



Sumi Huddle - Episode #4

Guest: [Natalie Sifuma](#) - Pan-African Climate Leader, Systems Thinker & Communications Consultant, Founder @[Sisters in Climate](#)

(Also available on [Spotify](#) and [YouTube](#))

Su Sakarya: Hello everybody. This is our third episode on Sumi Huddle. As I always say, we are joined by people who inspire us with their work, with their commitments to social impact and change-making in general. And today on Sumi Huddle, we have somebody really inspiring with a bright personality. I'm honored to meet her. We know her from Bloom Community, which is a social impact community. This is Natalie Sifuma—I hope I pronounced that correctly. She's a development strategist, a storyteller, and a climate advocate. As the founder of Sisters in Climate, a Pan-African ecofeminist community—this is my description; I'll hear about it from Natalie as well—Natalie is dedicated to amplifying women's voices, especially in climate action. Her journey from communications to climate advocacy showcases her commitment to making climate conversations and impact conversations more inclusive and accessible. I find her journey very inspiring, and I'm excited to learn more about it today.

So I wanted to start by asking—like I said, I had a little introduction about you—but I would love to hear you talk about yourself. Could you share a little about your journey that led you to founding Sisters in Climate? What inspired you to come up with this community, and do you think it has evolved since it first started, or do you think it will evolve in the future? Thank you so much.

Natalie Sifuma: Thank you. You pronounced it correctly. My name is Natalie Sifuma. I often make a point of pronouncing it clearly as people tend to say it differently. I'm an African storyteller, a development communications professional, and the founder of Sisters in Climate—basically how you introduced me. I'm so glad to be here, Su. Thanks for having me.

As far as Sisters in Climate, it was born on International Women's Day, March 8th, 2023. It was inspired by a gathering of women in Nairobi, where I'm based. We had come together to explore our role as environmental stewards. Around that time, climate conversations and policy discussions were gaining momentum across the continent. I had also just stepped into a new role as head of communications for a climate advocacy campaign. As I navigated the space, I noticed clear gaps in climate information and education, especially for women. It felt like there was a warm, urgent opportunity to create

spaces that centered knowledge sharing and collaboration on climate in formats that felt both inclusive and community-driven.

Since then, just over two years now, what began as a small initiative has started to find its rhythm. What was once a baby is now learning how to walk. We've continued to host knowledge and networking events and created climate education products—from webinars to digital series—that have helped expand our reach beyond Nairobi and even beyond Kenya. We've also partnered with like-minded, values-driven climate movements, which has helped us grow our impact and continue building a truly African climate sisterhood.

Su Sakarya: That is really inspiring. I was just talking with one of our previous guests about other issues connected to climate activism—immigration and forced labor, slavery. We are not always very capable of centering the people who are on the receiving end of these changes and challenges. I feel like communities affected by climate change also need a bigger voice in what's happening globally. So I feel like what you're doing in that sense is very interesting because climate change is a global issue, but it's also a gendered issue. Targeting that specific voice and empowering it is very valuable and inspiring.

Umay Özde Öztürk: You also mentioned that Sisters in Climate creates a beautiful space for women to talk about climate, and you said you always try to be inclusive. Africa is a big continent with many cultures and different climate challenges. How do you ensure the community is inclusive, and how do you make sure you resonate with women from diverse backgrounds? Did you face any specific challenges when building and sustaining the community?

Natalie Sifuma: I would say a lot of our journey has been inspired by things I experienced while working in a climate advocacy campaign. More specifically, we prioritize inclusivity in the way we design our projects. For example, when producing our digital series featuring women in climate, we make a conscious effort to represent different geographical regions across Africa and a range of age groups. Diversity is not just about checking boxes; it's about reflecting the real fabric of the continent—women young and old, from different spaces and backgrounds.

Right now, we're also looking into adding a linguistic dimension to our communications. Africa's linguistic diversity is rich and powerful, but navigating it requires care. We're mindful of the complexities, especially those tied to neocolonial legacies and the ongoing conversation around how we Africanize language in meaningful, respectful ways.



Of course, leading a community like this comes with challenges. One of the biggest is balancing our ambition with limited resources. As a team, we're full of ideas and creative energy, but when it comes down to funding, we often have to scale back. This reflects a broader issue around access to climate finance. Our model is largely nonprofit and community-oriented, which doesn't usually fit within traditional funding frameworks. I hope that sharing this helps shift the system because climate education and collaborative, inclusive engagement are just as critical to sustainable development as infrastructure or policy.

Su Sakarya: You're very right. In all areas of social impact and climate impact, we see repercussions of this funding drying up globally, especially from US and European agencies. It hinders all our conversations. At Sumi Communications, we help partners with funding—we write proposals and are involved in global funding schemes. We also observe that it's harder to make people believe in the value of what you're doing, especially when it's more abstract than logistical or infrastructural.

I also believe in the power of storytelling, which leads me to the next question. You've worked extensively in narrative projects like Paukwa Stories. How do you see storytelling influencing climate action, and why is it essential in your context? Do storytelling skills have any specific impact or benefits in your work?

Natalie Sifuma: I light up every time I'm reminded of my days at Paukwa Stories. Storytelling is deeply rooted in African culture. It predates formal education and has always been a vessel for preserving history, sharing wisdom, and instilling values across generations.

While working at Paukwa, these were some of the things that informed our story projects, which ranged in media and even included a Kenyan alphabet inspired by African realities to instill values in children. In climate action, storytelling is powerful—not just to inform, but to connect. It helps people feel and understand what's at stake.

In Sisters in Climate, we use storytelling to invite curiosity and inform agency, encouraging individuals to see themselves as stewards—within their families, communities, workplaces, or even as future policymakers. Through stories, people can reimagine what's possible. Especially for Africa, storytelling allows us to shape our own climate narratives from a place of vision, resilience, and hope.

Umay Özde Öztürk: That makes it even more impactful than just writing for urgency. You write grant proposals and project outlines, but people also need to hear stories about real people facing challenges from climate change. That's really powerful.

I want to take a different angle for my next question. For women looking to pivot into climate work without a traditional green background, what advice would you give? How can they leverage existing skills meaningfully if they feel not confident or lack formal education in the field?

Natalie Sifuma: I love this question. Sisters in Climate recently launched a quarterly Zoom-based series called *Work in Climate*, spotlighting African women working in different areas of climate, often without traditional green backgrounds.

In these sessions, we allow women to share their personal journeys into climate work, showing how diverse and nonlinear these paths can be. We held the first session in May 2025 and will be back with another in August.

The starting point is recognition: understanding that you already have a role in climate, whether by choice or simply by being part of the ecosystem. One speaker in *Work in Climate* said, “As long as you eat, you have a role to play in climate.”

The next step is curiosity: exploring how your academic background or personal interests might address gaps in the climate space. This could be creating content from credible sources, joining conversations, or speaking with people already in the field. For me, my journey into climate came from recognition and curiosity. Now, I contribute by sharing climate content through a communicator’s lens, breaking down complex topics and helping people see where they might fit in.

Su Sakarya: It’s inspiring to hear people actively making a difference. One question we often ask guests is about motivation. This work requires planning, structuring, and emotional labor. You feel urgency and sometimes gloom. Is there anything happening right now—climate or otherwise—that drives your motivation, either positively or even with anger, that fuels your work?

Natalie Sifuma: That’s a very interesting question. For Sisters in Climate, one thing that floats around my mind is finding climate funders who believe in our work and are ready to back it with unrestricted grants. Our work isn’t just creating community spaces; we also work directly with waste pickers on projects. These are people on the frontlines of pollution’s effects. Funding flexibility is crucial for community-led work, especially when it’s adaptive, people-centered, and rooted in lived realities.

Another thing on my mind is sustainable travel in Africa’s development. For a Pan-African community like ours to thrive, we need to bring people together physically. Creating spaces for connection, learning, and solidarity is important, but travel is costly and carbon-intensive. Navigating that tension keeps me reflecting deeply. While I don’t have all the answers, these challenges fuel me to keep searching for solutions.

Su Sakarya: It's nice to see different types of motivation in these conversations. Everyone finds their drive differently. Social and climate impact work may be rewarding in abstract ways, and introspection is often needed to find your motivation. Your problem-solving mindset—seeing challenges as things you can address—is really interesting and inspiring.

Su Sakarya: You mentioned the *Work in Climate* program launched in May. What's next for Sisters in Climate? Any new programs, collaborations, and how can our listeners stay connected?

Natalie Sifuma: We have exciting partnerships in the pipeline. As of June, we finalized a partnership with the African Climate Alliance for two upcoming events in two different cities in Kenya for World Environment Day.

We're also deepening our collaboration with Riara University, one of the top law universities in Kenya. We hope this grows into a technical partnership supporting new educational projects for African youth.

Listeners can stay connected through our Linktree: linktr.ee/sistersinclimate. It's our central hub with links to our website, social media, newsletter, and a special link for joining our WhatsApp community. If you'd like to support us, even with \$5 or \$50, you can reach us at hello@sistersinclimate.org. Every bit helps power our work.

Umay Özde Öztürk: That's amazing, Natalie. Thank you for being here today. It's really inspiring to hear about your journey and dedication to empowering women and creating climate conversations in Africa. We hope to see Sisters in Climate everywhere in the future. We'll leave the links for your LinkedIn and Linktree on the platforms this episode airs. Thank you so much.

Natalie Sifuma: Thank you for having me.