

THE VALUE OF URBAN NATURAL ASSETS WHEN PLANNING FOR RESILIENT AFRICAN CITIES: CONSIDERATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Profiling key lessons learnt through ICLEI's Urban Natural Assets for Africa (UNA) programme



URBAN NATURAL ASSETS FOR AFRICA HANDBOOK SERIES

HANDBOOK 5

The value of working with informality:
Improving collaboration at informal markets in Malawi



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS HANDBOOK

- The informal sector is a key part of the urban framework of many African cities, and it contributes significantly to economic development and job creation. Shifts in the way formal structures think about and interact with this sector are, therefore, required.
- Engagement and collaboration between city councils and those operating in informal systems is essential in ensuring that urbanisation unfolds in a sustainable way and natural assets are protected.
- Through the implementation of an UNA Rivers restoration project at the informal riverside markets in Lilongwe, it became clear that the existence of fairly formal governance structures within the informal sector makes collaboration between cities and communities not just possible, but easier than expected. By tapping into “official” entry points within informal structures, we’ve found that we can build important alliances and foster change faster.

WHO SHOULD CONSULT THIS HANDBOOK?



Organisations working on sustainability and development issues in Africa



City officials (planning, environment, engineers, developers and related disciplines)



City officials (economists, finance and procurement departments)



Academic researchers (and related organisations)

The relevance and significance of this handbook series

The ICLEI Cities Biodiversity Center (CBC), a global centre hosted by ICLEI Africa, developed this handbook series to showcase key considerations for integrating urban natural assets into city planning in sub-Saharan Africa. All lessons profiled were gathered through the implementation of the UNA programme.

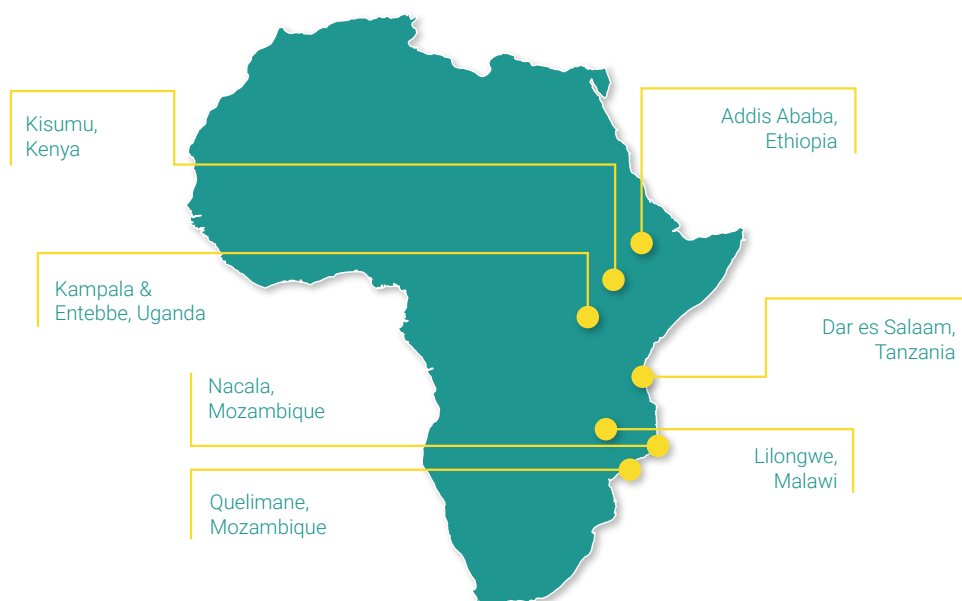
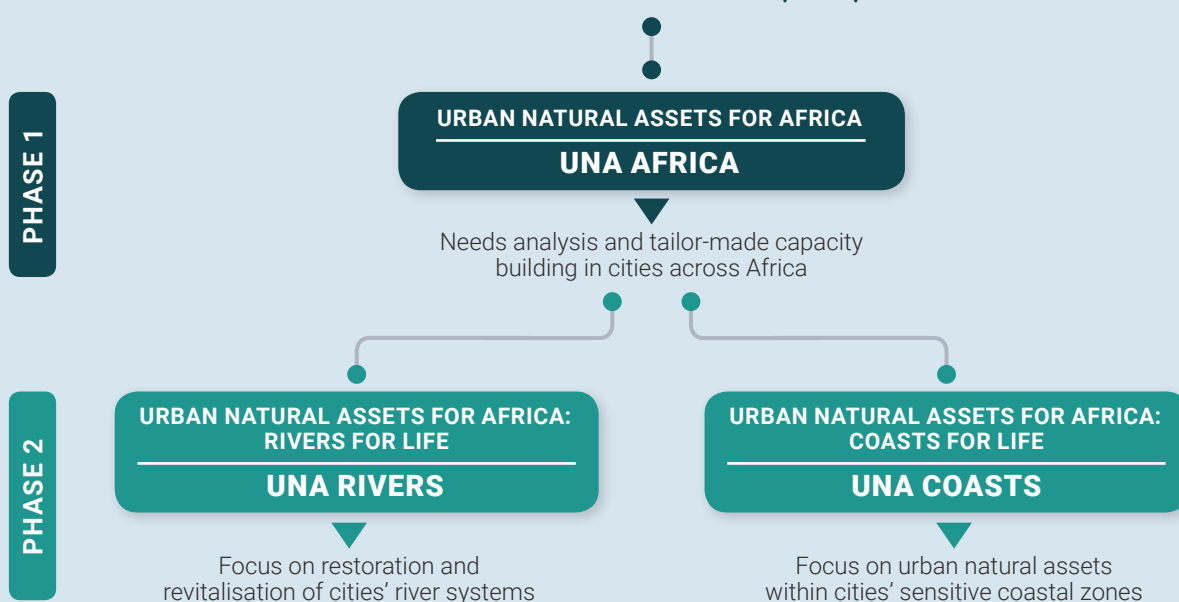
By sharing approaches that have been successfully tailored to African cities, these handbooks seek to support the development of future urban sustainability projects that are both more effective and better suited to the local context. Learnings also shed light on how ICLEI Africa is working with local authorities to ensure alignment with international policies and agendas (like the Paris Agreement). It’s imperative that we share Africa’s insights and lessons now so these can feed into discussions as the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) work on developing a new post-2020 global biodiversity strategy.

THE UNA PROGRAMME AND FLAGSHIP PROJECTS



Initiated in 2014, the UNA programme is designed to assist local governments in Africa build climate resilience through addressing the daily challenges they experience around protecting and revitalising their urban natural assets. To date, three flagship projects have been developed under the UNA umbrella. All broadly aim to integrate nature-based solutions into land-use planning for increased climate resilience and enhanced human well-being.

URBAN NATURAL ASSETS FOR AFRICA (UNA) PROGRAMME



All projects are funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) through SwedBio at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University.



THE VALUE OF WORKING WITH INFORMALITY:

IMPROVING COLLABORATION AT INFORMAL MARKETS IN MALAWI



THE INFORMALITY REALITY

Informality is an integral part of most African cities¹. Due to significant poverty and high rates of urbanisation, there tends to be rapid expansion of both the informal economy and informal settlements in many urban centres on the continent. As a result, unplanned areas often make up a large portion of cities' urban landscapes.

While technically 'illegal', the reality is that the informal sector doesn't just play a big part in urban development in Africa; it also plays an important part. In sub-Saharan countries, this sector contributes to between 50% and 70% of total employment and to 72% of non-agricultural employment². Contrary to popular belief, many large informal companies exist and provide work opportunities for thousands of people². Informality also tends to breed much-needed innovation.

In summary, while informal development in African centres may not be authorised, it is a) a reality that can't be ignored, and b) of potential value to cities.

CURRENT RELATIONS, PERCEPTIONS AND CHALLENGES

The relationship between the formal and informal sectors, and between municipal authorities and those operating in informal systems, is complex. There is cooperation and mutual dependence – the formal sector actually relies quite heavily on the informal sector for the distribution of goods³ – but there's also a fair amount of tension.

Through ICLEI Africa's work on UNA Rivers pilot projects, it has become clear that some city council members are somewhat hesitant to operate in areas of informality. Their discomfort is

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understandable: municipal officials and planners work to detailed land-use maps (see Handbook 2) and elaborate national planning laws that do not account for informality – informal development directly competes with and disrupts these formalised plans and challenges regulations. Due to capacity issues, city officials already struggle to deliver services to planned parts of the city, so it is a major challenge to now extend service delivery to “unplanned” areas too. As a result, informal settlements aren’t always fully accepted as official parts of the city.

The problem is, this sort of thinking not only limits informal settlements’ access to services and infrastructure⁴, but also means that development is not managed or structured in ways that are supportive of building resilience. Cities continue to grow at a rapid rate, but in a manner that greatly threatens nature.

What’s more, as informality fosters innovation, informal areas are often the source of answers to key problems – if city officials don’t collaborate with informal sector representatives, they might never discover new solutions that can be harnessed for the betterment of the city as a whole.

THE WAY FORWARD: ENGAGEMENT AND COLLABORATION

If urbanisation is to unfold in a sustainable way, there needs to be a change in the way authorities think about and respond to informality in African cities⁵. Legitimate or not, the informal sector plays an important role in a city’s economy, and therefore ideally needs to be incorporated into city plans and conservation efforts. In essence, it’s important to start seeing informality as part of the solution, not as part of the problem.

The key to achieving change lies in building strong working relationships between city councils and those operating in informal systems (see Handbooks 6 and 7). For improved collaboration between sectors, we at ICLEI Africa have learnt that (at least) two things are needed:

- **A mind-set shift:** The UNA Rivers project team found that a change in perception is necessary to foster better engagement between sectors. The team is constantly challenging decision-makers to see areas of informality as “unserved” rather than as “unplanned”. Using this new understanding of informality as a foundation, city councils can then work with community members to service settlements using nature-based solutions and other innovative approaches, like urban tinkering (see Handbooks 2 and 3).
- **Clear processes for engagement:** Uncertainty about *how* to engage with key players in the informal system can also be a major barrier to collaboration. A significant insight gathered by the UNA Rivers team is that the presence of (unexpectedly) formal governance structures within the informal sector actually make it fairly easy for city councils to work with communities (see Case Study 5 below). By tapping into the “official” entry points that exist within informal structures, it’s possible to build important alliances and foster change faster.

CASE STUDY

FROM UNA RIVERS:

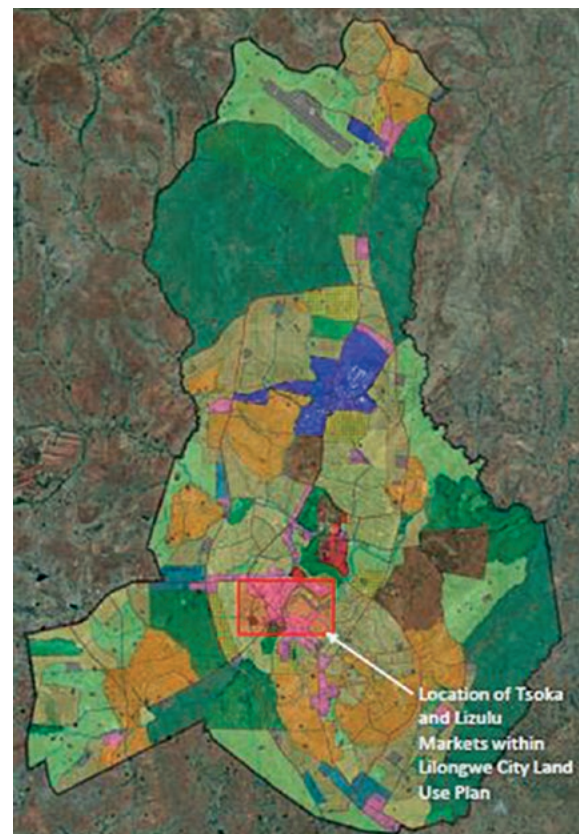
IMPROVING COLLABORATION AT INFORMAL MARKETS IN MALAWI



The Lilongwe River, which runs through Malawi's Lilongwe city, is an important urban natural asset and a primary source of water for residents. Unfortunately, over time, pollution levels within the river have risen dramatically, which both poses a health risk to citizens and threatens the natural environment. Various factors have led to contamination of the river, including dumping of waste and encroachment onto the river buffer zone. Activities at Tsoka and Lizulu, two informal markets situated on the banks of the river, have been identified as particularly significant sources of pollution.

Both markets are located in areas that were demarcated on land-use maps to be developed into urban green parks. As a result, when the markets were first set up, they were a point of tension between city officials and the community. Over time, however, it has been recognised that the markets play an important role as integrated communal spaces and platforms for livelihood creation and economic development.

When the UNA Rivers team was searching for a suitable site for a pilot river restoration project (see Case Study in Handbook 3), the Tsoka market was, for reasons mentioned above, identified as an obvious choice. It was recognised that in order for the project to be a success, municipal officials needed to work alongside representatives from the informal



Location of the informal markets within the Lilongwe City Land Use Plan



Birds-eye view of the Tsoka and Lizulu market site (satellite image from 2015)

markets. As a result, during the development stage of the pilot, multiple meetings were held at the site to bring together the project team, city officials and informal traders. Through these engagements, it became clear that a fairly formal and well-organised governance structure exists within the informal market system. Each category of produce has its own leader – there's a head of tomatoes and a head of potatoes, for instance.

Such an official arrangement, with well-defined power structures, made it easier for municipal officials to work with informal sector representatives on the project. The markets may have developed informally, but the communication and engagement process with market actors was, in fact, very formal, with clear entry points and procedures to be followed.

Our most significant discoveries were that a) it is easier than expected to collaborate with the informal sector, and b) when relationships are formed between city councils and those operating in informal systems, change is possible. Through the pilot project and dialogue with community members, a number of opportunities for urban greening (linked to livelihood creation) were identified and various insights on how to further ensure that development unfolds sustainably were gathered.





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ABOUT ICLEI AND THE CITIES BIODIVERSITY CENTER



ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability

ICLEI is a global network of more than 1,750 local and regional governments committed to sustainable urban development. Active in 100+ countries, ICLEI influences sustainability policy and drives local action for low emission, nature-based, equitable, resilient and circular development. ICLEI's members and team of experts work together through peer exchange, partnerships and capacity building to create systematic change for urban sustainability. ICLEI Africa serves the organisation's African members, working with cities and regions in more than 25 countries across the continent.

ICLEI's Cities Biodiversity Center (CBC)

ICLEI's Cities Biodiversity Center (CBC), which is located in Cape Town, South Africa, recognises the crucial role that cities and subnational governments play in the pursuit of a sustainable future, through efficiently integrating urban development and biodiversity management at the local level.

Through its programmes, ICLEI CBC seeks local solutions to the complex issues surrounding natural capital and the degradation of ecosystem services in a rapidly urbanising world. ICLEI CBC offers cities across the globe a broad portfolio of supportive services through a dedicated team of passionate, skilled and dynamic biodiversity and urban development experts.

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