wider attention to her activism. Nakate was invited by the Arctic Basecamp (an organisation of scientists raising alarm about the Arctic warming) in Davos, Switzerland to engage in advocacy and awareness raising. Though they did not participate in the WEF itself, they visited local schools and took part in educating children about the climate crisis. On January 24, 2020, Nakate along with prominent European activists such as Thunberg, Neubauer, Axelsson, and Tille, were invited to speak at a FFF press conference.

Following the press conference, the Associated Press (AP) published an article³⁵ with a photograph of a group of notable activists, featuring Thunberg, Neubauer, Axelsson, and Tille, in which Nakate, despite being present, was cropped out of the photo. Shortly after realising the incident, Nakate posted a video response on her X account, stating: *"You erasing our voices won't change anything"*. She added: *"This is the first time in my life that I understood the definition of the word racism"*.³⁶ Instead of framing the incident solely as a personal offense, Nakate deliberately situated it as a broader critique, drawing attention towards the wider problem of persistent marginalisation of African voices in the global climate agenda and media coverage. She then received media inquiries from local and international outlets, giving her a platform to discuss matters such as racism and media bias. With increased attention online, it sparked a divide in the debate, wherein there were those who understood and supported her side and others receiving the video negatively. The attention also drew backlash from online trolls questioning her motives.^{37 38}

³³ V. Nakate. *A Bigger Picture*. Pan Macmillan, 2021. p.84

³⁴ *Ibid* p.38

³⁵ "AP Statement on Cropped Photo" (The Associated Press, January 24, 2020) <https://www.ap.org/the-definitive-source/announcements/ap-statement-on-cropped-photo/> [accessed July 11, 2026]

³⁶ Ugandan cropped out of climate activists photo says she now understands racism, (Guardian News, 2020, January 25). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y6ksil-02q4>

³⁷ Vanessa Nakate: Literally "Cropped Out" of the Climate Conversation, (GZERO Media, 2021, July 27). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c6YboiD212Y&t=1s>

³⁸ V. Nakate. *A Bigger Picture*. Pan Macmillan, 2021. p. 75

The incident, though not necessarily a moment of triumph, legitimised what Nakate had already been arguing and gave her the leverage to take her agenda to an international level. Her activism demonstrates that the marginalisation of low- and middle-income countries in climate discussions is not incidental but rather structurally rooted in an exclusive global agenda-setting system. The cynical responses that her video received, that framed climate activism as the domain of white activists, illustrated the exclusion that happens when marginalised groups are disregarded in global climate discussions.³⁹

Vanessa Nakate's Climate Solutions

Vanessa Nakate has gone beyond awareness and advocacy to support community-based solutions, addressing Uganda's environmental challenges. In addition to her activism around climate justice and the disproportionate impacts of climate change on African communities, she worked on developing initiatives that give direct social and environmental advantages. They address issues such as deforestation, reliance on fossil fuels, energy insecurity and the lack of African voices in climate discussions. Nakate's work in the Vash Green Schools Project, the #StopEACOP campaign, and the Rise Up Movement exemplifies how grassroots efforts, advocacy and community involvement contribute to more sustainable environmental solutions.

Rise Up Movement

The Rise Up Movement is an Africa-focused climate justice movement that pressures governments and industries to take action addressing the causes and impacts of climate change. The movement grew out of Nakate's earlier movement Youth for Future Africa which she founded in Uganda before expanding into a community that mobilised and connected young activists across numerous African countries.

The movement both amplifies African voices and underlines the disproportionate impacts of climate change all over the continent within the climate justice framework. Overall, it is a representative example of how advocacy can lead to community-level climate action combined with visible sustainable initiatives. The movement addresses several environmental challenges. Firstly, it points out that African communities are becoming more affected by floods, long-term droughts and crop failures even when considering their little contribution to global

³⁹ Ibid P:79

emissions.⁴⁰ ⁴¹ Secondly, it stresses the impact of deforestation, which harms ecosystems and threatens the livelihoods of communities that rely on forests for their daily lives.⁴² The movement additionally raises concerns about wetlands degradation, arguing that the loss of these ecosystems exacerbates floods and compromises water regulation, harming both biodiversity and agricultural productivity.⁴³

Notably, the movement operates amid several important limitations. It raises awareness on encroachment into protected areas, deforestation, the extensive use and production of oil and gas, but ultimately has no formal authority to prevent, cease or even regulate these activities. In turn, it focuses on exerting moral pressure on governments, international organisations and corporations. While the movement can influence public debate and push for policy changes, it does not possess any legislative power. Therefore, the success of the Rise Up movement relies on the extent to which governments, policymakers and businesses are willing to respond to public pressure and implement proposed changes. Taking this into consideration, the progress may be slow, especially where economic interests, like fossil fuel extraction and large infrastructure projects, clash with environmental priorities.⁴⁴ Yet, if the Rise Up movement succeeds in convincing governments to adopt stronger climate policies, it reinforces both Nakate's influence and her credibility as a climate leader. Her involvement in quite successful campaigns such as The StopEACOP movement, protecting the Congo rainforest from deforestation, and promoting a shift and investment to and in renewable energy, exemplifies how her advocacy translates into visible policy outcomes, showing that grassroots activism can produce measurable outcomes.⁴⁵ This heightened credibility would enable Nakate to effectively engage with governments, policymakers and organisations. In turn, it would give her greater opportunities to influence the future funding decisions and climate legislation. It would additionally allow her to advance in her more general goal of ensuring that African perspectives and climate change are given more attention in international climate discourse.

⁴⁰ Kagoe, R. (2026) *Sixteen starve to death in Uganda as drought kills crops*. BBC News, 11 July. Available at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cvglievwy82o> (Accessed: 7 June 2026).

⁴¹ Nakate, V. (2021) *A Bigger Picture: My Fight to Bring a New African Voice to the Climate Crisis*. Boston: Mariner Books.

⁴² Global Forest Watch (2025) *Uganda Deforestation Rates & Statistics*. World Resources Institute. Available at: <https://www.globalforestwatch.org/dashboards/country/UGA/> (Accessed: 7 June 2026).

⁴³ Kampala Capital City Authority (KCCA) (2025) *Kampala moves to protect wetlands as loss reaches alarming levels*. Available at: <https://www.kcca.go.ug/news/960/kampala-moves-to-protect-wetlands-as-loss-reaches-alarming-levels> (Accessed: 7 June 2026).

⁴⁴ United Nations, 'Vanessa Nakate: Climate Change Is About People' (United Nations) <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/vanessa-nakate-climate-change-is-about-people> [accessed June 5, 2026]

⁴⁵ University of Oxford, Blavatnik School of Government, 'Vanessa Nakate' (2026) <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/spotlight/vanessa-nakate> [accessed June 5, 2026]

Vash Green Schools Project

The Vash Green Schools project installs solar panels and eco-friendly, energy-efficient institutional stoves in rural schools in Uganda. The project aims to provide reliable and sustainable electricity to vulnerable communities with very limited access to electricity. It also seeks to reduce deforestation caused by an overdependency on biomass such as charcoal and firewood. By creating cleaner and safer environments, the project directly improves education and public health.

The initiative addresses the environmental challenges of deforestation and degradation. Instead of treating deforestation as an isolated issue, the project recognises it as a consequence of Uganda's dependence on traditional fuels. Uganda's forests supply 90% of the country's energy through charcoal and firewood,⁴⁶ contributing significantly to deforestation, as low-income communities continually harvest wood for daily needs.⁴⁷ With environmentally sustainable alternatives being mostly inaccessible, reducing deforestation requires provision of affordable and reliable energy sources. Nakate's project directly targets this issue by providing schools with clean energy technologies cost-free. As of July 2026, the project has reached 75 schools, having installed 60 solar power systems and 75 eco-friendly institutional stoves. Overall, the initiative is assessed to have positively impacted more than 20,000 students whilst also reducing firewood consumption by 50% in Uganda.⁴⁸

Nakate has often criticised climate and energy policies for failing to consider the realities of communities suffering from the consequences of climate change. In this context, the Vash Green Schools project can be interpreted as a pragmatic reaction to perceived shortcomings of government-led approaches. The initiative provides immediate solutions at the community level rather than focusing on specific policy changes on the legislative one.

Participation and activism in the #StopEACOP Agenda

Vanessa Nakate has loudly criticised the East African crude oil pipeline – a 900-mile oil pipeline extending from Kabaale, Uganda, to the port of Tanga in Tanzania.⁴⁹ By advocating publicly through interviews, speeches and climate

⁴⁶ National Renewable Energy Platform (NREP Uganda) (@NREP_Uganda), 'Cook clean, Save trees' (X, 11 September 2024) https://x.com/NREP_Uganda/status/2066732738258907355 [accessed 7 June 2026]

⁴⁷ Kabutey-Ongor M, "Impact of Forest Plantations on Energy Poverty: An Assessment of Reforestation Efforts in Uganda" (ScholarWorks at University of Montana 2024) <https://scholarworks.umont.edu/etd/12265/> [accessed June 5, 2026]

⁴⁸ Vash Green Schools Project – Tard Foundation" (Tard.co.ug 2023) <https://tard.co.ug/vash-green-schools-project/> [accessed June 5, 2026]

⁴⁹ East African Crude Oil Pipeline (EACOP), 'Unlocking East Africa's Potential' (EACOP) <https://www.eacop.com/> accessed 7 June 2026.

campaigns, she seeks to raise awareness of the environmental and social consequences associated with the pipeline.⁵⁰

The #StopEACOP Agenda addresses numerous community-based challenges in Uganda. For instance, faith leaders in Uganda and Tanzania published a report documenting EACOP's destruction of over 2000 graves along the route of the pipeline, with minimal effort to consult or compensate the affected. Furthermore, due to insufficient and delayed compensation by the project developer TotalEnergies, countless families have been left displaced and unable to replace their lost land and resources, undermining their daily lives. A 2023 report by the Africa Institute for Energy Governance revealed that many households displaced by development projects, including by the EACOP, witnessed a decline in agricultural productivity. Around 41% were allocated replacement land with low farming potential and only 3% rated theirs as being highly productive. Consequently, crop production has decreased with only 77% of the households harvesting more than 51 kg per season after relocation compared to 92% before displacement. The study also found a significant drop in household income, with the number of families earning more than UGX⁵¹ 300,000 per year dropping from 90% to 69%, forcing many households to rely mostly on subsistence agriculture.⁵²

The pipeline also poses environmental risks. Despite the TotalEnergies' claim that the project doesn't cross any Ramsar zones or International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) sites, EACOP cuts through 44 protected areas and 7 key biodiversity areas (KBAs), threatening habitats, endangered species and ecosystem services that support many local communities. Oil spills, habitat fragmentation and the influx of new infrastructure caused by pipelines pose disproportionate hazards to KBAs.⁵³ For instance, Murchison Falls, one of the KBAs on EACOP's route, is a critical protected area for biodiversity, home to many species like elephants and hippos. It plays a central role in stabilising the ecology in the region and also serves as a major source of income for local communities and the country through tourism.⁵⁴ Here, EACOP directly threatens the ecological and economic support system, endangering one of Uganda's most famous natural treasures. The Victoria Nile riverbank, a part of Murchison Falls, which

⁵⁰ Radio France Internationale (RFI), 'African youth activists in French National Assembly over Total's oil pipeline in East Africa', *RFI*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20220317-african-youth-activists-in-french-national-assembly-over-total-s-oil-pipeline-in-east-africa>, accessed 20 June 2026.

⁵¹ Ugandan Shilling

⁵² Africa Institute for Energy Governance (AFIEGO), 2024, *Research report: EACOP project impact on affected people in Uganda*. Kampala: Africa Institute for Energy Governance. Available at: <https://www.afiego.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Research-report-EACOP-project-impact-on-affected-people-in-Uganda.pdf> [Accessed 9 July 2026]

⁵³ Earth Insight, 'Mounting Threats: Mapping What's at Stake as EACOP Advances', *Earth Insight*, 2025, <https://earth-insight.org/insight/eacop-map-story-2025/>, accessed 20 June 2026.

⁵⁴ Earth Insight, 'Mounting Threats: Mapping What's at Stake as EACOP Advances', *Earth Insight*, 2025, <https://earth-insight.org/insight/eacop-map-story-2025/>, accessed 20 June 2026.

over 40 million inhabitants are dependent on through agriculture, fishing and commerce is at an immense risk because of the pipeline, with any oil spill being detrimental.⁵⁵ Additionally, with 630,000 square metres of vegetation lost alongside the development of the oil project, socioeconomic risks increase and ecological lifeline drops.

In order to amplify her concerns about EACOP and bring attention to its consequences, Nakate has used interviews, social media platforms, and international media coverage. For example, at a #StopEACOP event in 2022, Nakate stated that there was “no future in the fossil fuel industry, which has done more harm than good in much of Africa. We cannot eat oil nor drink oil”.⁵⁶ Hence, through the international platform, Nakate intentionally connects local risks to land and water in East Africa with the broader global movement against fossil fuel development. At the same time, all environmental allegations have been contested by EACOP.

Vanessa Nakate's Impact

On the one hand, the Vash Green Schools project, the #stopEACOP agenda, and The Rise Up Movement have had tangible implementations with quantifiable results that have been beneficial for the local Ugandan community. On the other hand, some set objectives are yet to be proven as fully implemented.

Rise Up Movement

The Rise Up Movement has been arguably successful in amplifying both African and Global South voices in the global climate context. Individuals participating in this movement are able to exchange their thoughts, ideas, and arguments, allowing African and Global South voices to increase their visibility and involvement in the global climate agenda. Through the movement, Nakate has been able to promote public awareness on the fact that, even though Africa produces a very small fraction of the global greenhouse gas emissions, climate change threatens to expose 118 million of the poorest Africans to drought, floods, and extreme heat by 2030.⁵⁷ Additionally, Nakate was able to use the Rise Up Movement as a foundational ground for the implementation of the Vash Green

⁵⁵ Radio France Internationale (RFI), 'African youth activists in French National Assembly over Total's oil pipeline in East Africa', *RFI*, 17 March 2022, <https://www.rfi.fr/en/africa/20220317-african-youth-activists-in-french-national-assembly-over-total-s-oil-pipeline-in-east-africa>, accessed 20 June 2026.

⁵⁶ Yale Environment 360, 'Pipeline in East Africa Faces Mounting Resistance' (Yale University, 2024) <https://e360.yale.edu/digest/pipeline-in-east-africa-faces-mounting-resistance>, accessed 20 June 2026.

⁵⁷ United Nations, 'Vanessa Nakate: Climate change is about the people', *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/vanessa-nakate-climate-change-is-about-people>, accessed 12 June 2026..

Schools project, as well as publicly spread the campaign to save Congo's rainforest.⁵⁸ However, the Rise Up Movement has also made several ambitious promises in topics such as gender equality, climate justice, and sustainable solutions. The progress of implementation and level of success thereof is difficult to trace, particularly based on the information available.

On a national level, it provides a platform for young activists to raise their voices and share their concerns on climate change and how they affect the livelihoods of local communities. For instance, Aqlila Alwy, a Kenyan member of this movement raises concerns of how climate change has led to loss and damage of infrastructure and resources, which has affected her loved-ones. Overall, women are one of the most affected groups as they are left alone by their families to fetch food and water, which implies stopping their education just to be able to survive. Therefore, it can be argued that the Rise Up Movement acts as a medium for spreading knowledge and awareness on the realities faced by individuals of low- and middle-income countries.⁵⁹ Moreover, it reinforces the interconnection between climate change and education, where the adverse effects of the former can affect the nation's social and economic development.

Lastly, the Rise Up Movement has acquired global recognition through Nakate's collaboration with major environmental campaigns, participation in UN climate conferences and the planning and organisation of strikes. For Nakate, this implies increased connections with important environmental and political entities globally, which potentially improves her legitimacy as a climate activist. This movement is assessed to be environmentally relevant as it brings public awareness through social media on the effects that climate change has on the livelihoods of local and marginalised communities in Africa.

Vash Green Schools Impact

As of July 2026, the Vash Green Schools project has been partially implemented. Some notable results include building 75 eco-friendly institutional stoves in 75 schools that have been impacted by energy poverty, and promotion of the transition to cleaner forms of energy, as well as the acceleration of clean cooking in local schools. Additionally, 60 solar panels were installed, allowing access to more stable lighting to schools.⁶⁰ The "Go Fund Me" is a platform that has been used for crowdfunding, and for logging updates, where several individuals from all over the world have provided insights on the project, including pictures of the installed solar panels and stoves. Importantly, the projects follow an assessment

⁵⁸ World Economic Forum, 'Vanessa Nakate', *World Economic Forum*, <https://www.weforum.org/stories/authors/vanessa-nakate/>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁵⁹ A. Alwy, 'My name is Aqlila Alwy, a climate activist from Nairobi, Kenya...', *Instagram*, 15 September 2023, <https://www.instagram.com/p/CxNEBqgsl7W/>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁶⁰ Tard Foundation, 'Vash Green Schools Project', *Tard Foundation*, <https://tard.co.ug/vash-green-schools-project>, accessed 12 June 2026.

process to identify shortcomings and further implement improvements.⁶¹ The Vash Green Schools project has also made promises to provide solutions to energy poverty not only in rural schools, but also in rural households. However, little advancement has been done in this aspect, and there is not much information available on how and where this is being developed.

With direct environmental effects, this project promotes the transition to greener and renewable forms of energy, moving away from biomass, such as charcoal and firewood. The latter are not efficient and emit Greenhouse Gases, triggering increased temperatures and exacerbating extreme weather events due to climate change.⁶² On a community level, this affects the livelihoods of locals that face the destruction of their homes and resources. Moreover, the high consumption of and dependence on firewood contributes to deforestation, leading to habitat fragmentation that negatively affects both local species and indigenous communities.

Overall, this project has positively impacted over 20,000 students facing energy poverty, providing off the grid lighting and electricity to schools.⁶³ This project also reduces indoor pollution as these schools use kerosene lamps which both provide insufficient light and emit smoke leading to health problems including headaches and visual impairment.⁶⁴ In this context, it can be argued that the implementation of this project increased the overall quality of the education in these specific educational institutions. In addition, the effects of this project on Nakate's political stance have been overall positive given the good public responses at the "Go Fund Me" platform. For instance, one of the comments stated, "What a great idea! Win/win/win for schools, children, climate. Solar is the future. Africa is the future."⁶⁵ Moreover, it is argued that the development of a tangible project further helped her legitimise herself as a climate activist. In fact, she was named a UN Young Leader for Sustainable Development Goals in 2020, offering her global recognition.

⁶¹ Tim Reutemann, Greenhouse Communications, and Anna Guyer, 'Donate to support the Vash Green Schools Project, organized by Tim Reutemann', [gofundme.com](https://www.gofundme.com/f/vsukp-green-schools-with-vash), <https://www.gofundme.com/f/vsukp-green-schools-with-vash>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁶² UNESCO, 'Vash Green Schools Project', *UNESCO*, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/vash-green-schools-project>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁶³ Tard Foundation, 'Vash Green Schools Project', *Tard Foundation*, <https://tard.co.ug/vash-green-schools-project>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁶⁴ Angelica Sirotin, 'Clean cookstoves: On a mission to save families and the environment', *The Earth & I*, <https://www.theearthandi.org/post/clean-cookstoves-on-a-mission-to-save-families-and-the-environment>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁶⁵ Angelica Sirotin, 'Clean cookstoves: On a mission to save families and the environment', *The Earth & I*, <https://www.theearthandi.org/post/clean-cookstoves-on-a-mission-to-save-families-and-the-environment>, accessed 12 June 2026.

Therefore, it can be argued that this project addresses climate change on a broader level. Firstly, it reduces wood fuels, burning of which results in the release of one gigaton of carbon dioxide globally into the atmosphere. Secondly, this project addresses deforestation by avoiding logging for wood fuels sourcing, helping preserve a major carbon sink. The protection of forests is extremely relevant given that deforestation for wood and charcoal fuel for cooking contribute up to 5% of greenhouse emissions, which is equivalent to the yearly emissions generated by the global aviation industry.⁶⁶ However, this is still a relatively small-scale project. Even though it helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and encourages other schools or movements around the world to do the same, the overall impact is relatively small relative to the detrimental impact of global warming. Besides that, Africa accounts for only 4% of global carbon emissions, which highlights the need for high-emitting countries and larger industries having to put in more effort into reduction thereof.

Impact of her Activism in the #StopEACOP agenda

It can be argued that Nakate's involvement in the #stopEACOP agenda has been overall successful. The movement has mobilised over 1 million people advocating for stopping pipeline construction and calling for sustainable and fair alternatives for the East Africans.⁶⁷ Nakate has actively been a part of campaign coordination, supporting local resistance and helping to increase pressure on involved banks and insurers. Sustained protests, litigation, campaigning and pressure directed at all entities involved in the construction of the pipeline have resulted in hindering the project's timeline and cutting much of the international financing that this project had obtained. In particular, the 350.org movement that is involved in the activism against the EACOP development has pushed over 40 banks and 30 insurers to withdraw funding for the project. It also delayed the project for 4 years and established 18 legal actions including the East African Court of Justice (EACJ) case, while highlighting the criminalisation of peaceful individuals protesting against the EACOP.⁶⁸ However, the #stopEACOP movement has not provided clear alternatives for employment and income opportunities for East Africans, which the EACOP project does claim to offer.

This agenda promotes the diversification of the economy and sustainable inclusiveness, thereby not allowing huge multinational corporations to extract African resources and keep on profiting from them. Moreover, it reduces the burden for the people of Uganda and the neighbouring countries affected by the development of this project, particularly in terms of polluting industries. It also encourages equal opportunities for African countries to embrace clean

⁶⁶ E. Bryce, 'Cookstoves feed the world. But they're also a killer', *WIRED*, <https://www.wired.com/story/cookstoves-pollution/>, accessed 8 August 2026.

⁶⁷ #STOPEACOP, 'Home', #STOPEACOP, <https://stopeacop.net/>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁶⁸ 350Africa.org, 'StopEacop', *350 Africa*, <https://350africa.org/stopeacop/>, accessed 12 June 2026.

renewable energies and the benefits that come with it, including the reduction of Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions which exacerbates the effects of climate change. Moreover, prevention of the pipeline construction will allow it to pre-empt such environmental threats as wildlife loss and habitat fragmentation. From an economic perspective, conservation of the area's rich diversity, heritage and nature open a pathway for investment redirection to sustainable industries such as eco-tourism and reforestation programmes. Contrary to the oil industry which provides short-term benefits, the approach Nakate advocates for has a potential to provide employment and long-term security to communities.

As for political effects, the fact that more than 160 organisations are working together against the EACOP has promoted the participation of civil society organisations and public organisations. This involves legal actions, research, shareholder activism, and media advocacy.⁶⁹ This implies increased visibility of the #stopEACOP agenda, which promotes connection with NGOs and other international organisations, e.g. Greenpeace, World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF), and the Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas (CSCO).⁷⁰

Regarding climate change, implementation of this agenda would help to avoid serious environmental challenges triggered by the construction of the pipeline. Some 379 megatonnes of carbon dioxide emissions are anticipated to be emitted for the full value chain of emissions from pipeline transport of crude oil to final consumption.⁷¹ Additionally, the EACOP will be transporting oil that is estimated to generate over 34 million tons of carbon emissions annually.⁷² This would exacerbate the effects of climate change given the increased GHG emissions, and clashes with the global drive to shift away from fossil fuels dependence. Climate change is not the only environmental challenge that would be exacerbated by the EACOP. It would also pose serious threats for local communities in Uganda and Tanzania that depend on the African Great Lakes region⁷³ through which the pipeline's construction is planned. Besides preventing the pollution of critical water sources, the policy's implementation will protect animal species at risk of extinction, e.g. elephants, lions, and chimpanzees.

⁶⁹ UNESCO, 'Vash Green Schools Project', *UNESCO*, <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/vash-green-schools-project>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁷⁰ WWF & Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas in Uganda (CSCO), 'Safeguarding people & nature in the East Africa crude oil pipeline project', *WWF & Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas in Uganda (CSCO)* https://media.wwf.no/assets/attachments/99-safeguarding_nature_and_people_oil_and_gas_pipeline_factsheet.pdf, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁷¹ #STOPEACOP, 'Reports', *#STOPEACOP*, <https://stopeacop.net/reports/>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁷² Angelica Sirotn, 'Clean cookstoves: On a mission to save families and the environment', *The Earth* & *I*, <https://www.theearthandi.org/post/clean-cookstoves-on-a-mission-to-save-families-and-the-environment>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁷³ The Great Lakes region includes countries such as Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Recommendations for Vanessa Nakate

In an attempt to improve the outreach of the initiatives that Nakate has been involved in and increase her visibility as a climate leader, this report proceeds with outlining several policy recommendations. These incentivise the expansion of her current initiatives to a more global perspective to enhance her positive impact on marginalised communities all over the world. They also provide economic and feasible alternatives to her ideas as an activist, which sometimes may be perceived as “all talk and no action,” lacking a well-grounded foundation of tangible implementations.

Provide Alternative Employment, Income and Energy Source Opportunities to the Proposal of the EACOP

This recommendation targets an economic reform and sector investment, suggesting that Nakate propose tangible solutions and alternatives to the EACOP claims of providing employment and income opportunities for African countries. It is essential to continue advocacy on the topic, promote awareness, and bring up the adverse effects that the project may have on the environment, local communities and the economy. However, if no alternatives are proposed, it is difficult to outcompete the claimed benefits of the EACOP and justify the interdiction of the project.

In this context, Nakate is recommended to propose the usage of natural heritage and intrinsic value of the area for eco-tourism as an instrument to generate sustainable and eco-friendly sourced income as employment opportunities. As a complement to the previous point, it is also recommended to propose alternative renewable energy sources, other than oil, that can be used to reduce the carbon footprint of the countries involved. Given that solar radiation is 5.2 kWh/m²/day, it has the highest adoption rate in Uganda, and solar resource in Uganda is high throughout the whole year due to its closeness to the equator, it is recommended for solar energy to be implemented.⁷⁴ Notably, hydro resource potential is also considerably high in Uganda due to the River Nile. However, it can cause mass destruction of aquatic ecosystems, which would be inconsistent with the objective habitat protection of the region, reinforcing the validity of solar energy.

Both recommendations target the environmental challenge of wetland degradation in Uganda caused by the EACOP footprint across different water bodies, such as Lake Victoria and Lake Albert, which lead to habitat fragmentation, wetland destruction and water pollution. Moreover, it prevents the loss of several ecosystem services provided by wetlands, namely flood control,

⁷⁴ UNREEEA, 'Overview of Uganda's Renewable Energy Potential'. *UNREEEA*, <https://unreeea.org/energy-sector-overview/>, accessed 12 June 2026.

leading to increased vulnerability to these events, and drinking water provision, adversely impacting the livelihoods of local communities. Therefore, the use of eco-tourism would preserve these essential ecosystem services while economically benefiting from their aesthetic value. Moreover, the use of alternative renewable energy sources also addresses the climate challenge of extreme weather events, given that cleaner energy sources reduce the greenhouse gas emissions that would otherwise be emitted by the burning of fossil fuels. On a regional scale, this would reduce the contribution to climate change intensifying and increasing the frequency of extreme weather events which threaten both the livelihoods of local communities and the economy, given that uncertain precipitation trends can adversely affect agricultural productivity, and extreme weather events damage transport infrastructure for trading.⁷⁵ Besides, the introduction of a new energy source industry would generate new employment opportunities.

As previous sections show, Uganda's state environmental policies are present but not strongly enforced and often limited. Therefore, this is a driver for Nakate to take action and propose tangible solutions, rather than just criticising the failed policies of the Ugandan Parliament. Even though the Ugandan government has committed to transition to cleaner forms of energy, it still continues the development of projects such as the EACOP, which is inconsistent with climate commitments. This can therefore be leveraged to incentivise Nakate to propose governmental organisations alternative solutions to the environmentally degrading projects that are being developed in the country.

Increase Outreach of Vash Green Schools Initiative to other Marginalised Communities Globally

This recommendation is a diplomatic strategy that would require Nakate to spread and promote her initiative to install solar panels and eco-friendly institutional stoves in rural schools in Uganda to other marginalised communities globally. The core idea is to amplify the impact of this proposal, so that climate change is addressed with a more global focus, rather than only a local focus, which may have limited and insignificant impact for the climate urgency regarding GHG emissions and land degradation that the world is facing today. Some potential target areas include marginalised communities in India, where lower caste and tribal households have 10-30% less access to electricity and cooking fuel.⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, 'Climate Risk Profile: Uganda', *Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development*, https://www.adaptationcommunity.net/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/GIZ_Climate-risk-profile-Uganda_EN_final.pdf, accessed 20 July 2026.

⁷⁶ The Conversation, 'India's caste system extends to uneven access to cooking fuel and electricity', *The Conversation*,

This recommendation mitigates the environmental challenge of deforestation, as the transition from using wood to solar power implies reduced deforestation rates due to a decrease in demand for firewood. Additionally, it addresses the climate challenge of extreme weather events since forests are critical carbon sinks, where they have absorbed around 30% of all carbon emissions generated by the burning of fossil fuels and other anthropogenic activities in the last decade alone.⁷⁷ Shifting to solar power coupled with forest preservation reduces atmospheric GHG emissions, which is a powerful tool against climate change and global warming. Moreover, this recommendation helps local communities adapt to climate change, since wood and fossil fuels are unsustainable biomass in the long term. Therefore, the transition to renewable energy sources implies that, in this case, marginalised communities globally are set to have access to a sustainable, accessible, and reliable energy source.

Nakate could be incentivised to adopt this recommendation, since she links her climate agenda with other issues such as racism, poverty, and the sacred protection of the environment, especially in marginalised communities. She has repeatedly voiced her concern for the inequality faced by the countries of the Global South who are threatened by the worst effects of climate change, yet contribute the least to GHG emissions. In this context, the public opinion and media may also play a role in incentivising Nakate to adopt this recommendation as she has an active and readily available medium through which she is able to amplify and promote her initiatives. Furthermore, social media also plays a role in this case, as it has allowed Nakate to receive global recognition, convey her message on climate justice, and have supported the development of her initiatives. Therefore, knowing that she has the support of international organisations and NGOs may incentivise Nakate to further expand the Vash Green Project as it increases the likeliness of its viability, feasibility, and success.

Implement “Demi-Lunes”, “Earth Smiles”, or “Half-Moons” (semi-circular bunds) for Rainwater Catchment and Resilience against Drought

As a diplomatic strategy and a way to improve sector investment, this recommendation is a nature-based strategy to tackle desertification and drought. This initiative has been first developed in Senegal, in collaboration with the UN World Food Programme, and could be adopted in Uganda.

Initially introduced to stop the expansion of the Sahara Desert, it can be adapted to stop desertification and land degradation in Uganda. The core mechanism is to

<https://theconversation.com/indias-caste-system-extends-to-uneven-access-to-cooking-fuel-and-electricity-78309>, accessed 12 June 2026.

⁷⁷ United Nations, 'Forests - nature's solution to carbon pollution', *United Nations*, <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/science/climate-issues/forests>, accessed 12 June 2026.

plant a barrier of trees referred to as the “Great Green Wall” to restore degraded landscapes, reviving the land. The “demi-lunes” are water harvesting structures that maintain water on site. These structures work in the following way: the “half-moons” are put on contour lines, so that the rain that falls into the land flows into the dug area. This water feeds the plants, which have been previously sown inside the “half-moons.” In this way, water can be harvested alongside growing crops, providing a food source for local communities. Apart from the “half-moons,” there is another system consisting of planting lines and biomass trenches of horticulture beds where crops can be grown as well. Additionally, in between the trenches, there are planting pits where fruit trees are planted.⁷⁸ Not only does this address environmental challenges of the area, but also creates initiative, determination and awareness within the local community that the land can be rehabilitated. In fact, the idea is to employ locals to dig these “half-moons” to provide income in the area. Nakate could promote this nature-based solution through her social media platforms and Rise Up Movement initiative.

This recommendation serves as an adaptation strategy to climate change in general and extreme weather events in particular. Approximately 10–15% of the water would infiltrate the soil and recharge groundwater tables, thereby contributing to a more sustainable water source for present and future generations. In the context of deforestation, the proposed system would help restore and protect soil while simultaneously providing food and other resources for local communities. In other words, the proposed system mimics the functions of a forest by generating biomass, fruit, and horticultural vegetables, while also contributing to soil and water conservation.

Nakate's previous and ongoing work with international organisations and NGOs could be built upon to incentivise the leader to adopt this recommendation. These organisations could support the development and implementation of the project, as they have previously done in support of her initiatives, such as the Vash Green Schools Project. The criticism she has received through the media and public opinion could also be used to incentivise Nakate to endorse this recommendation, as it is a tangible solution that promotes the development of the three pillars of sustainability: the environment, society, and the economy, reinforcing Nakate's legitimacy as a climate activist committed to translating her advocacy into concrete actions and practical solutions.

Conclusion

Overall, Vanessa Nakate's advocacy has amplified the voice of marginalised communities in the climate agenda. She continuously frames the climate crisis as

⁷⁸ Andrew Millison, ‘How the UN is Holding Back the Sahara Desert’, *Youtube*, 18 February 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WCllogyNwLQ>, accessed 12 June 2026.

a humanitarian crisis, emphasising the need for urgent action and protection for those most vulnerable to its impacts. Nakate's leadership demonstrates how influential climate activism is to the global climate agenda through her moral authority. She strives to pressure world leaders from high-emitting nations to take accountability for low-emitting nations affected by the climate crisis, further pushing for a movement in climate justice beyond net-zero emission targets. Having the role of a climate activist and a non-traditional policy maker, she was able to mobilise the public to support an undermined perspective in the climate agenda through the moral authority she commands.

Nakate's distinction as a climate activist lies in the symbolic significance of her cause, as a woman and a person of colour actively pursuing change in a landscape shaped by Western perspectives. The foundation of Nakate's environmental activism is rooted in accountability for harmful emissions, inclusion of the marginalised in global climate policy, and the urgency of climate action for the loss and damage caused by the climate crisis. She emphasises a new perspective on climate justice that goes beyond future-oriented carbon targets and market mechanisms. She argues that focusing on mitigation overlooks human suffering, as current systems fail to address the loss and damage already experienced by those in the low-middle income nations.

The report analysed three of her climate initiatives, namely the Vash Green School Initiative, Rise up Movement, and her participation in the global #stopEACOP movement. Collectively, all three initiatives demonstrate Nakate's commitment to centering vulnerable communities within the global climate governance.

The Vash Green School project demonstrates a scalable and actionable response to the climate crisis by aiding communities transition away from biomass dependency towards sustainable alternatives. The establishment of this initiative shows the need for climate action to reach communities that suffer the crisis the most, as its impacts extend beyond the ecological to the immediate well-being of people.

Likewise, her Rise Up Movement further demonstrates how she leverages her moral authority within the climate agenda. This movement centers on pressuring governments, industries, and the public to address climate change through youth movements and educational initiatives. In doing so, it challenges the broader exclusion of low-middle income nations from global governance. By advocating for the representation of climate vulnerable communities in global climate policy-making and demanding accountability from responsible actors, the movement reflects Nakate's belief that structural inequalities in climate governance should be resolved.

Beyond her individual initiatives, Nakate's participation in the #stopEACOP global movement challenges decisions that do not adequately consider communities bearing the consequences of the construction of the pipeline. In this movement she voices criticism towards the pipeline's ecological and social consequences such as the displacement of families and inadequate compensation, and jeopardisation of livelihoods depending on the region's biodiversity.

Nakate's success as a climate leader lies in the change she has brought to the climate discourse despite her limitations as an activist in the domain. Arguably, Nakate's climate leadership can be seen as transformational, given her impact in agenda setting and representation to mobilise and pressure institutions to act upon the climate crisis. Throughout her activism, Nakate served as a voice for communities often excluded from the climate policy agenda. Her agenda also seeks to expose the broader exclusion of -low to -middle income nations as a structural problem of global climate governance. She was able to mobilise public support for the agenda to pressure governments in such domains as climate financing and fossil fuel expansion. Through her participation in international forums and activism, she became a representative of the inclusion of such social groups as Africans, women, youth, and vulnerable communities in the climate agenda.

The extent of the change that Nakate's leadership has produced varies between the community, national, and international levels. Importantly, her impact is assessed to be the strongest on a community level. Her VASH project and Rise Up Movement-linked educational initiatives raised awareness on environmental degradation and mobilised participation for protests and FFF Uganda. Above all, her significance on a community level is seen in how she empowers local communities by framing them as participants and drivers of change in climate action. Conversely, Nakate drives no direct change in Ugandan climate policy on a national level, but exhibits impact in public debate on Uganda's commitment to climate action. This can be seen in Kampala's persistent support towards fossil fuel development and Nakate's criticism thereof that contributed to mobilising the #stopEACOP movement. Her position as an activist places her in a constrained position as Ugandan climate activism operates within restricted political contexts characterised by limited freedom of speech. This limits her ability to create more demand and pressure on national institutions. Lastly, her key contribution on the international level is bringing visibility to African perspectives in the global climate agenda. The 2020 Davos photo-cropping incident serves as evidence of systemic racial exclusion and structural marginalisation of different communities in the climate agenda. Her role in climate discourse is owed to her participation in many international conferences, which give her a platform to educate the public and voice the concerns of the excluded.

In conclusion, Vanessa Nakate's stakes reveal the bigger picture of modern climate governance – the wider problem of inequality and the increasing role of non-traditional actors in the agenda. Her activism highlights the inequality of justice in climate governance by exposing the disparity between the support and role that certain communities have. Although low-middle income countries contributed the least to global emissions, they bear most of the severe climate consequences, yet climate financing to aid these nations continues to fall short. At the same time, it demonstrates the limitations of prioritising mitigation and preemptive measures while overlooking the short-term effects, emphasising that climate change extends beyond ecological degradation and intersects with the domain of human justice. Lastly, Nakate's leadership demonstrates that small non-traditional actors are of importance to the climate agenda. Thereby her influence shows that even with the lack of formal authority, this role is important for accountability in climate governance.

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