

# SUPPORTING LOCAL ACTION

tied to international agendas through on-the-ground implementation in African cities

## Setting the scene

### THE SITUATION PRIOR TO UNA INTERVENTIONS

In many of the UNA programme cities, municipal officials regularly express interest in implementing on-the-ground nature-related interventions that deliver tangible benefits for communities, while also serving as learning opportunities. In several areas, small-scale pilot projects are being implemented, often with the assistance of external funding.

What we found after extensive engagement with cities, however, is that there aren't always clear links between these projects and key international agendas, such as the **Paris Agreement**, the **Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011–2020**, the **Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)** and the **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**.

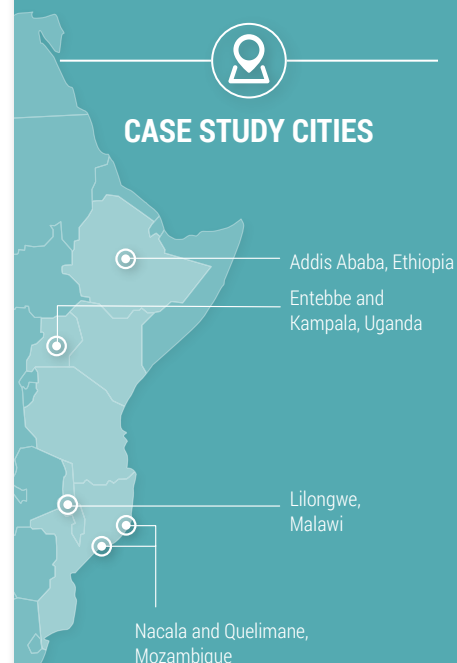


### KEY IMPACT

By focusing on multi-level governance and awareness building, the UNA programme supported cities in strategically aligning nature-based interventions with global frameworks and designing scalable projects that deliver real value to local communities.



### CASE STUDY CITIES



Similarly, local interventions aren't always designed with replicability and multi-functionality in mind, and the connection between these pilots and national government's plans, priorities and commitments isn't always made explicit.

Many different factors tend to limit coordination between national and local levels of government in the UNA cities, and this is a key part of the challenge. Local governments have an incredibly important role to play in national and international nature-, climate- and biodiversity-based action. It's therefore critical that strong partnerships exist between local, regional and national tiers – so that activities can be synchronised and effective reporting can occur.

## Programme intervention

### THE COURSE OF ACTION

Across all UNA cities, we focused heavily on connecting local and national government to co-design implementation projects and synchronise strategies. The UNA team also invested time in capacity and awareness building around the key international agreements to ensure that on-the-ground activities aligned with these agendas. More specifically, we facilitated discussions around the importance of multi-functional projects that link to several global frameworks and simultaneously safeguard biodiversity, reduce disaster risk, meet climate change objectives and enhance human well-being.

#### AIM



**To support city officials' ability to implement strategic, scalable and sustainable nature-based interventions that promote progress toward the achievement of national and international goals.**

By ensuring interventions are fairly generic and have widespread relevance, we attempted to achieve greater scalability and replicability. We also captured lessons learnt along the way so they could guide up- and out-scaling efforts, and in some cases, looked to establish interventions that would generate their own income so as to be self-sustaining.



#### ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

In partnership with the Addis Ababa City Council and UN-Habitat, the UNA programme brought together various local stakeholders and residents to redesign a rundown riverside plot (Ras Mekonnen) using an innovative mechanism: the computer game Minecraft. Regeneration plans for the site were combined and formalised, and the following interventions were implemented by UNA:

- The adjacent river was cleaned up and cleared of waste
- Indigenous riparian vegetation and tree seedlings were planted on 450m<sup>2</sup> of the site to stabilise the riverbank
- A 350m<sup>2</sup> bike lane was installed
- 100 unemployed youth and 400 local women were trained in relevant business skills, including landscaping and painting
- 10 bins were installed for public use
- 6 benches made from recycled materials were positioned around the park
- A monitoring and supervision plan was developed for the site



## NACALA, MOZAMBIQUE

Guided by engagements with local and national officials, UNA implementation work in Nacala focused on the greening and rehabilitation of the Jardim Da Messe site to create a recreational park for community members. We undertook the following:

- Landscaping was carried out and coastal vegetation was planted
- An irrigation system was established
- Paving was installed



## LILONGWE, MALAWI

Lilongwe's Local Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (LBSAP), which links to Malawi's National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan (NBSAP), was used to guide implementation in this city.

In consultation with national officials, local actors and community members, a master landscape plan was developed for the restoration of a pilot site alongside the polluted Lilongwe River. The multi-pronged plan includes components tied to DRR, biodiversity restoration, climate change adaptation, livelihood creation and human well-being. During its creation, we also assessed interventions that others were implementing in the area so that connections could be made.

With the plan in place, the UNA team then facilitated a prioritisation exercise to determine which parts of the plan should be implemented first. Stakeholders decided to focus on waste management as a top priority, which linked with river revitalisation. The following activities took place at the site that's home to the Tsoka-Lizulu informal markets:

- The river system was cleared of over 6 tonnes of organic waste
- 12+ women were trained to turn organic waste into compost, which could then be used for income generation
- A process for the improved flow of waste was mapped out and initiated
- Bins were placed at key locations
- A building was erected to provide shade and a place of safety for the composting volunteers, and for the storage of their tools and equipment
- Over 2 000 stakeholders received awareness and capacity building around waste management

Later, UNA's attention shifted to the development of a public park in Lilongwe's Area 18. We undertook landscaping to reduce the risk of flooding and planted indigenous species as part of a greening initiative.



WE FOUND OUT THAT ABOUT 72% OF OUR SOLID WASTE IS ORGANIC AND CAN EASILY BE TURNED INTO COMPOST AND MANURE, WHICH WOULD HELP A LOT OF POOR FARMERS AND EVEN PEOPLE WHO HAVE A GARDEN AT HOME – THEN YOU CAN EVEN SAVE A LIFE BY GROWING CROPS ORGANICALLY. SO IT'S REALLY GREAT AND THERE ARE SO MANY OPPORTUNITIES WITH THE WASTE THAT WE'RE THROWING AWAY. WE CAN MAKE A LOT OF THINGS FROM IT.

STEPHEN CHIUNJIRA: *Director OWI, Lilongwe, Malawi*



## ENTEBBE, UGANDA

Prior to implementing any interventions in Uganda, we hosted national-local dialogues that brought together the different governmental tiers to collectively explore ideas for on-the-ground activities that would provide significant strategic value. National government officials specifically wanted projects that could be easily scaled and replicated elsewhere in the country.

Ultimately, it was decided that Entebbe would serve as a base for a pilot project aimed at developing a social-ecological buffer zone around the Namiiro wetland to prevent further urban sprawl into this important natural asset.

Soon, though, we were met with significant challenges. The threat of COVID-19 and unusually high water levels at Lake Victoria (and as a result, the wetlands) made it impossible to work on this buffer zone. Accordingly, we decided to shift focus. Flooding and the pandemic highlighted root challenges plaguing the surrounding community that simply couldn't be ignored. So, together with national and local actors, we decided to rather put our energy into addressing these vulnerabilities using nature-based solutions (NBS).

Alongside planting 400 native fruit trees in the area, the UNA programme will also provide hands-on training to community members around using NBS to build resilience – they'll be trained in permaculture for subsistence farming, water harvesting, compost site establishment, sustainable irrigation and sustainable wood harvesting, for example. To achieve this, we'll be making use of the ICLEI CBC's THRIVE mobile app, which offers step-by-step guidance on how to implement 60 simple NBS at the micro scale.

## Evidence of change

### KEY OUTCOMES



## ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

The rehabilitated Ras Mekonnen site has not only helped significantly with the restoration of the riverbank, but today, it also serves as a recreational hub for citizens, attracting residents from across the city and instilling a sense of place and pride.

Various elements of the park contribute to promoting eco-mobility, improved waste management, flood control, bank stabilisation, and even safe social distancing under the COVID-19 pandemic. It is a shining example of the viability of sustainable development and the benefits of nature.

The Ras Mekonnen park is now also just one small part of a much larger ecological corridor (established by the municipal council), which weaves a green trail through the city.



I AM VERY HAPPY WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE PROJECT AND APPRECIATE THIS TREMENDOUS INTERVENTION IN CAPACITY BUILDING, ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC SPACES DEVELOPMENT IN OUR CITY. THE RAS MEKONNEN SITE IS NOW A BUSY PUBLIC PARK AND WE FEEL VERY PROUD OF IT.

ESHETU MULU: *Beautification, Parks and Cemetery Development and Administration Agency, City Government of Addis Ababa*





## NACALA, MOZAMBIQUE

Like in Addis Ababa, the community in Nacala now has access to a green open space and all the life-enhancing benefits it provides: shade and temperature regulation, improved mental and physical well-being, community cohesion and recreational opportunities, for instance. Landscaping and paving efforts have also helped to stabilise the soil, prevent erosion and reduce the risk of landslides (a key threat).

The local municipal council saw so much value in this project that they wrote ICLEI Africa a formal letter communicating their commitment to continuing the rehabilitation of the multi-functional park using their own funds. Our intervention has prompted them to install fencing, landscape additional areas, and plant new vegetation, and they've explicitly noted linkages with biodiversity and DRR considerations.



## LILONGWE, MALAWI

Over 15 tonnes of compost were generated during the waste management project at the Tsoka-Lizulu markets. While this particular intervention ultimately failed due to political and contextual challenges, the city council was so taken by the methodology underlying it that they've asked the UNA team to write up concept notes so that it can be replicated in other urban areas where it may enjoy more success.

The project also encouraged the city to place more emphasis on river revitalisation, and the council has since allocated budget toward an extensive river restoration project. Unexpectedly, as our work highlighted other nature-based interventions in the city, it has also inspired the council to develop a vast ecological corridor throughout Lilongwe that links all of these disparate implementation projects. UNA is helping the city develop an action plan for the establishment of this corridor, which John Chome, CEO of Lilongwe City Council, has labelled his legacy project.

Notably, the council has also chosen to integrate the learnings and sparks born from UNA's pilot projects in the city's new Strategic Action Plan (2020–2025). As a result, this critical document, which outlines a vision for the municipality, is greener than it's ever been before, laying out a much healthier future for Lilongwe.



WE CAME HERE FOR OUR CHILDREN BECAUSE WE HEARD IT'S A MUST FOR FAMILY MEMBERS. I DIDN'T KNOW ANY OF THE KIDS' PARENTS BEFORE, BUT NOW WE, THE PARENTS, ARE FRIENDS AS WELL AND WE ARE HAVING FUN!

*Father of 5-year-old boy*



MY DAUGHTER IS THE ONLY ONE BORN INTO THE FAMILY AND SHE DOESN'T REALLY HAVE FRIENDS IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD, BUT IT TOOK HER JUST A FEW MINUTES TO MEET SEVERAL FRIENDS IN THIS PARK.

*Mother of 8-year-old girl*





THE LILONGWE RIVER RESTORATION PROJECT HAS BEEN PROFILED AS ONE OF THE PRIORITY PROJECTS IN THE CITY, SUCH THAT WE HAVE INCLUDED IT IN OUR ANNUAL PROGRAMME AND WE HAVE SET A BUDGET TOWARDS IT, SO THAT THERE'LL BE SUSTAINABILITY FOR WHAT HAS STARTED FROM THE SUPPORT THAT HAS COME FROM ICLEI.

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



## ENTEBBE, UGANDA

An important outcome of our work in Uganda is improved working relationships between the national and local tiers of government. They are now better aligned and more aware of each other's priorities and challenges, which helps to promote coordinated city-level implementation that contributes to the achievement of national targets.

We also expect the new community-based project in Entebbe to yield important results. It will align closely with the Sendai Framework and offer evidence that NBS can be used to "build back better" after a major shock like COVID-19. Through careful monitoring and evaluation, we hope to quantify the value of NBS and build a strong case for their use in supporting human well-being and addressing the structural inequalities that place Africa's poor and vulnerable at risk.

## LONG-TERM IMPACTS AND SIGNIFICANCE

Through the UNA interventions, we successfully supported city stakeholders to **take local action linked to various international frameworks**. On-the-ground implementation work helped to advance the achievement of SDG 13 (climate action), 14 (life below water) and 15 (life on land). It also aligned with specific targets set out in countries' NBSAPs (targets that national governments have to report on), thereby promoting the tangible execution of these action plans. Finally, by championing nature-based work for climate resilience, projects additionally contributed toward the achievement of climate targets laid out under countries' National Adaptation Plans (NAPs).



Beyond this, local officials across UNA cities have demonstrated that they are now **more aware of the key global agendas** around biodiversity, climate change and DRR, and the need to develop multi-pronged projects that strategically link with several of these agreements. Ideally, then, in the long term, we'll see more and more local interventions being designed in accordance with these frameworks.

As a result of our national-local dialogues, the UNA team has also seen evidence of **improved multi-level governance (MLG)** in partner cities, which is likely to have a multitude of benefits: accelerated action on the ground, synchronised cross-country interventions, improved sustainability and scalability of implementation projects, lessons sharing that supports up-scaling and replication. If there are closer working relationships between government tiers, local councils are better positioned to help national officials develop strategies and plans that can have real impact in context. We've seen, for instance, how recommendations emerging from city-level interventions have helped greatly to inform updates to countries' Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) during the regular review of this document under the Paris Agreement.

Enhanced MLG, coupled with richer knowledge about global agendas, should also **improve reporting** to international bodies – local officials are better able to make explicit links between activities and global targets, and national officials are more aware of what's happening at a city level and, therefore, better equipped to report.

Additionally, it's been encouraging to see that, in at least two UNA cities, stakeholders have expressed a desire to develop much **larger ecological corridors** connecting green pockets. This means UNA pilot projects will hopefully form part of developments that could have broader strategic impact – by greening large parts of cities and reversing habitat fragmentation. The potential benefits for increased urban resilience are significant.

A multitude of important lessons have emerged from our time spent facilitating local action that's linked to international frameworks in African cities. We've shared these with our advisory board members and the international community through many different platforms and mechanisms. In this way, we ensure insights and recommendations from Africa are fed back up into the global discourse and can **inform the design of new, updated international agreements**, like the post-2020 global biodiversity framework – thereby closing the loop.

Already, a champion at the CBD has seen so much value in UNA's learnings that ICLEI Africa has been asked to consider packaging them into a capacity-building programme for cities. We hope this means we'll be able to broaden our impact and assist many others in implementing effective nature-related work in the future.



## KEY LEARNINGS

- Implementation projects are inevitably time-consuming and resource-intensive – it should never be assumed that they will be easy to up- or out-scale.
- Factors influencing the success of on-the-ground interventions are often context specific, which complicates replication.
- Limited budgets seriously hamper implementation and the sustainability of projects in many African cities. It may, therefore, be more strategic to shift away from small-scale pilots and rather focus on helping cities lay the foundation for better access to finance – by taking ideas for larger interventions and building concept notes and pre-feasibility studies around them (see [Impact Story 4](#)).
- For improved sustainability of projects, community members should be actively involved in planning and implementation. The public engagement methodology used is also key (see [Impact Story 6](#)).
- Practical interventions are more effective when community members are personally invested in the chosen implementation site – a sense of ownership is critical.
- It's important to collect baseline data prior to implementing, and to use effective monitoring methods, so that it's possible to accurately report on change under international frameworks.
- Local implementation projects should build in time for capacity building to ensure actors understand why activities are being undertaken and how they align with global agendas.

## 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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