

# 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 1

Key pillars of the UNA programme approach



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS HANDBOOK

- The Nature Pathway, developed by ICLEI Africa for the CitiesWithNature initiative, outlines nine steps (subdivided into 27 prompts) that guide cities in their efforts to incorporate nature-based solutions into policies, planning and decision-making processes.
- The fundamentals of this approach informed the UNA programme methodology, which is underpinned by 10 key pillars.
- Pillars of the UNA programme approach include 1) building on existing work, 2) aligning with city needs, 3) understanding institutional structures, 4) building strong relationships, 5) focusing on process, 6) embracing reflective and adaptive processes, 7) tailor-making solutions to challenges, 8) creating transformative spaces, 9) unpacking causal links, 10) engaging with communities.

## WHO SHOULD CONSULT THIS HANDBOOK?



Funder and donor institutions



Organisations working on sustainability and development issues in Africa

### The relevance and significance of this handbook series

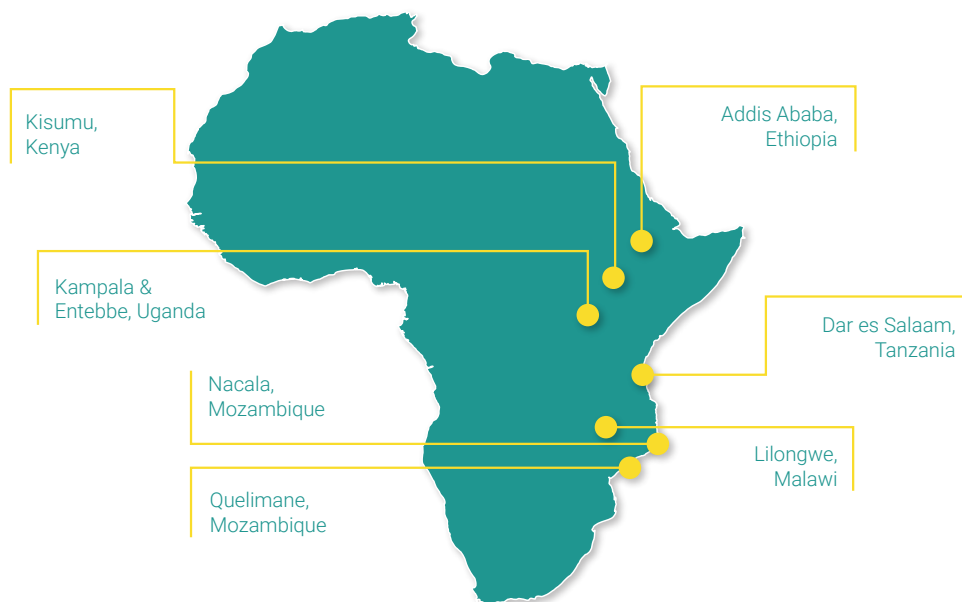
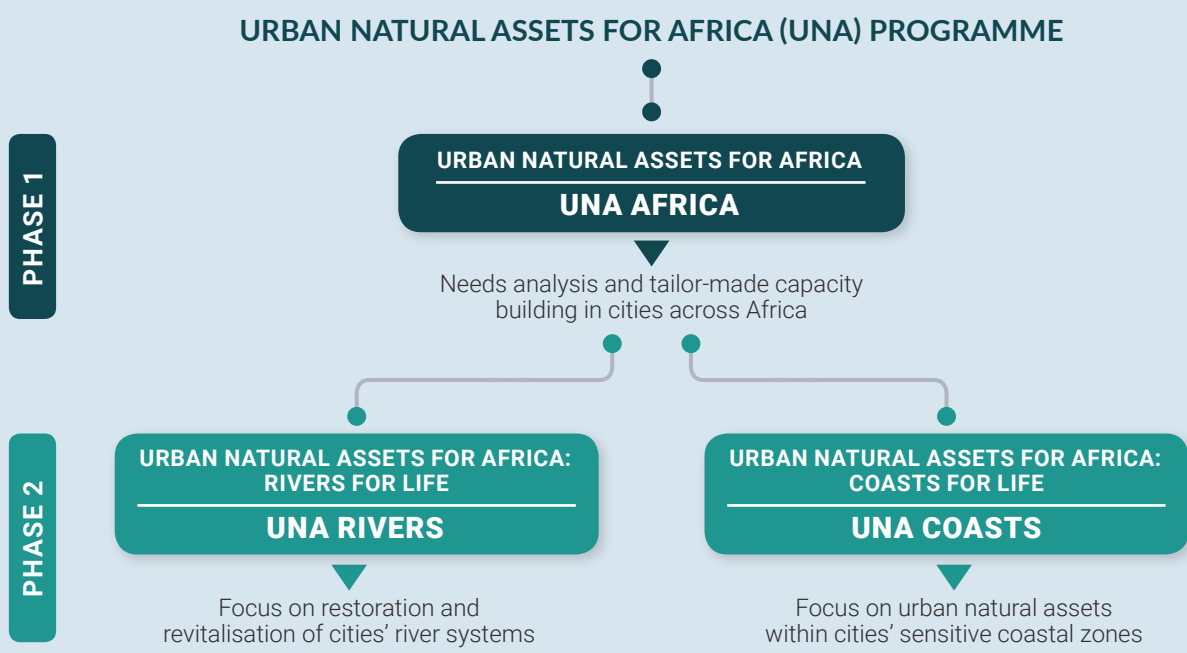
The ICLEI Cities Biodiversity Center (CBC), a global centre hosted by ICLEI Africa, developed this handbook series to showcase key considerations for integrating urban natural assets into city planning in sub-Saharan Africa. All lessons profiled were gathered through the implementation of the UNA programme.

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.



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



# KEY PILLARS OF THE UNA PROGRAMME APPROACH



All of ICLEI Africa's current projects, including the UNA programme, build on 25 years of expertise and experience. Over time, various best-practice approaches and guiding frameworks have been developed, refined and applied in order to take local decision-making to the next level and ensure nature is included in future plans for African cities.

One such methodology is the Nature Pathway, developed by ICLEI Africa for the CitiesWithNature initiative (see Figure 1 below).

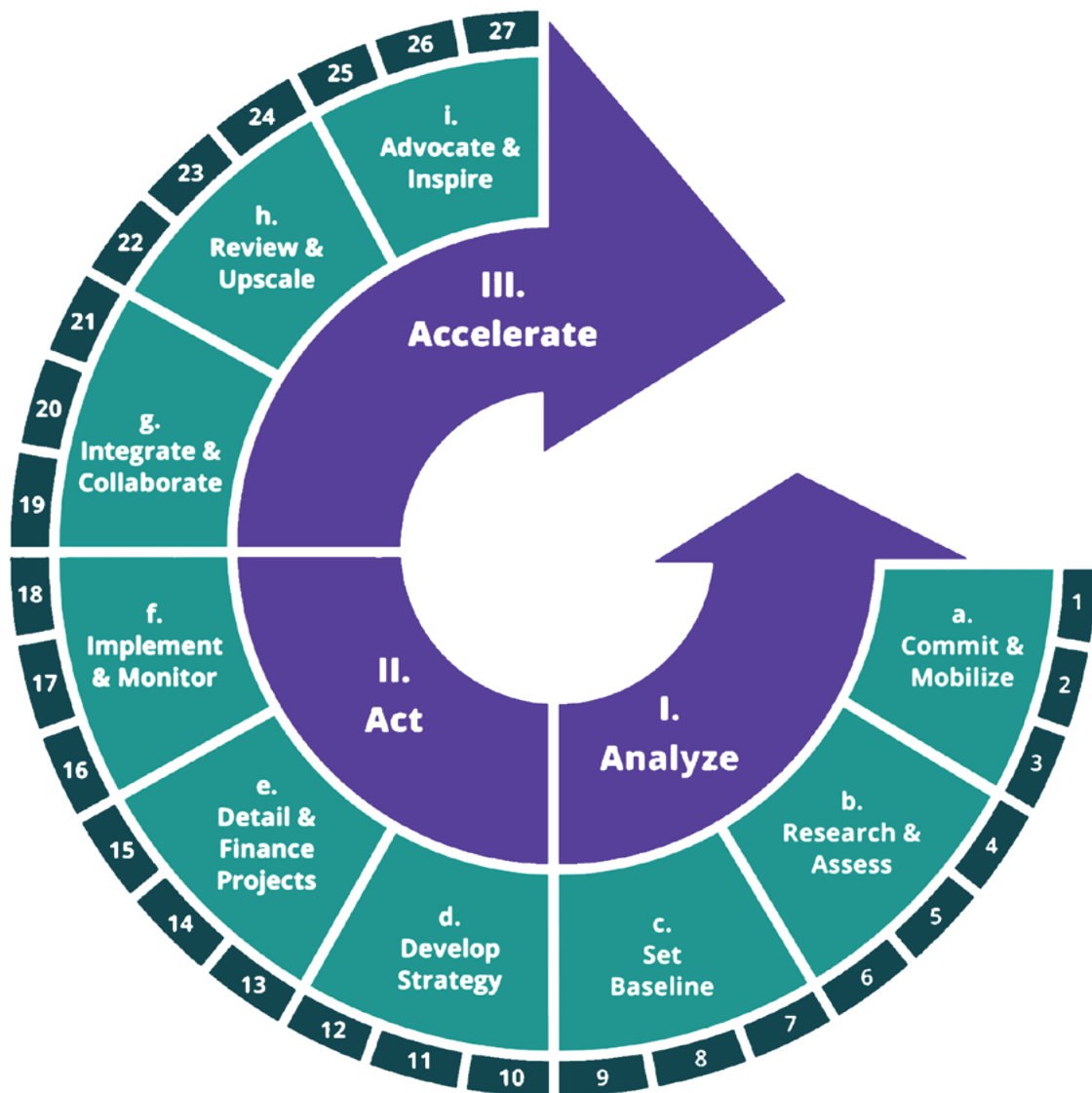


FIGURE 1: The Nature Pathway

The Nature Pathway, visually depicted in Figure 1, is intended to support cities on a journey towards improved natural asset management. It outlines a multi-step process comprising three main phases: Analyze, Act and Accelerate. Local officials can start their journey at any point in the process, depending on their specific requirements, and at each step, they can access a range of helpful tools and resources that will assist them in completing specified actions.

Much of the thinking behind this, and other similar methodologies, has fed into and informed the direction taken by the UNA programme. Here we outline 10 key pillars that underpin the UNA approach and assist with the achievement of the projects' objectives.

## KEY PILLARS OF THE UNA PROGRAMME APPROACH

### BUILDING ON EXISTING WORK:

The concept of deep-scaling, or building on work that's already been done, is central to the UNA programme methodology. Much of the success of later UNA initiatives, like UNA Rivers, is a direct result of having **worked with the same project city for multiple years, over multiple project periods**. In this case, UNA Africa, which was implemented first, paved the way for accelerated action by building relationships (see below) with stakeholders and assessing opportunities and challenges in four African cities. UNA Rivers then expanded on and strengthened the groundwork laid at three of the initial sites. In addition to building on existing ICLEI Africa work, the UNA team also always ensures it understands what has already been done, and what's currently being done, in a city before moving forward with project activities.

### ALIGNING WITH CITY NEEDS:

It's already well recognised that it's critical to take the time to understand the local context when designing urban sustainability projects<sup>1</sup>. The UNA programme takes this further by prioritising an extended initial planning process that relies on regular reconnaissance site visits to **assess and identify the specific needs of a city**. The programme has established an effective method for identifying local needs so that a **tailor-made work plan** that's appropriate for the context can be developed for project cities. We have found that co-producing relevant interventions, based on real needs, is essential to ensure that project cities take ownership of project activities.

### UNDERSTANDING INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURES:

In order to identify and tap into opportunities for long-term sustainable change, it's important to be familiar with institutional arrangements and understand how decisions are made, and by whom. This takes time and relies on deep-scaling and the development of close working relationships.

Through ongoing work on the UNA programme, ICLEI Africa has established a sound **methodology for understanding and working with formal (official) and informal (unofficial) governance structures** in African city councils (see Handbook 4).

### **BUILDING STRONG RELATIONSHIPS:**

Much of the success of all the UNA projects has hinged on the energy invested in building relationships with key stakeholders (see Handbook 7). **Strong relationships are the foundation on which we achieve change**, and hence, a significant part of the UNA programme process is devoted to fostering connections based on trust. We have found that sound partnerships between city leads and project teams, and between different sectors and governance levels (see Handbooks 9 and 11), allow for deeper engagement, accelerated action and more meaningful outcomes.

### **FOCUSING ON PROCESS, NOT JUST OUTPUT:**

Too often, the focus when running projects is on “the what” and not on “the how” or “the why”, and yet the process followed to design activities is at least as valuable as the end product<sup>2</sup> (see Handbook 9). The UNA programme recognises the importance of designing effective processes – ones focused on collaboration between disciplines and on the co-production of knowledge – to unlock new ways of thinking and support sustainable change.

### **EMBRACING REFLECTIVE AND ADAPTIVE PROCESSES:**

The UNA programme is unique in that it embraces processes that are highly reflective and adaptive. We have found that **flexibility and a willingness to pause, think and adapt** to what’s happening on the ground is essential to be responsive to city needs. While necessary, this approach does come with implementation challenges. We have, over time, established **multiple tools and learnings that outline best practice** for a) talking and writing about a programme of this nature (and its value), b) managing a programme of this nature, c) developing a Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework for a programme of this nature, and d) reporting impacts and achievements to others. These learnings will help to support the design and implementation of future projects that are equally reflective and adaptive, thereby ensuring maximum uptake and sustainability.

### **TAILOR-MAKING SOLUTIONS TO CHALLENGES:**

Owing to rapid population growth and urbanisation, overlaid by the impacts of climate change, cities in Africa face unique and complex challenges<sup>3</sup>. **Innovative solutions and approaches to urban planning and service delivery** that take the African context into account are, therefore, required. The UNA programme understands this need, and through its activities, consistently aims to **provide alternative, African-specific ways of thinking and acting** (see Handbooks 2 and 3).

## CREATING TRANSFORMATIVE SPACES:

To achieve significant, lasting change, it's important to **create spaces for reflection, dialogue, knowledge co-construction and conversation**. Such transformative spaces allow for the development of important tension areas – they create room for stakeholders to learn from and connect with others across disciplines and governance levels (see Handbooks 9 and 11), **facilitate systems thinking, encourage perception changes** and lead to new ways of addressing old challenges. It's critical that transformative spaces are carefully designed and well facilitated, and the UNA programme is pioneering the way forward in this regard (see Handbook 8).

## UNPACKING CAUSATIONAL LINKS:

Real transformation is only possible if we **address the causes of a problem, rather than the symptoms**<sup>4</sup>. The UNA programme invests much time and energy into understanding causational elements, to address the challenge at its root and recommend alternative ways of operating (see example). The programme is guided by a “value up and data down” philosophy. This means it first attempts to unpack the “whys” of human behaviour at an individual level – to work out what value a particular action holds for individuals – and then lets this understanding inform solutions that can be up-scaled through a larger coordinated plan of action.

### UNDERSTANDING CAUSES EXAMPLE:

**Problem:**

Community members are cutting down trees in high-priority biodiversity zones.

**Cause of problem:**

Community members rely on wood and charcoal as a source of income.

**Common approach:**

Educate communities on value of nature and plant more trees.

**Appropriate approach for sustainable change, based on understanding of cause:**

Connect community members with alternative means of income generation.

## ENGAGING WITH COMMUNITIES:

It's widely accepted that it's important to **involve community members in planning processes** right from the outset of projects<sup>5</sup>. However, for this to happen in reality, there needs to be a culture focused on fostering community engagement among city officials. The UNA programme experiments with a range of **cutting-edge approaches for including and engaging community members**, with a particular focus on youth and marginalised groups (women in particular) (see Handbook 6). In addition, UNA projects use innovative tools to inspire community ownership of nature and encourage local on-the-ground action.







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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### **Project Funder:**

The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida) through SwedBio at the Stockholm Resilience Centre, Stockholm University

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### **Design and Layout:**

Ink Design Publishing Solutions, Cape Town

## ABOUT ICLEI AND THE CITIES BIODIVERSITY CENTER

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### **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)**

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.

This document should be cited as: ICLEI CBC. 2019. Handbook 1: Key pillars of the UNA programme approach, in *The value of urban natural assets when planning for resilient Africa cities: consideration and decision-making processes*. Cape Town, South Africa: ICLEI CBC.

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