24. The Fridays For Future Movement in Uganda and Nigeria

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BACKGROUND

Fridays For Future in Uganda and Nigeria is a student- and youth-led platform that was launched in February 2019 following the call from Greta Thunberg to school strike. The Fridays For Future movement is gaining track in Africa and is registering success in demanding action. The movement in Uganda began after a dialogue by university students on the climate strikes. During this dialogue we highlighted Greta's courageous act of striking outside the Swedish Parliament, this motivated us to start the strikes in Uganda. We realized that this will help us increase attention to our demands for urgent climate action from our leaders. The discussion focused on the nature of the activity and how to incorporate it in our work. After several discussions, the movement was later started by Hilda Flavia Nakabuye, who was joined by other climate activists like Leah, Bob, Joy and Sadrach after a couple of weeks. From February 2019 to date, over 20 000 students have added their voices to demand urgent climate action and joint efforts to combat this climate breakdown.

Inspired by Greta Thunberg, Fridays For Future Uganda is leading the way towards the growth of a strong youth space through influencing policy, increasing climate action, activism and awareness. On 15 March the movement's first significant strike in Kampala, Uganda took place as part of the global school strike for climate. University students were joined by high school students for the strike that gathered over 150 young people. It is from this strike that the movement decided to write a joint students' demand paper, "The Uganda Students and Youth's Climate Action Demands". This document summarizes the reasons for climate strikes and demands, ranging from calls to leaders to act fast to calling for unprecedented global action towards the climate crisis/ecological breakdown.

On 24 May, Fridays For Future organized the second global school strike for climate. On this day, a group of Fridays For Future Uganda representatives

presented the document to the Government of Uganda through the Office of the Speaker. The speaker of parliament is elected by the members of parliament. A discussion between the movement's representatives and Honourable Rebecca Kadaga, the speaker of parliament, was held on the document and the speaker responded positively while noting that the Ugandan government has created policies and action plans to combat climate change. She appreciated the Fridays For Future movement in Uganda for championing the move for urgent climate action.

On 12 July, a massive mobilization strike in preparation for the 20 September global climate strike was held with hundreds of students in Kiboga District to reaffirm the demands made in the document that was presented to the speaker of parliament. Many mobilization strikes are taking place in Uganda in places such as schools, universities, public places, workplaces along with activities such as tree planting, climate awareness, plastic pick-ups, among others. The Fridays For Future movement in Africa realized a turnout of over 1400 people for the global climate strike day on 20 September and over 2000 people for the entire global strike week of 20–27 September 2019.

The mass global climate strike week was open to youth, students, elders and everyone to raise the momentum on pushing for urgent climate action. Nigeria and Uganda are two of the African countries that participated in this global strike. The strikes in Uganda took place in different parts of the country. For instance, the major strike took place in Wakiso District and in other towns, In Kampala, Uganda Christian University, Jinja also held strikes. This was to enable everyone to be part of the strikes and for those people who were not able to join the major strike in Mukono. The strike in Uganda included primary and secondary students from different schools, university students, farmers' associations, teachers, local chairpersons, environmentalists and the general public. The global climate strike was held alongside the United Nations Climate Action Summit, hosted by the United Nations Secretary General António Guterres, which took place in New York, and aimed to boost ambition and accelerate actions to implement the Paris Agreement on climate change. A youth climate summit also took place as part of the weekend events. This was the first ever UN climate summit for young people and it provided a platform for young leaders to showcase their solutions and also meaningfully engage with decision-makers.

Therefore, from February 2019 until now, every Friday, students have held both group and individual strikes. The strikers have held talks in several universities, schools and communities to mobilize others to join the action as well as the Fridays For Future movement. The strikes are held on high-traffic roadsides and in public places, among others.

The growth of the movement in Uganda has inspired similar action in Nigeria, South Africa, and other countries. In South Africa, campaigners are

demanding emissions reduction and driving youth participation in communities and schools in several South African cities. Nigeria too has participated in the Fridays For Future movement to bring together young people in the fight to demand government action.

THE MOVEMENT IN NIGERIA

The movement is getting stronger here and awareness on climate change is rising, as everyone is taking one climate action or another to demand for climate justice. At first, Adenike Titilope Oladosu started alone. Yet, she was optimistic that it would spread to all the states in Nigeria. Then, before the first global climate strike, other youths saw it as an avenue to demand environmental and climate justice, and they joined. At the first global climate strike, hundreds turned out in Abuja, Lagos and Kaduna. In Abuja, the climate strike was led by Adenike Titilope Oladosu (now the country director for Fridays For Future in Nigeria), Michael Fagbemi led the Lagos climate strike, Ibrahim Muhammad Shamsuddin and Sakeenat Bello led that of Kaduna. People who saw it were then awakened by leaders' inaction over the years even though Nigeria is one of the countries that signed the Paris Agreement. During the second global climate strike, the influence of the previous strikes engineered an increase in the number of people participating as many states joined the strike in the demand for climate justice. Climate change is real and the vulnerability is greater in African countries. Though we have not yet moved tens of thousands in the streets because of security challenges, our message is audible. Then, at the third global climate strike on 20 and 27 September, the dream was realized as it has spread into the corners of Nigeria: we witnessed a massive turnout in almost all the states in Nigeria as students, workers, adults, the physically challenged, children and other groups participated. As at the first global climate strike, there was no media attention, but as time passed we began to gain media attention from newspapers and organizations as they began to take interest in the action. One of the challenges we are yet to overcome is the sponsorship of our climate strikes.

The specifics of Nigeria are unique, hence the uniqueness of our approach in driving the Fridays For Future/climate strike movement in Nigeria. What we consider remarkable is the consistency with which we have driven the movement despite political and social barriers. While we may not freely take to the streets in places like Abuja, we must focus our energy and resources on educating students in schools, groups and gatherings. Regardless of the audience, our message is the same: to communicate on the climate crisis in Nigeria, to demand improved commitment and environment-focused policies from the government of Nigeria, to increase public drive towards climate action. For over 46 weeks, our group has been moving from schools to religious organ-

izations, to social events and across various media platforms to make public the climate crisis Nigeria is facing and stress the need for well-targeted and cohesive efforts toward building climate resilience. We understand the peculiarities in Nigeria; hence, we understand that we may not be able to mobilize 100 000 young people to boycott school. Nonetheless, from the country's capital Abuja, to the country's most populous city Lagos, to marginalized communities in Benue State, and in rural areas of Kaduna State, we have decentralized ourselves to share the same message among different communities. We are still struggling with getting the needed media support to cover our activities and improve our storytelling skills required to convince more people to join us and show the government the urgency of our message.

Nigeria is one of the countries experiencing the severe impacts of climate change, which is leading to conflict, especially among herders and farmers. The Boko Haram saga is also fuelled by the impacts of climate change, including issues in the Niger Delta. The effect is felt greatly as it leads to migration of people from their community to others, resulting in atrocities due to limited resources. This has been affecting livelihoods, as most of these zones depend on agriculture as their primary means of occupation. As such, climate change has been a threat to our food security. Flooding is also another threat to our environment. This has created many internally displaced people camps, in unsafe places that can be dangerous for women; and most times such people are affected by diseases and infections of all kinds. Deforestation is on a rise as people depend on it for cooking materials since there is no clean, subsidized alternative. This has led to intense heatwaves that we witness during the dry season.

Other African countries like Kenya, Ghana and South Sudan are also taking an interest in the school strikes for climate but are yet to join the movement that will form a platform for youth to participate in the action in their respective countries. Many of the most troublesome aspects of environmental change are direct consequences of human behaviour, so it is appropriate that changing that behaviour should be high on the list of goals for any programme of environmental preservation.

While the strikes started within just three locations in Nigeria, from our reports of the third global climate strike held on 20 and 27 September it appears that about 36 locations around the country were involved. That shows the significant progress the movement is making in Nigeria, even though we believe we need to do more and keep pushing harder for climate action.

The federal government also, through the Federal Ministry of Environment, has been playing a significant role towards mitigation and adaptation, by involving Nigerian youth from all over the country in roundtable meetings and seminars aimed at harnessing their climate-smart ideas and actualizing them towards achieving Nigeria's Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC)

commitment to the Paris Agreement of a 20–45 per cent reduction in emissions by 2030.

CHALLENGES TO THE FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE MOVEMENT AND THE REASONS WE STRIKE

Challenges faced by the movement include empty promises and inaction from politicians. Uganda signed the Paris Agreement in 2015 but very little or nothing has been done yet to combat the effects of climate change; we are running out of time. Promises have been made to us about taking climate action but haven't been put in play. For instance, the speaker of parliament of Uganda promised to organize a climate debate with fellow members of parliament, but all in vain. The movement has been criticized in Uganda as political. Indeed, one of the candidates for the 2021 presidential election, Honourable Robert Kyagulanyi (known as Bobi Wine) was mistakenly identified as a founder of our movement. This candidate has built his own movement, "People Power", which promotes political and social change.

There is no teaching about climate change in schools. This makes it hard for people to understand climate change the first time they hear about it during our climate awareness and public engagement sessions. However, despite the ignorance, everyone is familiar with effects of climate change because they affect each and every one of us in various ways.

Sometimes the community does not support us in our strikes because we disagree with some of the activities in some areas, such as cutting trees for timber to earn a living, environmentally unfriendly farming and fishing methods, sand mining in lakes, disposal of waste in lakes and rivers, unnecessary driving that contributes to air pollution and CO₂ emissions, and so on.

Inaction at large is putting everything at risk. For instance, the numbers of climate refugees within our countries are increasing at an unacceptable pace. Diseases like malaria and cholera, among others, are on the rise due to increasing temperatures. The health and the welfare of our people are at risk if we marginalize climate change as only one among various environmental issues:

- The fact that the Fridays For Future movement is growing globally in different countries around the world, such as Germany, Belgium, African and Latin American countries among others, proceeds from the need to have unprecedented global responses for fighting the climate change crisis. Such global action is portrayed in the ways youth in different countries are standing up for action and creating initiatives such as Zero Hour, Earth Uprising, climate marches, youth climate strikes, youth climate councils, lake-shore clean-ups, plastic pick-ups, tree planting, and so on. These actions include

powerful speeches by climate activists directed at policy-makers and politicians.

- We are the first generation to know what is happening to our Earth and this puts us in a position to find solutions to stop it.
- Africa in particular is headed for trouble if countries do not adopt sustainable development. With the increasing global heat, agro-based societies in the Sub-Saharan region will not survive because agriculture is essential to all livelihoods – it's far more than energy, technology, business, health or science. Agriculture is the lead employer and source of income for African economies. A weak agricultural sector will lead to food insecurity, malnutrition, extreme poverty and unhealthy conditions. The increasing global heat will lead to water scarcity, evolving human, plant and animal diseases, soil erosion and lack of reliable energy sources.
- With increasing droughts, cyclones, floods, failing crops and decreasing water levels, many countries like Uganda, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Kenya, Ethiopia, South Africa and South Sudan will be among the first to be severely broken down. Today, Mozambique's economy is being crippled by the deadliest tropical Cyclones, Idai, which killed over 1300 people in 2019, and Kenneth, sweeping over several coastal locations.
- In Uganda and other countries, despite the ban on plastics, there is an ever-increasing rate of littered plastic. The East African region harbours the African Great Lakes and this plastic is an increasing threat for the survival of many livelihoods. Lake Victoria is home to over 40 million people on its shores, generating tonnes of plastic every day. As a way of mitigating this plastic problem, increasing momentum on the demand to ban plastics, the Fridays For Future movement in Uganda started a petition to enforce the ban on plastic bags, as well as a lake-shore clean-up activity carried out every week on water bodies to beat plastic pollution and preserve our water resources.
- The rate at which our forests are being cleared and trees cut down for timber and charcoal is accelerating. The bare land is then used for industrialization or sugarcane plantations by investors and businesspeople. An example is the Mabira Forest in Uganda. The same applies to wetlands, which are being cleared for industrialization, settlement and rice plantations. Their protection is yet another demand of the movement.
- Therefore, young people with more life ahead of them, have the most to lose from an unsafe future and Fridays For Future emphasizes this. Today, more than 60 percent of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa is under the age of 25 years; moreover, the African youth population is expected to double by 2050.

Mobilization to rally more students to participate in the movement's activities continues. Today, over 20 000 students in Uganda and 100 000 in Nigeria have been enrolled. Mobilization is done through educating and sharing information and action about climate change and other pressing environmental issues like deforestation, plastic accumulation and water pollution. This gives us opportunities to call fellow students and other people to participate in the strikes.

In conclusion, the Fridays For Future movement faces social and political barriers, especially in Africa, but with consistency, hope, desire, unity and hard work we will keep pushing to realize our objectives and goals, which are in line with the Paris Agreement.