



GLOBAL  
CENTER ON  
ADAPTATION



UNIVERSITE  
CHEIKH ANTA DIOP  
DE DAKAR

# CHEIKH ANTA DIOP UNIVERSITY ADAPTATION HONORARY LECTURE

## BUILDING A SAFER, GREENER, PROSPEROUS CONTINENT FOR AFRICA'S YOUTH

### 13<sup>TH</sup> MAY 2022, DAKAR, SENEGAL

Honorable Vice Chancellor Cheikh Becaye Gaye, esteemed faculty, and – in particular – students.

My name is Patrick Verkooijen and I am the CEO of the Global Center on Adaptation.

It's a pleasure to be with you today. When I look around this hall I can see that the future of Senegal is bright. You represent the expectations of this great country, this great continent.

I have no doubt that you are all fired by ambition to make the most of your opportunities to build lives and careers that are worthy of your talents. It is in the nature of life that every generation faces new challenges. I think it is fair to say that your challenges are among the greatest that any generation will ever face – they are existential and they are approaching faster than many wish to believe.

We cannot bury our heads in the sand. The climate emergency is a reality and the urgency to respond will be nowhere greater than in Africa. It will have life-changing consequences.

I do not use the word "life" lightly.

The science tells us that unless we make deep and fast reductions in emissions we will not stay within 1.5 degrees Celsius of warming. If we do not stay within 1.5 degrees, large parts of Africa will become uninhabitable. This is the limit for maintaining life on our planet as we know it. Even if we keep within the Paris Climate Agreement goal of keeping the world within 1.5 degrees of warming, the economic costs of climate change in Africa will still be enormous.

Students: I make no apologies for raising the alarm. I don't need to remind you that Africa is fighting multiple crises on several fronts: the economic fallout of Covid-19, an energy and food emergency triggered by the war in Ukraine – all compounded by the climate emergency.

Senegal has not emerged unscathed. Water-related extreme events in Senegal already cost the country more than 10% of GDP every year, threatening the country's growth and position as a regional economic powerhouse.

So Africa, which is home to the world's youngest population, will be disproportionately affected by a climate crisis it did not cause. Left unchecked, the consequences of this crisis will be hitting you even harder in the next two decades – at the very peak of your potential to be useful and productive members of society.

But being alarmed by what lies on the horizon isn't a prescription for despair.

There is a proverb that you may be familiar with: "Tomorrow belongs to those who prepare for it today". And there are many things that we can start doing today to adapt to a future that will have to be greener, more resilient and more sustainable if we are to have any future at all.

Let me repeat this because it needs to be underlined: unless work gets underway urgently at a massive scale, large parts of Africa will cross the threshold of financially and economically viable adaptation.

My key message for you today is this: it is time for bold climate action. And young people should be at the heart of it. Adaptation is an investment in your future prosperity.

I am here speaking to you because I believe – I know – that adaptation is not only possible; it makes economic sense. When done right, climate adaptation presents significant opportunities for productivity, economic benefits, and poverty alleviation. Your ingenuity, your innovative flair and your boldness will turn this decisive moment in our history to your advantage.

Last year, GCA's State and Trends on Adaptation report found that a dollar invested in weather and climate information services gives between 4 and 25 dollars in benefits. A dollar invested in resilient water and sanitation not only saves lives; it creates between 2 and 12 dollars in economic benefits.

The cost of action is not zero. Integrating resilience into agriculture and food systems in Sub-Saharan Africa will cost \$15 billion annually. But do you know the cost of inaction? \$200 billion annually. So this is an opportunity you must seize.

For us at the Global Center on Adaptation, the real story on climate adaptation in Africa is a story of resilience, of responsibility, of solidarity, of opportunities for a safer, greener, more prosperous continent.

I would like to specifically highlight what we are doing with the African Union under the leadership of your president; President Macky Sall. Together with the African Union, the African Development Bank, we are driving the growth and prosperity agenda of tomorrow through the largest adaptation program ever.

The Africa Adaptation Acceleration Program (AAP) is Africa's response to the climate crisis, mobilizing \$25 billion for adaptation in the areas of food security, resilient infrastructure, climate finance, and youth employment. In its first year, we have already influenced climate adaptation responses through three billion dollars of investments.

Let me give you one example of how AAP delivers impact in food security. Across the Sahel, including in Senegal, temperatures are rising 1.5 times faster than the global average. As a result, droughts and floods are growing longer and more frequent, undermining food production. To address this, GCA is mainstreaming adaptation within a \$300 million investment that will transform the lives and livelihoods of over five million smallholder farmers by putting vital climate data and analytics into their hands through climate-smart digital agriculture technologies. This will reduce climate risk for farmers and increase agricultural productivity by 40 to 70%.

The Covid-19 crisis has demonstrated that trillions of dollars can be mobilized by the international community overnight. At the same time, we know that only a small portion of this Covid-19 finance came to Africa. And the same is true for climate finance. Africa needs to access large-scale climate financing in order to capture the benefits of adaptation and foster growth and prosperity for everyone.

But the sad reality is that most African institutions are at the moment locked out of accessing global climate finance. This moral and economic injustice needs to be addressed.

Senegal has the plan. Senegal has the leadership with President Macky Sall. Now Senegal needs the financing from the international community to match the ambition.

And that is why I am delighted that we at GCA are joining forces with four innovative, Senegalese financial institutions to unlock \$1 billion in global climate finance for investments in food security, resilient infrastructure, and youth, jobs and entrepreneurship.

Honorable Faculty and students, I am also honored to announce today the partnership with GCA and West Africa's premier knowledge institution to leverage the talents of your students and faculty to ensure Senegal's road to economic growth and prosperity will be underpinned by resilient infrastructure. So that when the rains come, as the flood waters rise, your families will still be able to go to work, students will not be left out of school, and a pregnant mother will still be able to go to the hospital.

In closing, let me challenge each of you to join this journey with me. Many of you have big dreams, innovative ideas, and boundless energy. The AAAP puts youth and young entrepreneurs at the heart of the solution for climate adaptation. In Glasgow last November, we announced the first cohort of the AAAP youth entrepreneurship winners. Each winner was granted \$100,000 to build green enterprises ranging from drought-tolerant farming to the innovative use of drones for resilient cities.

This October, I will be back here in Dakar to announce the next round of winners for 2022. My challenge to you is to put forward your bold business plans to join the green adaptation jobs revolution.

My pledge is that we at GCA will walk alongside you, we will provide our knowledge and expertise, we will give you the tools to make yourselves be heard.

I truly believe that you and your generation have the vision and the ambition to achieve the adaptation to climate change that will secure the future for our world.

The opportunity is here for the taking. Let us seize it.

I thank you.