African Insurers Advance ESG Integration Through Shared Learning

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There comes a point in every transformation journey when strategy must leave the boardroom. Board approvals must become business decisions. Sustainability commitments must survive the realities of competing priorities, limited resources and changing market conditions. The true measure of success is no longer the quality of a strategy document, but how effectively that strategy is embedded into everyday operations.

For four insurers participating in Cohort 2 of the ESG Strategy Technical Assistance Programme under the Nairobi Declaration on Sustainable Insurance (NDSI), that moment arrived in Nairobi. Representatives from Geminia Insurance, Fidelity Shield Insurance, Pioneer Insurance and Intra Africa Assurance convened for a focused knowledge dissemination session, an important milestone that brought together twelve months of learning, implementation and collaboration.

Convened by FSD Africa on behalf of the NDSI and facilitated by Impact Actuarial, the session marked the culmination of the programme's first two phases while launching the in-person component of Phase Three. It was a celebration of progress, a forum for honest reflection and a demonstration that sustainable insurance is best advanced when institutions learn from one another.

Unlike many capacity-building programmes that conclude with training, the ESG Strategy Technical Assistance Programme was deliberately designed as a structured implementation journey.
Phase One focused on building understanding and developing strategy. Board members and staff from participating insurers first underwent ESG education sessions to establish a common understanding of sustainability and its implications for the insurance industry. This was followed by one-on-one ESG Strategy Development technical assistance sessions, during which Impact Actuarial worked closely with each insurer using its ESG Strategy Development Framework to develop organisation-specific sustainability strategies. The phase concluded with participating companies securing board approval for their ESG strategies, ensuring sustainability became an organisational commitment rather than a departmental initiative.

With strategy approved, the programme moved into Phase 2, implementation. During this phase, Impact Actuarial's technical experts worked individually with participating insurers, providing tailored guidance as each organisation began putting its ESG strategy into practice. Progress was tracked using Impact Actuarial Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) templates, allowing companies to assess implementation, identify challenges and refine their approaches through structured technical assistance sessions.

By the time participants gathered in Nairobi, they had already spent months translating strategy into action. The defining characteristic of the knowledge dissemination session was its emphasis on peer-to-peer learning.

Rather than introducing ESG concepts for the first time, participants spoke openly about what had happened, what had worked, what had proven more difficult than anticipated, where implementation had exceeded expectations, and what lessons others could adopt.

Equally important was the company's willingness to discuss areas requiring further improvement. Pioneer identified resource allocation, implementation timelines and decentralising performance monitoring as key priorities, demonstrating that organisational transformation requires continuous refinement rather than perfection. Intra Africa Assurance offered another compelling example of implementation in action. The insurer has engaged 105 stakeholders to determine its most material ESG issues, established an IFRS S1 and S2-aligned internal reporting baseline, embedded sustainability as one of six strategic pillars within its 2026–2028 Strategic Framework, and quantified the financial implications of climate change by analysing over KES 342 million in gross flood claims recorded during 2025. Yet, the company also acknowledged the journey ahead. Planned next steps include developing greenhouse gas inventories, strengthening ESG governance through a dedicated department and steering committee, advancing climate risk modelling capabilities and establishing measurable targets for emissions, diversity and financial inclusion.

Across the participating insurers, the presentations revealed tangible progress in moving ESG from strategy into organisational practice. Companies reported stronger sustainability governance, clearer ownership of ESG metrics and greater accountability for implementation. In some cases, sustainability has been incorporated into employee Key Performance Indicators across all levels of the organisation, from the boardroom to entry-level staff, helping turn ESG commitments from broad aspirations into measurable responsibilities.

The discussions were equally candid about the challenges that remain. Participants highlighted the need for more deliberate resource allocation, stronger implementation timelines and greater decentralisation of ESG monitoring and reporting. These reflections underscored an important lesson from the programme: meaningful ESG integration is an iterative process, requiring organisations to continually assess what is working, confront implementation gaps and refine their approaches.

Other experiences shared during the session demonstrated how ESG integration is beginning to influence strategy, reporting and risk management. One participating insurer, for instance, engaged 105 stakeholders to identify its most material ESG issues, developed an internal reporting baseline aligned with IFRS S1 and S2, and embedded sustainability as one of six strategic pillars within its 2026–2028 Strategic Framework. The insurer also quantified its exposure to climate-related events by analysing more than KES 342 million in gross flood claims recorded in 2025, providing a clearer connection between sustainability risks and their financial implications.

At the same time, participants acknowledged that significant work remains. Priorities for the next stage include developing greenhouse gas inventories, strengthening ESG governance structures, advancing climate risk modelling capabilities, and establishing measurable targets for areas such as emissions, diversity and financial inclusion. Together, the experiences shared illustrated both the progress already made and the deliberate work still required to embed sustainability more deeply into insurance operations

These presentations illustrated an important principle underpinning the programme. Successful ESG integration is not defined by having all the answers. It is defined by establishing systems that enable organisations to learn, improve and mature over time.

Beyond organisational updates, the session challenged participants to consider how ESG should shape one of insurance's most fundamental functions; underwriting. Insurance has always been about understanding and pricing risk. Today, however, that definition of risk has evolved dramatically. Climate change, biodiversity loss, governance failures, labour practices and human rights issues increasingly influence financial performance, claims experience, regulatory expectations and long-term business resilience.

Beyond the company presentations, the session featured a technical deep dive into embedding ESG within underwriting, drawing on internationally recognised guidance from the UNEP Principles for Sustainable Insurance (PSI). Participants explored a practical six-step framework for translating ESG considerations into everyday underwriting decisions, from defining an organisation's ESG risk appetite and embedding it into underwriting guidelines, to assigning clear responsibilities, establishing escalation pathways, assessing ESG exposures using specialised tools and heat maps, and ultimately reflecting those risks in underwriting decisions, pricing and reporting.

Interactive discussions demonstrated how environmental, social and governance risks differ across insurance products and sectors, using ESG risk heat maps covering both life and non-life insurance portfolios. Participants explored practical questions facing underwriters every day, from which risks should be accepted, which require enhanced due diligence to which fall outside an insurer's risk appetite altogether.

The knowledge dissemination session marked the beginning of Phase Three of the ESG Strategy Technical Assistance Programme. While the in-person workshop brought participating insurers together to consolidate learning from the strategy development and implementation phases, the journey continues through a series of specialised technical webinars that will deepen technical capabilities and sustain implementation momentum.

As sustainability expectations continue to evolve across regulators, investors and customers, insurers are increasingly recognising that ESG is no longer a peripheral consideration or a reporting obligation. It is becoming central to governance, underwriting, product development and long-term competitiveness.

The Nairobi session demonstrated just how far the participating insurers have already come, from board education and strategy development to implementation and operational integration. More importantly, it demonstrated that while every organisation's sustainability journey is unique, the industry's future will be shaped by collaboration.

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