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 7

The importance of relationship building:
Fostering trust through time investment and innovative interactive exercises

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS HANDBOOK

- In order to effectively mainstream nature-based solutions into urban planning and decision-making, more emphasis needs to be placed on certain "softer" processes and goals. One such "softer" area of focus that should, ideally, be prioritised is relationship building.
- When strong relationships exist between sectors and stakeholders, trust is developed, best practices are shared and supportive networks are formed. As a result, practitioners shift the way they work together, and this new dynamic lays the groundwork for sustainable change in natural asset management.
- The UNA programme makes relationship building a priority by a) working with the same city over extended periods, with much of this time going towards fostering trust, and b) facilitating engagement spaces and interactive learning activities that bring different stakeholders together to jointly reflect and problem-solve.

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)

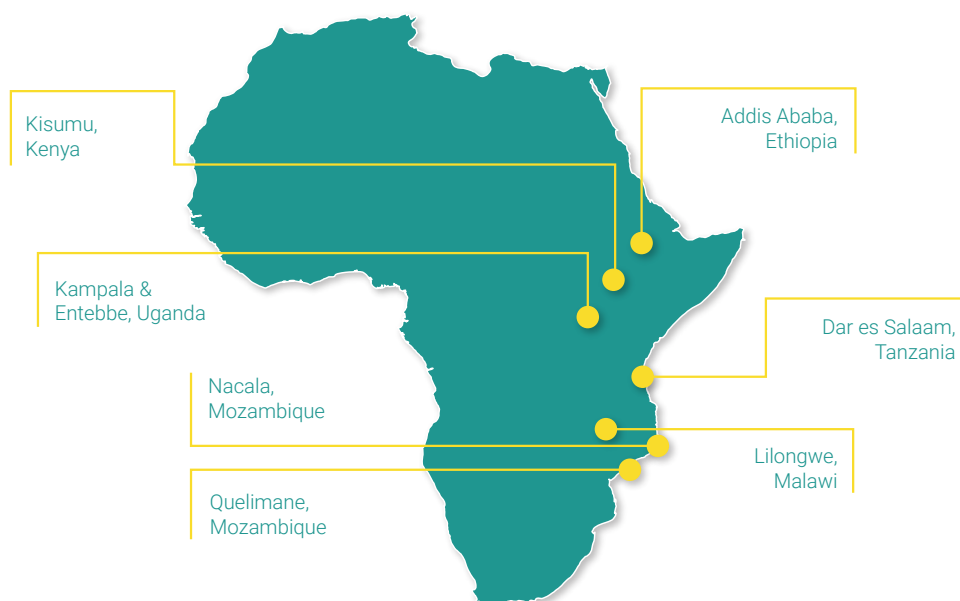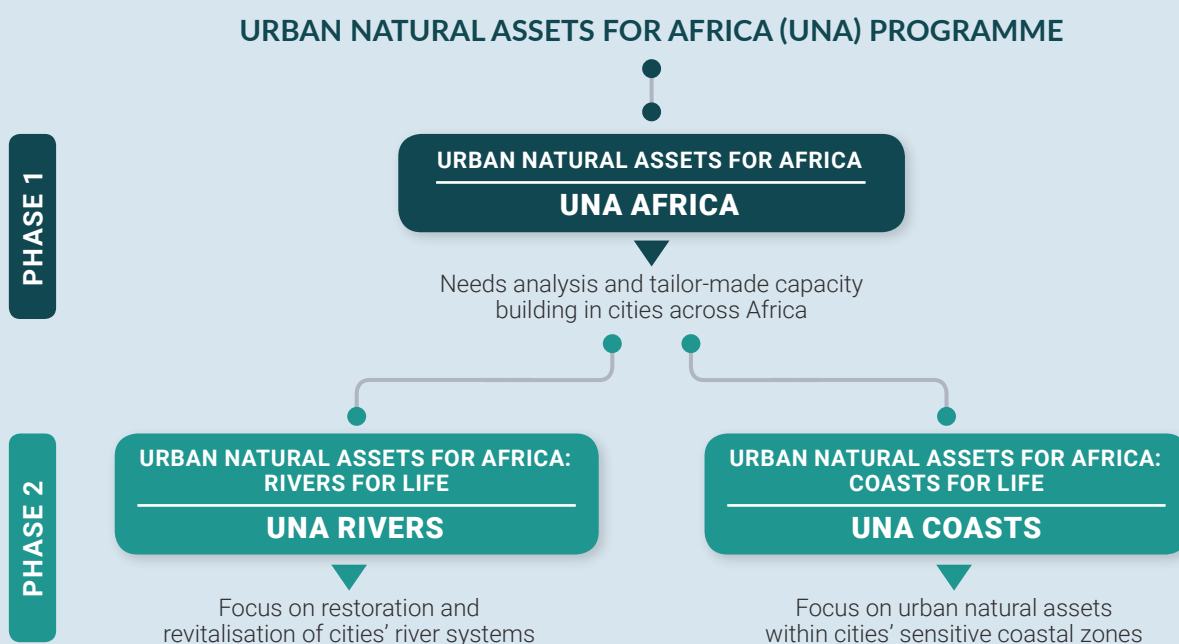### The relevance and significance of this handbook series

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.

URBAN NATURAL ASSETS FOR AFRICA (UNA) PROGRAMME

PHASE 1

URBAN NATURAL ASSETS FOR AFRICA
UNA AFRICA

Needs analysis and tailor-made capacity building in cities across Africa

PHASE 2

URBAN NATURAL ASSETS FOR AFRICA: RIVERS FOR LIFE
UNA RIVERS

Focus on restoration and revitalisation of cities' river systems

URBAN NATURAL ASSETS FOR AFRICA: COASTS FOR LIFE
UNA COASTS

Focus on urban natural assets within cities' sensitive coastal zones

Kisumu, Kenya

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Kampala & Entebbe, Uganda

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania

Nacala, Mozambique

Lilongwe, Malawi

Quelimane, Mozambique

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:

FOSTERING TRUST THROUGH TIME INVESTMENT AND INNOVATIVE INTERACTIVE EXERCISES

A major learning that has come out of ICLEI Africa's ongoing work on the UNA programme is that it's not enough to simply produce nature-related information and then search for "entry points" in decision-making into which this knowledge can be embedded. Considering the complex environment within which African decision-makers operate, this is, unfortunately, not an effective way to mainstream nature-based solutions into urban planning and facilitate on-the-ground change. In African cities, "entry points" cannot be *found*; they need to be *created*. This requires a fundamental shift in the way decision-making and planning is currently carried out – a shift that puts more focus on certain "softer", less tangible processes and outcomes.

Time and time again, we've found that **relationship building** is one of several "softer" processes that needs to be prioritised in order for change to be realised. When trusting partnerships are developed between stakeholders – when independent departments start to collaborate – "entry points" naturally emerge and important information around natural asset management can more easily be mainstreamed. As a result, strong relationships aren't simply a nice-to-have; they are essential if we're going to effectively deal with the impacts of urbanisation on African cities and protect nature.

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING BETWEEN PROJECT AND CITY TEAMS

As an external organisation working on urban sustainability issues in Africa, we at ICLEI Africa have found that it's near impossible to make headway and achieve goals if trust hasn't been fostered between project and city teams. Our finding is that real change is built on the foundation of strong relationships. Without solid, trusting partnerships with city and community representatives, it's difficult to truly understand what a city's needs are or how decisions are made (see Handbook 4), and without such understandings, it's not possible to develop projects that are sustainable, effective and tailored to the specific context. With this in mind, the UNA programme makes building relationships with city teams an absolutely priority and invests a huge amount of time and energy in fostering trust throughout the lifespan of a project (see more below).

4

THE VALUE OF URBAN NATURAL ASSETS WHEN PLANNING FOR RESILIENT AFRICAN CITIES:
CONSIDERATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

RELATIONSHIP BUILDING BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS WITHIN CITIES

Alongside building relationships with city representatives, the UNA project teams also focus on strengthening connections between actors within project cities.

It's not easy to achieve change when operating in isolation. Urban natural asset management in Africa is a complex and dynamic issue, and therefore a coordinated, multidisciplinary approach is required to address related challenges. Coordination is only possible if strong relationships are formed between departments and organisations that have historically worked in silos.

When key stakeholders in different sectors, institutions and city council divisions connect and collaborate, they empower one another to make better decisions and do better work. Such networks are invaluable sources of support and information – they address issues around isolation and lack of knowledge and awareness. Through partnerships, practitioners can share insights and best practices related to climate resilience and natural asset management.

Most importantly, stronger networks expose decision-makers to alternative ways of thinking, acting, planning and researching. Relationships broaden perspectives, and this helps stakeholders in African cities to innovate more – to lead the way forward by developing creative solutions for improved natural asset management. Our finding is that when practitioners learn from, and about, each other, they start to work differently with each other. There's a subtle shift in the way they think and respond to each other, and in this new context, the "entry points" mentioned above – opportunities for nature-based information to be mainstreamed into planning – tend to be co-created more effectively.

UNA PROGRAMME APPROACHES TO RELATIONSHIP BUILDING

While it's widely acknowledged that relationship building is important, many aren't sure how to actually go about fostering trust and developing partnerships in practice. The UNA project team has developed effective techniques for relationship building that rely on:

a) **Deep-scaling and significant time investment (for building relationships between project and city teams):** It is standard UNA practice to work with the same project city for multiple years, over multiple project periods, which naturally helps to strengthen relationships with city representatives. Much time and effort is specifically dedicated to developing connections, with a focus on trust, throughout projects, but especially during the scoping and planning phases (see Case Study 7A).

THE IMPORTANCE OF RELATIONSHIP BUILDING:
FOSTERING TRUST THROUGH TIME INVESTMENT AND INNOVATIVE INTERACTIVE EXERCISES

5

b) **Group learning and knowledge construction activities (for building relationships between stakeholders within cities):** The UNA programme regularly makes use of interactive exercises and activities (see examples in Handbooks 8 and 9) that prioritise engagement and collaboration, and that therefore encourage relationship building. We've learnt that when stakeholders from different departments and disciplines are brought together under one roof to jointly explore issues and create knowledge together, trust is fostered and partnerships naturally develop. While such engagements are generally aimed at capacity building, when facilitated correctly, using the unique UNA approach, they are equally successful at strengthening networks and relations (see Case Study 7B). Importantly, these exercises also help to break down power structures, thereby creating an environment that promotes equality (across gender and rank, for instance).

Nacala, Mozambique. To build thriving and productive relationships that will ultimately lead to transformative change, it is essential to co-create information with stakeholders.

CASE STUDIES

FROM UNA PROJECTS:

FOSTERING TRUST THROUGH TIME INVESTMENT AND INNOVATIVE INTERACTIVE EXERCISES

Lilongwe, Malawi. Taking the time to build mutual trust provides a foundation for positive future interactions and impactful action.

Nacala, Mozambique: Providing the space for high level dialogue is crucial for building relationships.

CASE STUDY 7A · **TRUST BUILDING THROUGH TIME INVESTMENT IN UNA PROJECT CITIES**

After the UNA Africa project was launched in 2014, much emphasis was placed on developing trusting relationships with city officials and community representatives in the project cities. The UNA team didn't immediately dictate deliverables or impose their own ideas and perspectives on city teams; rather, they devoted a significant amount of time – the first 18 months of the project – to needs analysis and listened carefully to the requests of multiple stakeholders, so that projects could be tailored to the context. This approach contributed greatly to the development of strong alliances and good relations.

In 2016, the programme was extended and UNA Rivers was launched in three of the original UNA Africa project cities (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; Dar es Salaam, Tanzania; and Lilongwe, Malawi). Owing to the focus on deep-scaling (building on existing work; see Handbook 1) and the time spent in these cities in the previous two years, city stakeholders already had faith in the UNA project team and were confident that their needs would be addressed. This trust has allowed for deeper engagement, accelerated action and more meaningful outcomes.

When the UNA Coasts project was later initiated in Mozambique, the UNA team built on the lessons learnt in the other cities and focused on developing strong, trusting relationships here too. Like in the other cases, much of the success that this project has seen so far has hinged on the energy invested in fostering trust and mutual respect.

CASE STUDY 7B

CREATING SPACES FOR RELATIONSHIP BUILDING WITHIN CITIES

In many African cities, relationships between stakeholders within municipalities, and between city councils, research institutions and other organisations, tend to be fairly weak. Prior to UNA's interventions (see Handbooks 8 and 9), best practices relating to natural asset management were rarely shared, and engagements typically took the form of conventional meetings and workshops that didn't often allow for much collaboration. Many practitioners expressed that they, therefore, felt isolated in their efforts to address challenges.

With the initiation of UNA activities, significant shifts have occurred. UNA exercises, which give stakeholders a space to reflect, learn and solve problems together, have been found to be very effective means of strengthening relationships and networks, both within cities and between different cities. As one external observer notes, UNA activities, and the way they're facilitated, contribute to both conceptual development and **social cohesion**. That is, they both build knowledge and promote positive dynamics between stakeholders.

As a more concrete example, the UNA team has seen how the collaborative process of designing hotspot maps (see more on this in the case study in Handbook 2) has helped to give town planners and environmental officers a new appreciation for each other's work. When these two groups first started building maps together, planners were hesitant to engage with environmentalists or put nature at the forefront of urban planning. Regardless, the two disciplines continued to jointly reflect and create knowledge, while working towards the common goal of mapping.

Various cities in Africa. One of the fundamentals for transformative change is reflecting, learning and solving problems together.

8

THE VALUE OF URBAN NATURAL ASSETS WHEN PLANNING FOR RESILIENT AFRICAN CITIES:
CONSIDERATIONS AND DECISION-MAKING PROCESSES

Many years into the process, a new town planner joined the team and expressed the same view the other practitioners had originally held: Why do environmental officers need to be included in this activity? Why are urban natural assets the primary focus? It was the other town planners, not the environmental officers, who provided the answer and explained why nature experts had to be in the room. Through constant engagement with the environmentalists, the town planners had come to appreciate the value of nature in urban planning – the relationships they had formed with the scientists had shifted the way they thought about and approached city design. In other words, strong "entry points" for change had been created and nature-based solutions could be integrated into decision-making more effectively.

Nacala, Mozambique. Creating space to build relationships and identify local champions provides enabling conditions for climate and natural asset information to be used in decision-making.

Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. Workshop participants use their local knowledge to improve information and data on natural assets in the city.

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.