IMPACT STORY

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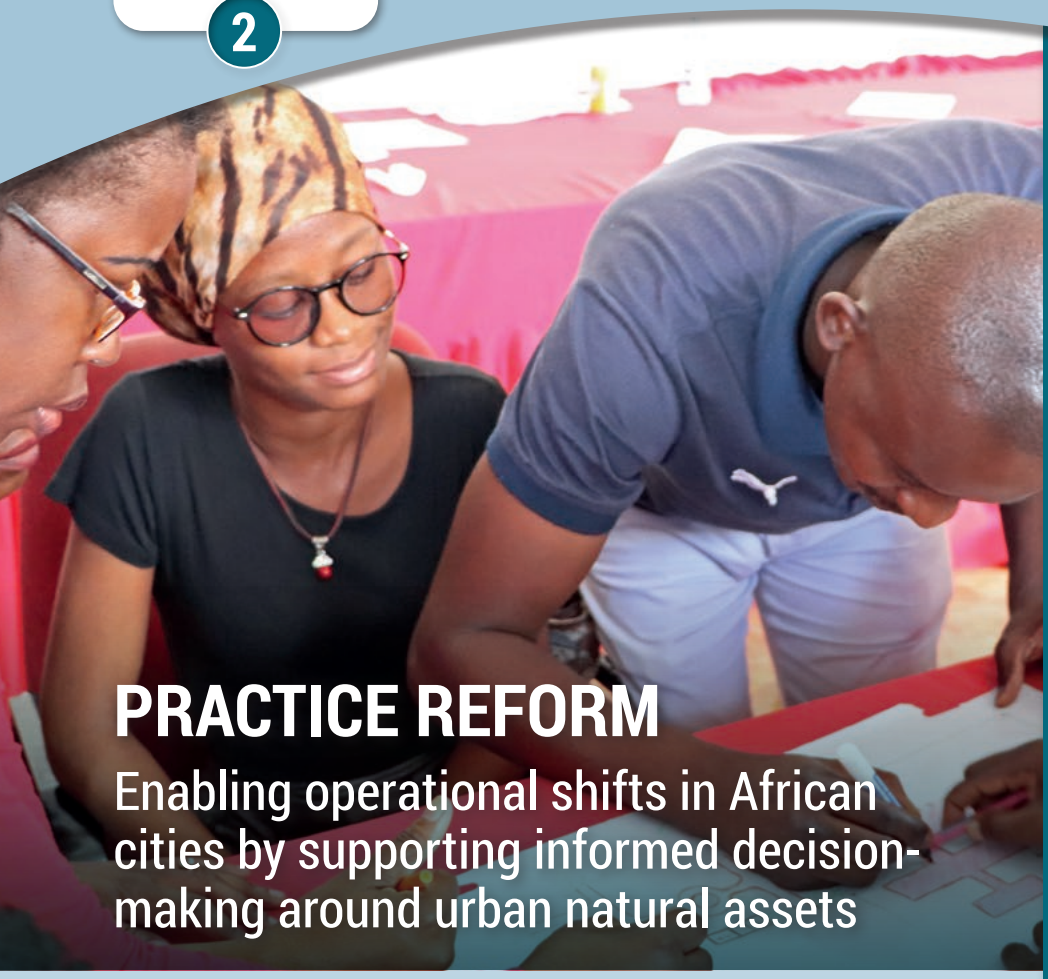


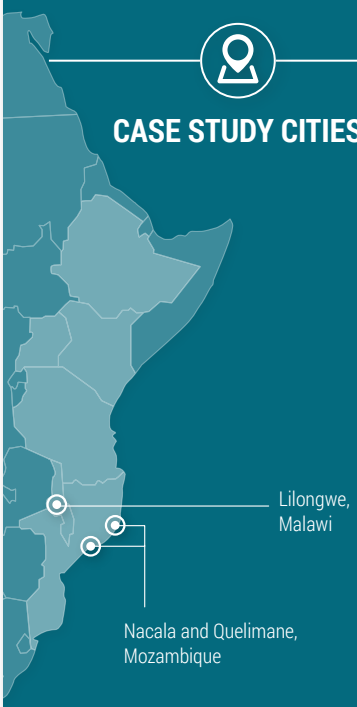
PRACTICE REFORM

Enabling operational shifts in African cities by supporting informed decision-making around urban natural assets

KEY IMPACT

By co-developing concrete tools and resources with city actors, the UNA programme laid the foundation for fundamental shifts in the way decisions are made to better integrate nature and climate considerations in daily urban practice.

CASE STUDY CITIES



Setting the scene

THE SITUATION PRIOR TO UNA INTERVENTIONS

When the UNA programme first started engaging with city stakeholders in Malawi and Mozambique, local officials identified a pressing need for supportive resources they could draw on to make more informed decisions around nature-based resilience in their everyday practice.

Even where policies do incorporate nature and climate change considerations, actors noted that they lacked the concrete, data-driven guidance and knowledge they needed to execute plans and strategies on the ground – to turn intentions into strategic action. Officials often didn't have access to baseline information about which urban natural assets (e.g., forests, wetlands, rivers etc.) are present in their city, and what critical ecosystem services they provide.

ICLEI Local Governments for Sustainability
CBC Cities Biodiversity Center
SwedBio A programme at Stockholm Resilience Centre
Stockholm Resilience Centre Sustainability Science for Biosphere Stewardship
Stockholm University

AIM

To meet city actors' identified operational needs by providing information and resources that support informed decision-making and ensure nature and climate concerns are properly embedded in everyday planning practice.

> THE MAPS ARE CRUCIAL SOURCES OF INFORMATION. IF WE COME UP WITH ANY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS ALONG OUR RIVERS, THEN THE MAPS ARE A PRIORITY BECAUSE THEY HELP STAKEHOLDERS TO SEE WHERE TO IMPLEMENT THEIR PROJECTS ACROSS ALL LEVELS WITHIN THE CITY. THEY ARE THE FIRST RESOURCE WE CAN DEPEND ON WHEN WE PRODUCE OUR STRATEGIC PLANS.

WISEMAN KAMWIYO:
Urban Development Officer, Ministry of Land, Housing and Urban Development, Malawi

There were few formal processes for planners to integrate nature into their daily planning operations. Similarly, there weren't many well-established actionable procedures for monitoring important natural resources, which makes it challenging for cities to effectively enforce relevant bylaws and ensure compliance – a major barrier to biodiversity protection.

Programme intervention

THE COURSE OF ACTION

LILONGWE, MALAWI

Guided by Lilongwe's unique needs and priorities, an UNA-appointed consultant gathered data on land-use change, habitat fragmentation, key species, temperature distribution and water quality in the city. A diverse range of city stakeholders – from environmentalists and planners to finance, health and building control officers – then reviewed this information and collaborated closely to co-produce detailed prioritisation maps.

These maps showcase the location of important urban natural assets in Lilongwe and assign priority statuses to each, demarcating areas of Priority UNA Value (critical asset; no development to take place here), High UNA Value, Medium UNA Value and Low UNA Value (preferred sites for future development). Statuses were allocated to assets based on how negatively the city (and community) would be affected if the asset were lost, and how much more vulnerable the urban landscape would be to the impacts of climate change (temperature rises etc.). In this way, we made a direct link between nature and urban resilience.

Considering that the enforcement of bylaws is a persistent challenge in these cities, we then used the maps as a foundation to develop easy-to-action monitoring and enforcement plans that environmental teams could apply daily to guide and target their regulatory activities. The aim was to overcome a major obstacle to conservation by making enforcement more manageable in practice.

NACALA AND QUELIMANE, MOZAMBIQUE

In the port city of Nacala, the UNA team brought together a number of different city actors, including representatives from the local community, to collectively develop a Coastal Natural Asset Management Plan (CNAMP) that's meant to serve as a roadmap for the sustainable management of the municipality's coastal zone. The plan highlights key coastal natural assets found within Nacala, the benefits they provide, and their main threats, while also offering practical, actionable guidance to support the protection, conservation and rehabilitation of these assets. It not only outlines strategic visions and targets, but also specific goals, actions, interventions, responsible parties and recommendations for financing and implementation.

Similarly, in Quelimane, we are supporting officials in developing a concrete decision-making framework (DMF) that they can rely on to make better judgements around nature to improve future resilience – a need identified by city stakeholders themselves.

Evidence of change

KEY OUTCOMES

LILONGWE, MALAWI

Thanks to the prioritisation maps, officials across city council departments now don't just know what their key natural assets are, but also understand how their loss would compromise urban resilience. We cannot underestimate the power of this knowledge to reshape action and drive practice change.

The maps were intended to serve as concrete decision-making tools, and indeed, city planners have acknowledged that they view them as valuable resources that they can use to guide future construction and determine where development can safely take place.

Similarly, the maps offer tangible direction for environmental enforcement teams so that they know where to focus their efforts and have a practical approach they can follow to monitor priority zones.

While we expected these tools to assist the practice of environmentalists, we couldn't have predicted the impact they would have on the everyday work of Lilongwe planners. The latter have noted that the maps – and their user-friendly format – add huge potential value as they make it easier than ever before to put nature front and centre, and use it as a guiding principle around which future decisions are made.

Finally, the development of the maps also strengthened recognition that more funds need to be channelled into the management of urban natural capital. Officials now have solid evidence to make a stronger case for finance needed to conserve and revitalise key areas – indeed, Lilongwe City Council has since allocated budget toward protecting the city's priority river systems and plans to do so annually.

NACALA AND QUELIMANE, MOZAMBIQUE

As the Nacala CNAMP has only recently been finalised, and the Quelimane DMF is currently being developed, the major impacts of these resources are still to be seen.

Stakeholders in both cities recognise that, thanks to these tools, they will, for the first time, have material that supports and informs daily practice around nature by providing clarity, focus and direction. The data contained in these guidelines and the specificity of the goals and outputs make it easier than ever to come to sound decisions and take action. City actors now know where they want to be in terms of coastal natural asset management and, even more importantly, how to get there.

While the above is an intended impact, a key unanticipated outcome in both Mozambique and Lilongwe has been how these guidelines and frameworks have changed the way different stakeholders and departments work together in practice. As these resources were co-developed by multiple parties, and as they stipulate integrated action, they have laid the conditions for planners, environmentalists, finance officials and others to engage with each other in entirely new ways around nature-related matters. This should lead to more coordinated, cohesive and impactful operations.

> "PREVIOUSLY WE USED TO LEAVE ISSUES OF THE ENVIRONMENT TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL AFFAIRS DEPARTMENT. BUT NOW A PLATFORM HAS BEEN CREATED IN MALAWI, SPECIFICALLY IN THE CITY OF LILONGWE, WHEREBY WE ARE ABLE TO SERIOUSLY DISCUSS ISSUES OF THE ENVIRONMENT." ... "SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE UNA PROJECT, THERE'S BEEN AN INCREASED COORDINATION OF STAKEHOLDERS IN AS FAR AS PROTECTING BIODIVERSITY AND THE ENVIRONMENT."
>
> GIFT KASAMIRA:
> *Head: City Development Strategy Unit, Lilongwe City Council, Malawi*

LONG-TERM IMPACTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

A significant impact of the UNA interventions in these cities has been that officials and practitioners now see nature, and its relationship with climate resilience, differently. Natural buffer zones have come to be regarded as assets to local governments that need to be sustainably managed and restored, so as to guard against the many threats that come with climate change. It makes sense that such shifts in perspective should colour and shape all planning decisions and practices in the future.

The tools developed have legitimised the option of using nature-based solutions in place of grey infrastructure to address multiple different urban challenges, including flooding and erosion control. This could have far-reaching implications for the way African cities are designed and developed.

By taking a pioneering approach to developing nature-based resources, and positioning natural capital more broadly as being absolutely essential for coping with various shocks (particularly climate change), the UNA team helped to bring together biodiversity and urban resilience. Partner cities are

now, therefore, well positioned to take integrated actions that underpin both the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) and the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP) simultaneously.

In this way, we've also ultimately helped the cities to localise a range of international frameworks (such as the Aichi Biodiversity Targets). That is, the maps and other resources are clear examples of how these global standards and agendas can be filtered down and interpreted through tangible means so that they fit the local context.

Most importantly, cities now have relevant, real-time information, packaged in easy-to-reference formats, that lays the foundation for long-term changes in the way planning is conducted, development tenders are evaluated, relevant bylaws are enforced, budgets are allocated, departments are connected and development is regulated (in the context of extensive informality and urban sprawl).

As all relevant stakeholders, across many different departments, were actively involved in developing the tools and frameworks from the very start of the process, they now fully understand the information contained within them, and we can trust that they know how to interpret and apply the material in their everyday work (this may not have been the case if resources were simply handed over to actors).

If the tools are applied as intended, nature- and climate-based considerations should be integrated into every municipal decision and project in Lilongwe, Nacala and Quelimane going forward. So, ultimately, we should see existing natural assets being better protected, conserved, managed and used, as well as a drive to bring nature back into cities where it's been lost or degraded. In the long term, the result will ideally be stronger, healthier urban landscapes that are more resilient to the changes that tomorrow will inevitably bring.

> ONE OF THE BIGGEST AND MOST SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IS THE WAY WE PERCEIVE THE URBAN NATURAL ASSETS WE HAVE. BEFORE, MOST PEOPLE LOOKED AT THESE ASSETS AS SOMETHING THAT HAS ALWAYS BEEN THERE, AND MAYBE WILL ALWAYS BE THERE. BUT NOW THERE IS A GROWING CONSCIOUSNESS OF OUR NATURAL ASSETS AND THE NEED TO CONSERVE THEM.
>
> **JOHN CHOME:** *CEO, Lilongwe City Council, Malawi*

KEY LEARNINGS

- Practice reform isn't as simple as providing supportive tools and informational assets to guide decision-making. These resources are the starting point, but it's important to also create an environment that enables practitioners to actively take up these tools and apply them.
- To create this enabling environment, it's key to include all those who'll be implementing new practices in the development of tools from the very beginning. This encourages ownership and adoption, and ensures that practitioners can easily interpret the information contained within the guidelines and apply it in practice.
- The information and tools developed should always be based on needs identified by city stakeholders themselves.
- It's not sufficient to equip a city's environmental department with data and tools. Practice reform needs to target all departments. As planners and financial officers play a critical role in city decision-making, it's essential that they are always in the room too.
- No single actor, sector or governance level can effect real change alone; operational and cultural shifts rely on collective agency.
- The basics should never be neglected. When supporting practice reform, time must be built in for fundamental capacity building around urban natural assets, the value they provide and the conditions threatening them in a particular environment.

About the UNA Programme

Implemented by ICLEI's Cities Biodiversity Center, the UNA programme is designed to support local governments in Africa in addressing the daily challenges they experience around protecting and revitalising their urban natural assets. It specifically seeks to improve human well-being and build climate resilience through integrating nature-based solutions into land-use planning.

To date, the UNA programme supports three flagship projects; **Urban Natural Assets for Africa (UNA Africa)**, **Urban Natural Assets: Rivers for Life (UNA Rivers)** and **Urban Natural Assets: Coasts for Life (UNA Coasts)**.

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