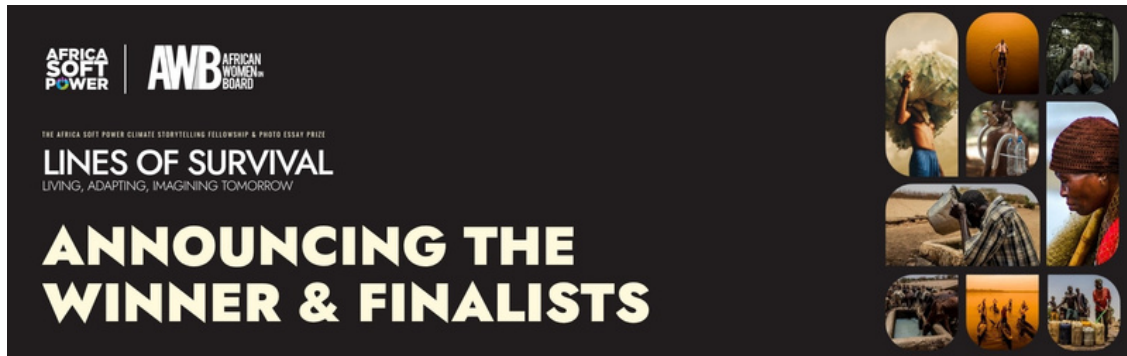




Five photographers. Four countries. Five powerful stories of survival, adaptation and possibility.

What does climate change look like when seen through the eyes of the people already living it?

It looks like a fisherman learning to read a lake whose seasons no longer behave as they once did. A family rebuilding after another flood. A coastline gradually surrendering homes to the sea. A waste collector whose daily work is quietly helping a city rethink what it throws away.

These are the stories at the heart of the 2026 Africa Soft Power Climate Storytelling Fellowship & Photo Essay Prize.

Today, we are delighted to announce this year's winner, **Mpumelelo Buthelezi of South Africa**, alongside four exceptional finalists from across the continent.

The 2026 Winner



Mpumelelo Buthelezi | South Africa

E'Plazini: A Placeto Call Home for Waste Collectors

What happens when we look beyond what society discards and see the people creating value from it?

Photographed in Soweto, *E'Plazini* documents the waste collectors whose daily labour diverts recyclable materials from landfills while sustaining livelihoods within the informal economy.

Buthelezi's winning essay is ultimately about more than waste. It is about work, value, visibility and dignity. He describes his camera as “an ally”— a way of bringing people and their contributions into stories from which they are too often absent.

As the 2026 winner, Buthelezi receives US \$2,000, the title of Climate Storytelling Fellow, and inclusion in the Prize's global exhibition tour.

The Finalists



Vanessa Mulondo | Uganda

The Fishermen's Tale

At Lake Eyasi in Tanzania, generations of traditional knowledge are being tested by changing weather patterns and water levels.

Vanessa Mulondo's intimate photographs follow a fishing community adapting its fishing and drying practices to sustain both its livelihood and the lake ecosystem. Her work reveals the knowledge, resourcefulness, and resilience communities draw upon as familiar environmental rhythms begin to change.



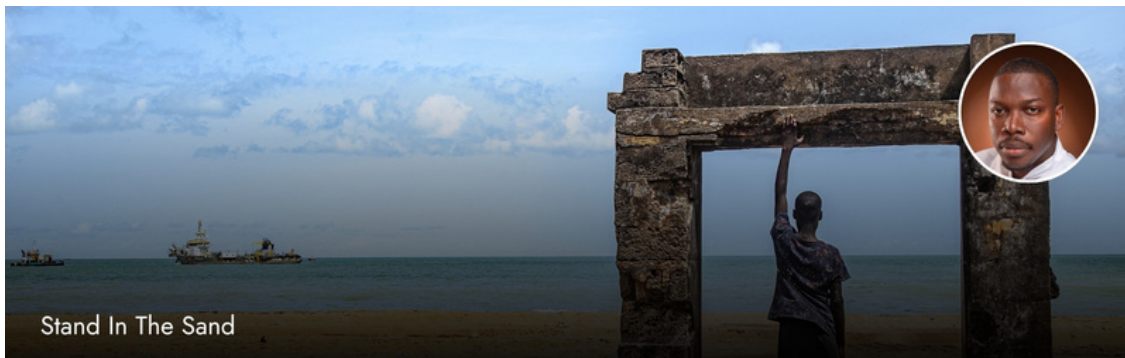
Climate Realities

Kevin Ochieng Onyango | Kenya

Climate Realities

Photographed between 2020 and 2024, Kevin Ochieng Onyango's ongoing series documents the effects of drought in Kenya - and the ingenuity of the communities living through it.

His work explores the intersections of climate, water, cities, and youth, looking beyond crisis to show how people respond, adapt, and continue to move forward.



Stand In The Sand

Kossivi Nicolas Vava | Togo

Stand in the Sand

Along Togo's coast, the shoreline is changing. Fishing catches are declining, rising waters are claiming homes, and communities are confronting an increasingly uncertain future.

Vava's photographs capture both what is being lost and the efforts being made to protect the coastline. His work is an intimate portrait of people, place, and the enduring relationship between communities and their environment.



When The Water Stays

Brian Ongoro | Kenya

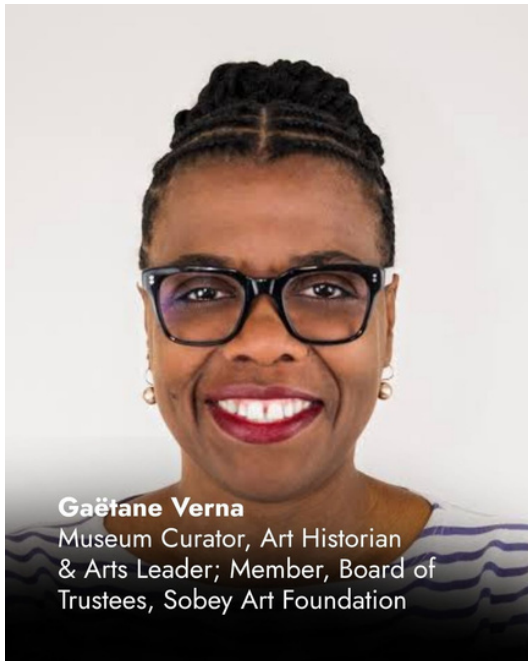
When The Water Stays

In Kisumu County, flooding is no longer experienced as a single emergency. For many communities, it has become a recurring condition of everyday life.

Brian Ongoro documents how people continue to live, rebuild, and preserve their dignity amid repeated environmental disruption. His wider practice across East Africa focuses on human dignity, social change and regional development.

Selected by a Distinguished Panel

The 2026 winner and finalists were selected by a panel bringing together expertise in photography, visual storytelling and the arts:





Tsoku Maela
Award-winning Photographer
& Filmmaker



Polly Irungu
Founder, Black Women Photographers



THE AFRICA SOFT POWER CLIMATE STORYTELLING FELLOWSHIP & PHOTO ESSAY PRIZE

LINES OF SURVIVAL

LIVING, ADAPTING, IMAGINING TOMORROW

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PUBLIC BEGINNING:
SEPT. 17TH
8AM - 5PM (ET)



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The Global Exhibition Journey

This announcement is only the beginning.

From **17 September to 1 November 2026**, the selected works will be exhibited at **The Africa Center** in New York, as part of Africa Soft Power's special partnership with The Africa Center.

From New York, the exhibition will travel to Antalya during COP31, before continuing to Lagos and Nairobi. The journey will take these stories into influential global conversations about climate, policy and investment, before bringing them home to engage audiences across the continent.

At each destination, the exhibition will create space for African experiences of climate change, adaptation and resilience to be not merely discussed, but seen.

The Prize offers organisations an opportunity to support the next generation of African visual storytellers and help ensure that their perspectives reach the audiences and institutions shaping our climate future.

[EXPLORE PARTNERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES](#)

About The Africa Soft Power Group

We are the umbrella platform for three organisations (Africa Soft Power, African Women on Board & ASP Global) with mutual objectives. Our overriding mission is to mainstream vital – and all too often still unseen – African perspectives as a fundamental part of the global conversation in every aspect of life and economy.

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