



KEY IMPACT

Through dialogic engagements and exercises, the UNA programme developed the capacity of over 2 000 African stakeholders to make the case for nature to be prioritised in urban planning, decision-making and financial allocations.

CAPACITY BUILDING

Empowering stakeholders to become champions for nature in 8 African cities

Setting the scene

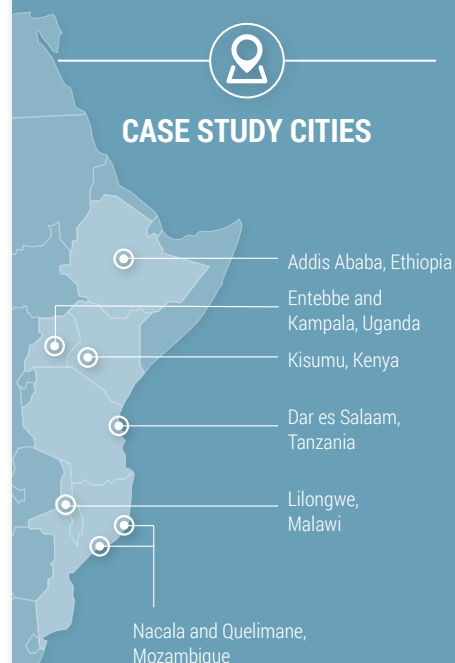
THE SITUATION PRIOR TO UNA INTERVENTIONS

During extensive needs assessments in UNA partner cities, municipal officials indicated that they didn't have all the knowledge, skills and understandings necessary to make a strong case – to their own departments, other sectors and national government – for the inclusion of nature in planning processes and decision-making.

The nature and climate change fields are fairly complex, and we found that city officials required support to better understand not only key terminology and processes, but also *how* nature-based solutions (NBS) can function as viable, effective alternatives when it comes to building climate-resilient cities, improving service delivery and reducing vulnerabilities to disaster.



CASE STUDY CITIES





WHAT WE HAVE LEARNT FROM BEING PART OF THE UNA PROJECT ... NOWADAYS, WE KNOW THE IMPORTANCE OF MANAGING URBAN NATURAL ASSETS, ESPECIALLY IN URBANISED CITIES ... IN DAR ES SALAAM, THERE IS A NEED TO BALANCE BIODIVERSITY WITH POPULATION INFLATION.

GRACE MBENA: *Urban Planner and Coordinator for Environmental Planning and Management, Dar es Salaam City Council, Tanzania*

AIM



To create champions for nature – local actors who are empowered with the knowledge and skills to promote and defend nature-based solutions, and unlock finance for their implementation.



THE SENSITISATION AND AWARENESS ON ISSUES TO DO WITH ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY IN SENSITIVE AREAS HAS REALLY BEEN OF GREAT IMPACT TO MANY PEOPLE ... PEOPLE DIDN'T THINK ANYTHING ABOUT THEM UNTIL A PROGRAMME OF THIS NATURE STARTED.

ALLAN KWANJANA: *Director: Parks, Recreation and Environment, Lilongwe City Council, Malawi*

Needless to say, limited understanding in this area unfortunately undermines the ability of actors to adequately advocate for NBS and drive the necessary reform.

In particular, we noted that local stakeholders were especially underprepared to make the financial case for nature – to argue convincingly that NBS add economic value and are worthy of investment.

In a context that's often characterised by widespread poverty and informality, it can be tricky to convince authorities to channel budget into nature, when so many other areas require attention, and when the benefits of NBS aren't always immediately visible.

Programme intervention

THE COURSE OF ACTION

As fostering transformative agency¹ relies, in part, on developing enabled people, the UNA programme invested much time and energy into capacity-building exercises around the topics of nature, biodiversity and climate change (as well as access to finance for NBS).



CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH DIALOGIC ENGAGEMENTS IN 8 AFRICAN CITIES

Over the course of seven years, the UNA team facilitated more than 85 capacity-building events in eight partner cities, aimed at fostering actors' agency, whilst welcoming shifts in mindset and behaviour.

As traditional training workshops tend to be overdone in African cities, we chose to run dialogic engagements that prioritised experiential learning ("learning by doing"). All sessions were fundamentally interactive and inclusive, with a heavy focus on process – we built in plenty of time for learning, reflection, conversation and (most importantly) knowledge co-creation. We also used a format that disrupted power dynamics to ensure that the historically marginalised could also actively participate in the dialogue.

Every session was tailored to a specific city need and designed to support nature-related work already happening in that location. We explored topics like the significance of rivers in urban life, NBS for climate resilience, and NBS for disaster risk reduction, while incorporating innovative activities, such as *Spilling the Beans* and *Co-ordination is a Maze* (see [UNA Handbook 8](#)) to advance understandings and unpack complex concepts.



DEVELOPING PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND CONCEPT NOTES IN NACALA, QUELIMANE AND DAR ES SALAAM

Recognising that municipal officials often find it challenging to make an economic argument for NBS, the UNA team focused on equipping them with the knowledge and skills to package pilot project ideas effectively in order to unlock finance for their implementation.

With the help of external financial consultants, stakeholders in Quelimane and Nacala, Mozambique were trained in developing pre-feasibility studies, and in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania a concept document was developed that helped make the argument that ecosystem benefits can be enhanced through site greening.

While activities differed by location, the focus was on building an understanding of how to determine the financial viability of projects, calculate potential return on investment, and position NBS as “bankable” alternatives.

Evidence of change

KEY OUTCOMES



CAPACITY BUILDING THROUGH DIALOGIC ENGAGEMENTS IN 8 AFRICAN CITIES

A significant outcome of the UNA capacity-building events in partner cities is more than 2 000 enabled individuals who now have an improved understanding of the value of nature and are better equipped to make the case for it to be taken seriously in planning and policies. Stakeholders walked away from these engagements with not only new knowledge and boosted capacity around nature, but also the will and motivation to champion NBS in their daily work. That is, we saw a fundamental mindset shift – a transformation from within.

It was most encouraging to see this shift in non-environmentalists – those who don't traditionally play a central role in urban natural asset management: the urban planners, finance officers, and communication officials, for instance. Such cross-disciplinary change can only have far-reaching impacts.

In Lilongwe, for example, we witnessed a significant shift in one particular town planner, who had initially been hesitant to engage with environmental officers on collaborative activities. After some time spent interacting with environmentalists through capacity-building exercises, his views on the importance of NBS had shifted so considerably that he voluntarily defended the need to work closely with nature experts when another new town planner questioned why natural assets were being given so much emphasis.

The fact that officials like this have also stepped forward and asked the UNA team to assist them with developing concrete tools and resources they can use to turn their newfound understandings into practice (see [Impact Story 2](#)) is also evidence of their personal investment in driving change.



¹ *Agency involves both the capacity of actors and structural conditions to shape and perform social action (Scoones et al. 2019).*





SOME OF US WERE NOT FULLY EXPOSED TO THE ISSUES OF THE ENVIRONMENT, BUT THROUGH THE UNA PROJECT, WE HAVE HAD AN OPPORTUNITY TO LINK UP WITH OTHER ENVIRONMENTAL STRATEGISTS AND EXPERTS IN VARIOUS CITIES ... WE HAVE ACTUALLY LEARNED NEW THINGS RELATED TO THE ENVIRONMENT AND THESE ARE THE ISSUES THAT WE ARE NOW STREAMLINING INTO OUR DEVELOPMENT PLANS TO MAKE SURE THEY ARE IMPLEMENTED BACK HOME IN THE CITY OF LILONGWE.

GIFT KASAMIRA:
Head: City Development Strategy Unit,
Lilongwe City Council, Malawi



THE UNA PROGRAMME HAS HELPED US APPRECIATE OUR NATURAL ASSETS. BEFORE WE WERE TAKING THEM FOR GRANTED. WE DIDN'T KNOW HOW MUCH WE HAVE, BUT AFTER THIS EXERCISE, WE'RE NOW ABLE TO BETTER APPRECIATE OUR ASSETS AND QUANTIFY THEM ... IT HAS OPENED OUR EYES ... THE CITY IS ONE BIG SYSTEM, WHICH IS FED INTO BY SMALLER SYSTEMS, AND OUR NATURAL ASSETS ARE ONE OF THE SYSTEMS THAT FEEDS INTO THE BIGGER SYSTEM OF THE TOWN, SO THEY SHOULD GUIDE A LOT OF PLANNING.

SAMSON SEMAKULA: *Agricultural Officer, Entebbe Municipality, Uganda*



DEVELOPING PRE-FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND CONCEPT NOTES IN NACALA, QUELIMANE AND DAR ES SALAAM

Thanks to the finance-related capacity building in Mozambique, officials now have the tools they need to unlock finance for nature-related projects, as well as templates they can use to build pre-feasibility studies and concept documents in future.

Perhaps even more importantly, though, they also have a better understanding of the funding landscape in general – of how finance flows between government tiers, of what funders look for in proposals, of which bodies fund what, of how to present a convincing argument that a project is well worth investment.

In Nacala and Quelimane, stakeholders now have not just a pre-feasibility study for a specific pilot, but also five supporting concept notes for other ideas that they can take forward if they wish. And in Dar es Salaam, the concept document that was developed has led to further commitment from another ICLEI Africa project (INTERACT-Bio) to start implementing an on-the-ground greening project in the city (scheduled to commence as soon as possible).



THE PUBLIC HEALTH OFFICIALS MUST KNOW THE EXTENT OF OUR NATURAL ASSETS, THE ENGINEERS MUST KNOW, THE ADMINISTRATORS MUST KNOW, THE PEOPLE RUNNING SCHOOLS MUST KNOW HOW MANY NATURAL ASSETS WE HAVE. IT MUST BE CROSS-CUTTING AT THE END OF THE DAY, SUCH THAT IT IS BETTER APPRECIATED. AND WE MUST ALSO GET SOME BUDGET FOR IT SUCH THAT WE KEEP IT MOVING AND ALIVE.

SAMSON SEMAKULA: *Agricultural Officer, Entebbe Municipality, Uganda*



LONG-TERM IMPACTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

At the end of the day, it's people who drive change. By helping to develop a large community of enabled people, across countries, and across municipal departments, the UNA programme has hopefully built enough momentum to ensure that urban natural assets (e.g., forests, wetlands, rivers etc.) are given serious weight in decision-making processes in all partner cities going forward.

The presence of over 2 000 individuals who now have what they need – the insight, skills, tactics, instincts and drive – to make the case for nature, should logically lead to significant long-term impacts in the form of practice and policy reform.

By building the inherent capabilities of municipal officials, UNA has also helped to ensure that local actors can walk forward confidently on their own – become champions for nature-based resilience in their own rights – and rely less on external support.

Finally, considering budget is such a big obstacle to driving change, if officials now have the competency to make a stronger financial case for nature, this barrier will ideally start to break down. We should hopefully start to see more funds flowing into NBS, more strategic economic decisions being made around natural assets, and more African cities being developed with the principles of nature-based resilience in mind.



ENACTING GLOBAL CALLS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

Through capacity-building initiatives, the UNA programme has helped partner cities to take action that aligns with the guidance and directions provided by several international bodies, treaties and agendas in the biodiversity and climate change space.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development prioritises capacity building as a critical way to support the implementation of all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Paris Agreement promotes capacity building that is based on recipient countries' needs (Article 11) and calls for countries to take appropriate measures to advance climate change education, training and public awareness (Article 12). Similarly, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) has positioned capacity building as an important instrument for achieving biodiversity conservation.

While these international calls for capacity building are generally aimed at national government, the UNA programme has enacted them at the local level to ensure that global priorities are also given weight on the ground in cities.

The team has even developed a range of resources that capture our learnings around urban natural asset management ([the UNA Handbook Series](#)), and the CBD has since requested that ICLEI Africa consider packaging these into a capacity-building programme for local governments.



KEY LEARNINGS

- Nothing can be achieved without enabled people. For this reason, capacity building should be given significant weight in interventions, despite it sometimes being viewed as a nice-to-have activity that doesn't always yield very tangible results.
- Capacity-building exercises must be guided by – and tailored to – the specific needs of a city, identified by local stakeholders. Relevance is paramount.
- Many African cities have workshop fatigue, so capacity-building engagements should break away from the traditional training format and instead embrace dialogic exchange. Sessions should be short, fun, stimulating, interactive and inclusive.
- It's not enough to develop a small handful of enabled people; a large community of empowered individuals is required to effect change.
- Alongside building knowledge and understanding, it's important to also equip stakeholders with concrete tools and resources they can use to turn insights into practice. Capacity building should also then continue throughout the development of these tools so that practitioners are well positioned to interpret and apply them.
- When investing in capacity building, attention should also be devoted to developing the *confidence* of stakeholders so that they feel empowered to apply their newfound knowledge.
- In African cities, capacity-building exercises should include training and education around how to navigate the funding landscape and unlock finance for nature-based resilience.

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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