



MAINSTREAMING IN PRACTICE

Using multi-actor engagements and co-production to effectively embed nature in urban planning

Setting the scene

THE SITUATION PRIOR TO UNA INTERVENTIONS

Through the UNA programme’s work in several African cities, it has become clear that even when nature-based considerations are included in urban plans and policies, they’re not always adequately taken into account in decision-making. It would seem that there are several barriers – often related to capacity and the way different sectors and governance levels engage – that prevent nature from being properly factored into land-use planning on the ground.

Based on these observations, the UNA team came to realise that mainstreaming NBS isn’t as simple as producing information and resources and then searching for “entry points” in policies and decision-making into which these can be embedded.



KEY IMPACT

By changing our approach to mainstreaming and facilitating processes that focus on knowledge co-production and relationship building, the UNA programme has established more effective ways to integrate nature-based solutions (NBS) into land-use planning and decision-making.



CASE STUDY CITIES



Entebbe and Kampala, Uganda

Lilongwe, Malawi

Over time, we found that such “entry points” often need to be *created*, and that the best way to do so was to facilitate processes that bring together a diverse range of stakeholders from different disciplines to co-produce knowledge, jointly reflect, learn, problem-solve and build relationships.

Recognising that the act of co-production is an important mainstreaming tool in itself, we saw a need to change our approach to mainstreaming so that we no longer focused just on outputs, but on the collaborative process used to produce outputs.



KAMPALA, UGANDA

At the national level in Uganda, it is understood that urban natural assets (e.g., forests, wetlands, rivers etc.) need to be factored into planning, and nature is already included in some national policies. However, at the local level, nature tends to still not be fully integrated into decision-making, in part because there is a lack of clarity with regards to which government tier is responsible for enacting which aspects of national policy requirements. As a result, as Kampala has expanded rapidly due to urbanisation, several key urban natural assets (particularly the wetlands in and around the city) have slowly been lost and degraded – this has happened despite the fact that Uganda has been progressive in terms of including nature in national policy.



LILONGWE, MALAWI

In Lilongwe, city planners and environmental officers have historically worked as separate departments, engaging on an ad hoc needs basis. As a result, each discipline hasn't had the opportunity to provide advice and guidance throughout the full course of an intervention, from the onset of work.

This historically embedded work style, coupled with limited access to nature-related resources, has often pushed town planners to make urban development decisions that don't include nature-based considerations. Over time, therefore, with rapid urban growth and encroachment onto green spaces, nature across the city has gradually come under threat and valuable pockets of biodiversity have been lost.

Programme intervention

THE COURSE OF ACTION

To go beyond the traditional approach to mainstreaming, the UNA team focused on:

- Facilitating **learning and capacity building** among decision-makers about *why* nature should be mainstreamed into policies and plans.
- Designing engagements that brought together different government tiers and municipal departments to **collectively reflect** on needs and challenges, and to **co-develop tools and solutions**.

AIM



To enable transdisciplinary collaboration and the co-production of knowledge in order to advance “mainstreaming in practice” and unlock new opportunities for nature to be embedded in planning.

- Ensuring plenty of space for **joint learning, dialogue, knowledge co-creation, networking and connection.**
- **Building relationships** between stakeholders so they can align priorities, learn from each other, and more readily rely on each other for information and support.



KAMPALA, UGANDA; LILONGWE, MALAWI

In both case study cities, the UNA programme ran a series of engagements that connected a broad range of stakeholders with different backgrounds and mandates, including planners, environmentalists, policy-makers, and finance officers. The aim of these dialogues was to raise awareness of the value of nature in cities, create space for reflection on current obstacles and decision-making processes around natural capital, and unpack how decision-making could be approached differently.

During the discussions, it was agreed that urban natural asset hotspot maps needed to be developed to showcase the location of key natural assets in the city and assign a priority status to each asset based on its vulnerability and how much it contributes to broader city resilience. The maps were meant to serve as critical tools that planners could use to keep nature top of mind when making decisions and assessing development requests and tenders.

While we knew the maps would be valuable outputs, we also focused heavily on optimising the processes followed to produce these documents. Over a period of 18 months, different municipal departments worked together closely and systematically to co-produce a methodology for developing the maps, and to then co-create the maps themselves.

Evidence of change

KEY OUTCOMES

The natural asset hotspot maps are the tangible outcomes of these extensive engagements and co-production exercises. Since the maps have been approved by the city council, they are already being used in both cities as a core planning tool that can be drawn on to support day-to-day work and improve decision-making around nature. In this way, and largely thanks to the methodology used, the mainstreaming of nature-based considerations into daily operations and land-use planning has been achieved.

Perhaps even more important, though, are the less tangible outcomes that emerged from the process of map development: constant cross-sectoral collaboration, discussion, knowledge-sharing and debate have broken down barriers between departments, facilitated systems thinking and shifted the way officials think and engage with each other. We've seen a deepening of relationships between stakeholders, and city government officials have started working more closely interdepartmentally (particularly land-use planners and environmental officers) and sharing information more openly.



IN MY VIEW, LILONGWE CITY IS NOT THE WAY IT WAS BEFORE ... THIS PROJECT BROUGHT STAKEHOLDERS THAT ARE DOING ISSUES OF THE ENVIRONMENT TOGETHER AND WE STARTED SEEING THINGS IN A DIFFERENT WAY. WE SAID, "HOW BEST CAN WE COORDINATE SO THAT WE WORK AS A FAMILY TO ACTUALLY PROTECT URBAN BIODIVERSITY?"

GIFT KASAMIRA:

*Head, City Development Strategy Unit,
Lilongwe City Council, Malawi*

These perception changes, partnerships and lessons learnt have built capacity from within and unlocked other opportunities for the mainstreaming of NBS that extends far beyond the maps. In fact, both cities have gone on to invest in additional work aimed at enhancing existing plans and further ensuring that nature is prioritised in decision-making. It's important to note that had we simply produced these maps with the help of an external consultant, and then searched for opportunities to embed them in practice, it's unlikely we would have seen the same significant structural shifts – born from the process – and mainstreaming might not have occurred to the same extent.



KAMPALA, UGANDA

Thanks to the map development process in Kampala, there's an improved flow of information within the city council and evidence of mutual trust developing between tiers of government. It's also evident that there's a clearer understanding between national and local officials with regards to who should be taking responsibility for which aspect of environmental management and planning.

The maps have also effectively been taken up and incorporated into decision-making to ultimately change the way nature and biodiversity are addressed in planning. City officials have now used them to inform the development of a series of recommendations on how to manage urban natural assets. Both the maps and the subsequent recommendations are currently being incorporated into the Resilience Strategy of Kampala, which is used to guide city planning as well as water management and climate change responses – a shining example of mainstreaming in practice.



LILONGWE, MALAWI

Following the collaborative exercises in Lilongwe, several key decision-makers – namely, the Head of City Development, the Assistant Director of Land-Use Planning and the Head of Environmental Recreation and Parks – have started working together more closely, and in doing so, have become important champions for nature in city planning.

Officials have also used the maps as guidelines to develop an additional enforcement report, which supports environmental enforcement teams so that they're better equipped to monitor priority areas, regulate urban development and ensure compliance with environmental bylaws. Both outputs are in the process of being included in the Lilongwe Monitoring and Enforcement Plan.

In addition, local government has since allocated budget toward river restoration in the city, and the CEO of Lilongwe City Council, Mr. John Chome, specifically asked for the development of an ecological corridor restoration plan. More specifically, he has indicated that he'd like to embark on a co-production process to rehabilitate the ecological corridor along one of the rivers in Lilongwe as a legacy project before the end of his term.

Finally, the city council is currently updating the Strategic Action Plan (2020–2025) for the city and has chosen to include nature-based principles and activities from UNA pilot projects in Lilongwe.

Above all else, these developments demonstrate the significant impact that the map development journey and other UNA co-production exercises have had on how the council now thinks about city design and what is now considered a priority – deserving of budget and focus – when planning future development.

LONG-TERM IMPACTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Through the co-creation process used to develop the natural asset hotspot maps, project cities haven't only produced their own tools to inform decision-making around nature, and embraced the **uptake** of these tools; they have also **bridged divides, shifted mind-sets, and deepened interdepartmental relationships**.

This has led to **more coordinated work between departments and governance levels** that previously operated separately, and has set up enabling conditions for the **opening of new windows** – or “entry points” – for nature considerations to be properly integrated into decision-making. As such entry points emerged organically, from deep within the structure of city councils, they will hopefully **result in significant, lasting change**.

By working in a more synchronised, cohesive manner, officials can access nature-related information faster, think and plan **holistically**, accelerate action and **align activities** to collectively protect and restore biodiversity.

If nature is effectively mainstreamed on this scale, we can expect to **prevent further degradation of natural ecosystems** and **better preserve existing natural assets** in the long term. It also opens the door for **nature to be brought back into cities**, which will enhance climate resilience and offer multiple benefits to residents in the form of livelihood generation, new economic opportunities, and improved physical and mental well-being.

At an international level, the UNA programme's approach to mainstreaming has aligned with and supported the current school of thought on best practice. Co-production and the exchange of knowledge among multiple stakeholders – coupled with the use of land-use and territorial/spatial planning as an entry point for mainstreaming biodiversity – have been common practice in mainstreaming initiatives and projects globally for more than a decade. It's now recognised that co-production forms an integral part of mainstreaming practice and is central to ensuring both legitimacy and uptake.

Importantly, both the notions of co-production and stakeholder engagement, and the use of land-use planning as tools for effective mainstreaming at the local level, are embedded in the *Long-term Approach to Mainstreaming Biodiversity*, which is

LILONGWE CITY IS VERY RICH IN NATURAL RESOURCES AND WE HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO RETAIN SOME OF THEM. WE NEED TO TAKE WHAT WE LEARNT FROM THE UNA RIVERS PROJECT AND PLAN THE RIVER CORRIDOR TO HAVE IT BETTER PROTECTED, BETTER USED AND MORE ACCESSIBLE.

JOHN CHOME: *CEO, Lilongwe City Council, Malawi*



being developed for adoption at the Convention on Biological Diversity's (CBD) fifteenth meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP 15).



KEY LEARNINGS

- For mainstreaming to be effective, it needs to go beyond simply developing a plan or tool and presenting it to city councils for approval. Due to the nuanced complexities surrounding decision-making in African cities, as well as financial and political influences, this isn't enough to facilitate change on the ground.
- What's required instead is a fundamental shift in the way planning and decision-making is carried out in cities – one that puts more emphasis on ongoing learning, knowledge co-production, reflection and relationship building.
- Effective mainstreaming relies on developing enabled people, and building enabling processes and systems that allow for information to be incorporated into city structures – a process that takes many years of ongoing work.
- As the above is a lengthy process, projects need to build in sufficient time to invest in the shifts required to embed knowledge in planning culture.
- “Softer”, less tangible processes – such as relationship building, networking, capacity building, creating ownership through co-production, and breaking down power dynamics – need to be considered and included as key parts of mainstreaming interventions.

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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