

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 6

Involving community members in planning and implementation:

Using creative tools to encourage local participation and action in sub-Saharan Africa



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS HANDBOOK

- Involving community members – those individuals who are on the ground and closest to problems – in urban planning processes and in the implementation of practical solutions is critical in order to accurately identify a city's needs and ensure the success and longevity of development projects.
- Securing community participation can be challenging, and citizens are often only engaged at a fairly superficial level. City officials should be encouraged (and supported) to create enabling environments that facilitate community-led planning and that give residents the opportunity to actively drive processes and guide decisions.
- The UNA programme makes use of a range of innovative tools and approaches to encourage participation and engage residents around nature. These include the Minecraft computer game, an educational song and music video, a mobile application that offers step-by-step guidance on how to implement various nature-based solutions, and a photography initiative aimed at visualising and recording change during a composting project.

WHO SHOULD CONSULT THIS HANDBOOK?



Funder and donor institutions



Organisations working on sustainability and development issues in Africa



City officials (planning, environment, engineers, developers and related disciplines)



City officials (economists, finance and procurement departments)



National government officials (planning, environment, engineers, developers, economists, and finance and procurement disciplines)



Academic researchers (and related organisations)

The relevance and significance of this handbook series

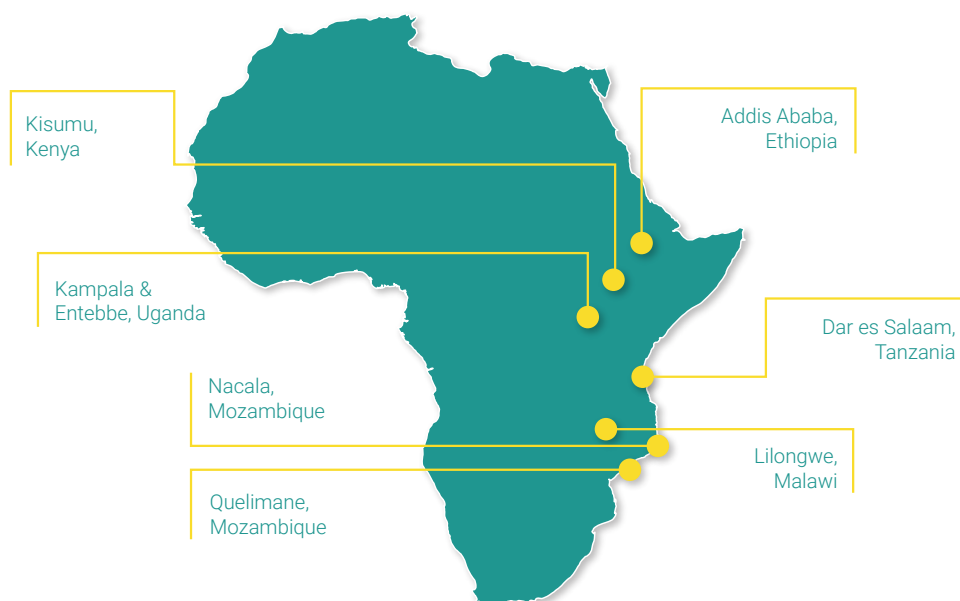
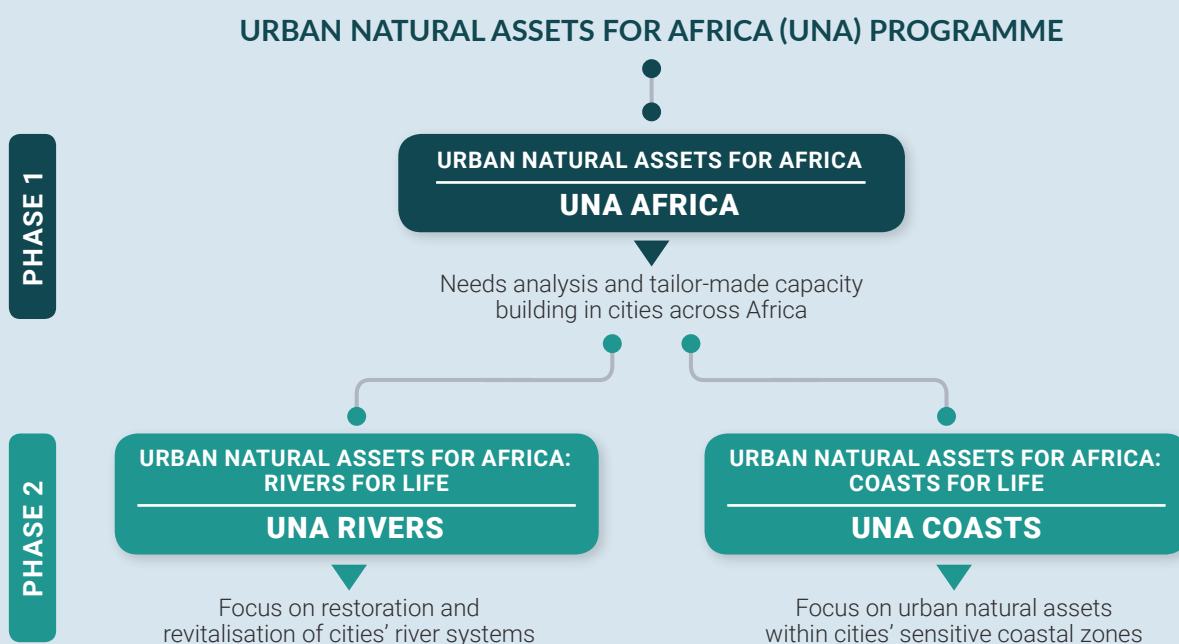
The ICLEI Cities Biodiversity Center (CBC), a global centre hosted by ICLEI Africa, developed this handbook series to showcase key considerations for integrating urban natural assets into city planning in sub-Saharan Africa. All lessons profiled were gathered through the implementation of the UNA programme.

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.



INVOLVING COMMUNITY MEMBERS IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION:

USING CREATIVE TOOLS TO ENCOURAGE LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND ACTION IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



Environmental challenges tend to be complex and multi-layered. Decision-making around such issues – and around the management of urban natural assets – therefore needs to embrace a wide range of understandings, viewpoints, values and knowledge systems¹.

Although historically, in Africa, city plans were developed without the input of the public², there has been growing recognition that it would be impossible to transform cities into sustainable centres that are resilient to changes without the support and participation of local community members³. As a result, it's now considered best practice to involve residents in urban planning and decision-making processes, as well as in the actual implementation of interventions⁴.

THE CASE FOR A PARTICIPATORY APPROACH

Community participation in the planning and implementation of urban sustainability projects has a number of key benefits. These include:

- **An improved understanding of city needs:** Community members are the building blocks that make up a city's identity⁵. As a result, local residents are in the best position to identify city needs and pinpoint possible opportunities for change. By allowing the public to effectively guide decisions relating to land use and urban development, city councils can harness context-specific knowledge and ensure that local realities and social issues are considered at every stage of the planning process³.
- **More inclusive solutions:** Participatory planning is a powerful way to foster social cohesion and bring together people with different knowledge, experiences, ideas and skills⁶. It's a way to make sure that the voices of vulnerable and marginalised groups – particularly youth and women – are heard, and that their needs are integrated into plans.
- **Better uptake and higher chances of project success:** Initiatives that do not have the support of those affected by decisions and policies rarely succeed⁷. If community members are given the chance to engage with city officials from the outset of a project – if there's space for open discussion and their input is actually used to inform decisions – they are much more likely to buy into the plan and advocate for its implementation. In this way, community participation helps to improve the sustainability and longevity of interventions.
- **Local ownership of nature:** When community members are invited to actively participate in projects aimed at protecting urban natural assets, it encourages them to rethink their relationship with nature – to take pride in and ownership of it⁸. Such a shift is critical for lasting change.

- **Support for municipal officials:** Related to the above, if community members take on some of the responsibility for planning and implementing projects, the burden on local government officials and decision-makers is greatly reduced, and their ability to take action is supported. In other words, involving the public can actually help to overcome city council capacity constraints and address service delivery challenges (it's important that officials recognise this benefit so that the push to engage community members isn't seen as a hindrance to operations, but rather as something that can help significantly in the long run).

CHALLENGES AROUND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT IN AFRICA

Although the benefits of community participation are widely accepted, engaging residents remains a challenge in African cities. While members of the public are often included in discussions, they're not always fully embedded in planning and implementation processes from start to finish. That is, they are often engaged at a fairly superficial level (as is required by protocol), but it's still fairly rare for community members to be given the chance to play a leading role in designing and changing their own cities.

There are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, it can be difficult to attract community representatives to meetings and then retain their commitment throughout the process as planning can take many months. Time and budget constraints also often limit the extent to which civil society can be included in all stages of a project – in the context of limited time and finances, the push to involve community members can be a bother. In addition, city officials and decision-makers often lack the confidence they need to effectively engage the public. They regularly express the desire for more guidance in this area.



Lilongwe, Malawi. It is essential to involve community members in order to develop a plan for urban greening on the riverbanks.

In line with this, we at ICLEI Africa identified the need to support city councils in creating more enabling environments that facilitate community-led planning, so that residents aren't just included in the process, but are given the opportunity to actively drive it. Over the last few years, the UNA programme has been experimenting with a range of cutting-edge approaches for successfully engaging community members, with a particular focus on youth and vulnerable groups.

These creative tools are designed to help city officials to a) educate residents about the value of urban natural assets, b) *effectively* involve citizens in planning processes and the implementation of practical solutions, and c) gain confidence so that they are more inclined to adopt the necessary engagement approaches (See descriptions of community participation approaches used by the UNA programme in Case Study 6A-D).

FINAL NOTES: THE IMPORTANCE OF TRUST

Trust has proven to be an essential ingredient for successful community participation. A good engagement process also helps to build strong, trusting relationships between stakeholders, and this lays the foundation for project longevity (see more about relationship building in Handbook 7).

To foster trust, local government officials can:

- Listen to community members with sincerity and make it clear that their input is taken seriously.
- Be upfront with community members about objectives, policies, regulations, key actors and decision-making frameworks from the outset. By being transparent, officials can also rest assured that residents are aware of all the parameters and of what can and cannot be done.



Nacala, Mozambique. Walking workshops engage the community by allowing them to point out exactly where the challenges in urban environments are and how they can be solved together.

CASE STUDIES

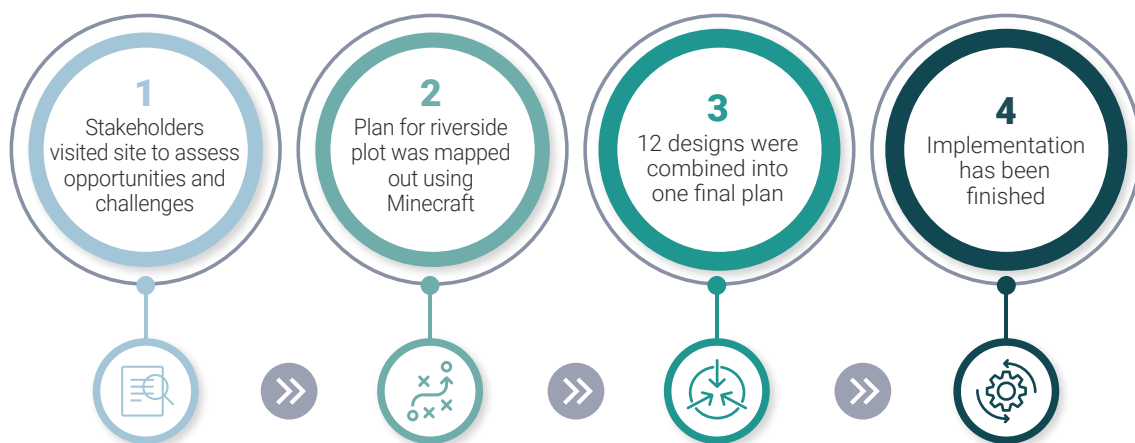


FROM UNA PROJECTS:

USING CREATIVE TOOLS TO ENCOURAGE LOCAL PARTICIPATION AND ACTION IN MALAWI, TANZANIA AND ETHIOPIA

CASE STUDY 6A MINECRAFT AS AN INNOVATIVE PARTICIPATORY TOOL¹

For several years, UN-Habitat has been successfully using an amended version of the well-known computer game Minecraft, which works like a complex 'digital Lego', to involve community members in the development of urban public spaces. The success of this approach inspired the UNA Rivers team to partner with UN-Habitat and the Addis Ababa City Authority to use this tool to design a riverside park in Ethiopia with input from residents, especially women, children and other marginalised groups.



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Women and children from the community use the Minecraft game to show how they would design the river park.

The experience was fun, educational and engaging for all involved, and community members' input was found to be especially valuable. Despite having no urban planning education or formal design training, residents' plans were among the most practical and cost-effective – a product of their first-hand knowledge of the site. Land-use planners were impressed with the results, expressing that they believed that “half the job has been done”⁹.

The 12 designs were combined into one final plan for the green open space, which was reviewed and signed off by community members and officials. Core elements of the design were implemented at the site – a process that has contributed significantly to the restoration of the riverbank.

CASE STUDY 6B THE POWER OF SONG

ICLEI Africa recognises that in order to effectively engage community members around nature, it's important to communicate with them via the right channels. In line with this thinking, UNA Rivers partnered with renowned Malawian musician Lulu to develop a catchy song and music video that raises awareness around the value of rivers in cities and the need to protect them. With such a popular figure as its champion, the song, titled *Mpumulo* (“Rivers for Life”), is a powerful educational tool and means of encouraging local action. It continues to make its way around Malawi naturally – *Mpumulo* currently has over 8000 downloads, and 3000 CDs have been distributed to vulnerable communities.

CASE STUDY 6C HELPING COMMUNITIES TO BUILD CITIES THAT THRIVE

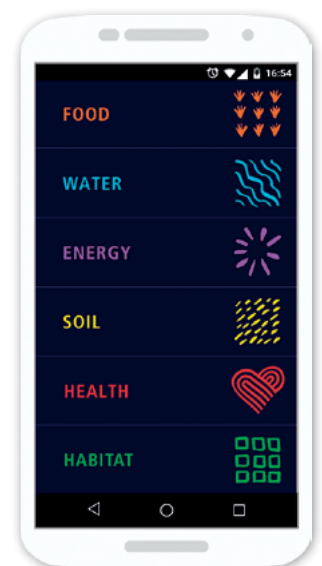
Developed by the ICLEI CBC, THRIVEⁱⁱ is a user-friendly mobile application that offers step-by-step guidance on how to implement 60 simple solutions that promote the sustainable use of natural resources in cities. This innovative tool is designed to empower community members to take ownership of nature by giving clear direction on everything from “how to reuse water” to “how to build a food garden”. THRIVE is currently being used in several African cities, and has proven to be a fun, interactive way to engage youth and encourage action on school grounds. The app can be downloaded for free via Google Play.



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The Minecraft game allows marginalised members of the community to share their vision for urban spaces and promotes gender inclusion.



Lilongwe, Malawi. Lulu took to the streets to publicise his song, “Mpumulo”, which challenges communities to take ownership of protecting their urban rivers.



The Thrive app provides practical steps for implementing nature-based solutions in six categories

CASE STUDY 6D VISUALISING CHANGE THROUGH PHOTOVOICE^{III}

The well-established Photovoice methodology^{iv} was used in Lilongwe, Malawi to further engage residents around a riverside waste management initiative implemented under the UNA Rivers project (see Handbook 3). A group of community members involved in composting were given disposable cameras and invited to take photographs of scenes at the pilot site every week over November and December 2017. Doing so was a way for them to monitor and record the change they were creating, which helped to make them feel more connected to the project's aims. In later discussions with city officials, the photographs served as tools that community members could use to articulate their perspectives and make their voices heard. The process inspired community ownership and revealed many valuable insights that can be used to improve waste management and river clean-up initiatives in the city.

Lilongwe, Malawi. To show the municipality what was happening on the ground, this group of composters took weekly photos to tell the story of their sites.



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ENDNOTES

- i http://cbc.iclei.org/participatory-planning-rivers-riversides-case-study-addis-ababa/#_ftn1.
- ii www.thriveapp.co.za
- iii cbc.iclei.org/waste-is-wealth/
- iv <https://swed.bio/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/Malawi-Photovoice-Report-August-2018.pdf>

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ABOUT ICLEI AND THE CITIES BIODIVERSITY CENTER



ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability 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.

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