Climate justice is more urgent than ever, youthful campaigners said Saturday night on the first day of events marking the 50th World Environment Day in Rwanda which is being celebrated under the theme “Beat Plastic Pollution.”

Farmers who largely depend on rain-fed agriculture, are bearing the brunt of climate crisis.

Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network (RCCDN) has resolved to advocate using all means by engaging youth with the aim to strengthen action on the climate crisis which is also affecting the East African country in many ways.

Although environmental experts have pointed out that Rwanda has never experienced climate justice related to environmental or climate migration, the country has experienced environmental displacements in recent decades and has long been vulnerable to natural disasters as a result of climate change.

On the sidelines of the 27th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP27), that took place last year in the Egyptian coastal city of Sharm el-Sheikh, developing countries have called for ‘climate justice’ in the form of adaptation and loss and damage funds.

During the ongoing campaign, activists observe that despite current efforts, those who bear no responsibility for the causes of climate change especially from developing countries are the most affected.

As one of the regions most adversely affected by the impacts of climate change, activists are now advocating for urgent and practical global, regional and national actions and enhanced ambition to combat climate change.

Latest report by the by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) shows that plastic pollution disproportionately affects marginalized communities and communities living in close proximity to plastic production and waste sites, constituting an environmental injustice.

Representatives of Rwanda Climate Change and Development Network (RCCDN)

The 2021 UN agency report recommend that governments expand their monitoring

of plastic waste, study its health impacts, and invest in its management. Governments should also adopt and increase enforcement of bans on single-use plastics and encourage reduction, recycling and reuse.

Rwanda’s efforts to be plastic free are expressed through relevant laws that were introduced as early as 2008. In that year, the country passed its first law banning the manufacture, import, use, and sale of polyethylene bags. Four years later, as part of supporting the aforementioned law, Rwanda created the Environment and Climate Change Fund as a cross-sector financing mechanism to achieve the development goals of environmentally sustainable, climate-resilient, and green economic growth.

In 2019, Rwanda passed a transformative law that began phasing out all single-use plastics.