

## **Africa and Climate Change – A Conversation with US Senator John Kerry towards COP27**

*By Tony O. Elumelu*



As the world continues to experience the daily impact of global warming, whether the tragic recent flooding in Pakistan, or the less covered, but equally harmful, persistent environmental degradation of Africa's Sahel region, leaders need to act, not just talk.

Equally, Africa should not just be in the conversation, but actively set the agenda.

While Africa's 3.8% contribution to global emissions is immaterial compared to others, we are the most vulnerable region to the effect of climate change. Africa's rain-fed agriculture focus, and a large share of agriculture in Africa's GDP, add to the continent's vulnerability. It is clear that climate change is not just a threat to the future, it is also a threat to the present.

Global conversations around climate change are geared towards a focus on green and renewable energy. However, Africa's focus is and should remain, providing energy from both traditional and green sources for its citizens - this was the focus of my discussion with Senator John Kerry, Former Secretary of State and Current United States of America's Special Presidential Envoy for

Climate, along with the CEO of Heirs Oil and Gas (HHOG), Osa Igiehon, at Transcorp Hilton Abuja, yesterday.



We must be realistic about the inequalities that exist between Africa and the rest of the world. Africa has a significant energy deficit, with a substantial amount of its population living with minimal or no electricity. Africa transiting fully to green and renewable energy sources will require considerable investment, and this cannot be at the expense of the drive to urgently address the current energy deficit. Green energy transition must allow room for Africa to power its development and sustain its economic growth. Anything else will be potentially detrimental to us all.

There must be an equitable transition – that is why I welcome the US’s recent recognition of this concept in its much-awaited [Africa strategy](#) announced earlier this month.

Africa’s green revolution requires immediate and significant funding – funding that is larger than the resources available to African governments, that have so many competing priorities such as poverty, economy, education, healthcare, security, and more – all of which have a direct impact on the livelihood of Africans, especially the youth.

With this dilemma, the world must step up! Africa will require far more external support and the same policy flexibility that rich nations claim for themselves in the energy transition.

As the world gathers in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt for COP27, African nations must engage with the rest of the world, with one voice about the massive support required for this transition – one that is frankly in everyone’s interest. The Tony Elumelu Foundation’s work with the UNDP in the Sahel seeks to address the toxic cocktail of the lack of opportunity and extremism, and the frightening impact of environmental change has only made this task more difficult.

Africa must do what it can in the present – African governments must provide the enabling environment to promote climate change and incentivise the private sector to own these initiatives and begin implementation in their various organisations. At Heirs Holdings Group, with our integrated energy strategy, we are working to address Africa’s energy needs. Our energy strategy comprises three pathways –

- i. an oil and gas pathway (with HHOG already providing up to 12million standard cubic feet of gas per day into the Eastern Nigeria Domestic gas hub);
- ii. a gas-fired electricity generation pathway (with Transcorp Group operating an aggregate of approximately 2000 megawatts, some 15% of Nigeria’s total installed electricity generating capacity); and
- iii. a renewables/green energy pathway currently being developed.

We cannot afford to ignore traditional energy sources, to power basic needs, but equally we cannot ignore our responsibility to future generations in developing alternatives.

We are great supporters of young entrepreneurs – and we are ensuring that we infuse green climate awareness in young African entrepreneurs, through the work of The Tony Elumelu Foundation (TEF). We believe that the current energy transition and future lies in the hands of our private sector, who through their actions or inactions can either perpetuate current ills or catalyse change. Our over 1.2m TEF entrepreneurship seed capital/knowledge beneficiaries are being encouraged to create businesses that incorporate sustainability into their practices.

My conversation with Senator Kerry ended with a broad based discourse about opportunities for Africa in the renewables space, and technology-focused initiatives that will aid in addressing and improving access to energy in Africa.

I applaud the United States of America, for this inclusive approach to addressing the climate issues. It is through such direct engagements that a comprehensive agenda will be developed for faithful implementation across Africa and the wider world.

Collectively, we can do better. We must do better. We have a dwindling window to address, probably the most significant challenge of our time. Our children deserve and expect better.