

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 9

Prioritising processes:

Bridging the divide between different sectors and disciplines in sub-Saharan Africa



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THIS HANDBOOK

- Through ICLEI Africa's ongoing work on the continent, it's become clear that often the process followed to design projects generates learnings and partnerships that are as valuable as project outputs themselves.
- This is especially true when the process is focused on interdisciplinary collaboration, dialogue and the co-production of knowledge.
- The processes of visioning and scenario planning (to imagine possible futures for cities) have proven to be instrumental in bringing about change in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. When all the relevant stakeholders are involved, these approaches not only lead to meaningful results; they also bridge divides between disciplines, encourage fundamental shifts in perspective, facilitate systems thinking and foster working relationships that put nature at the forefront of urban planning.

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.

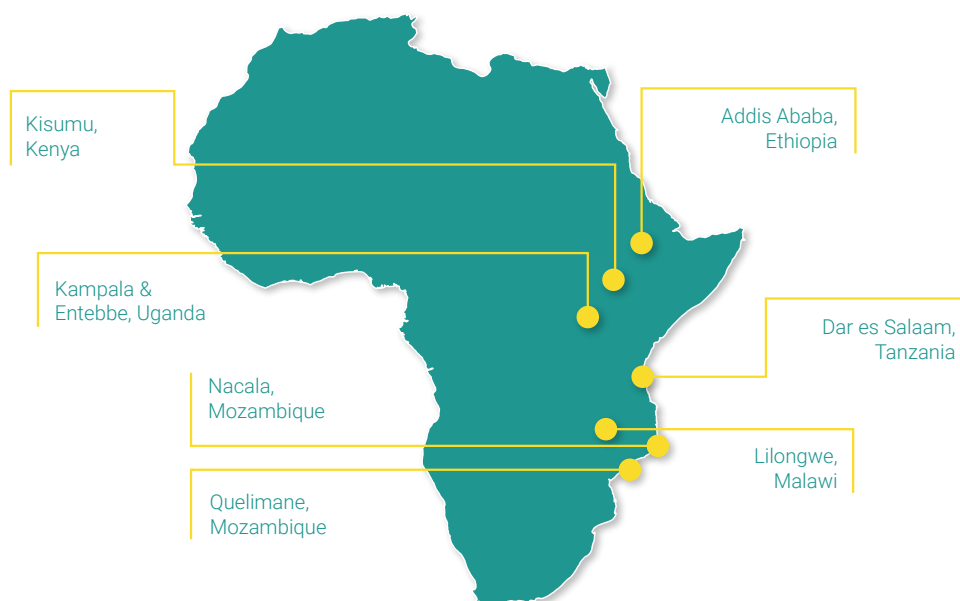
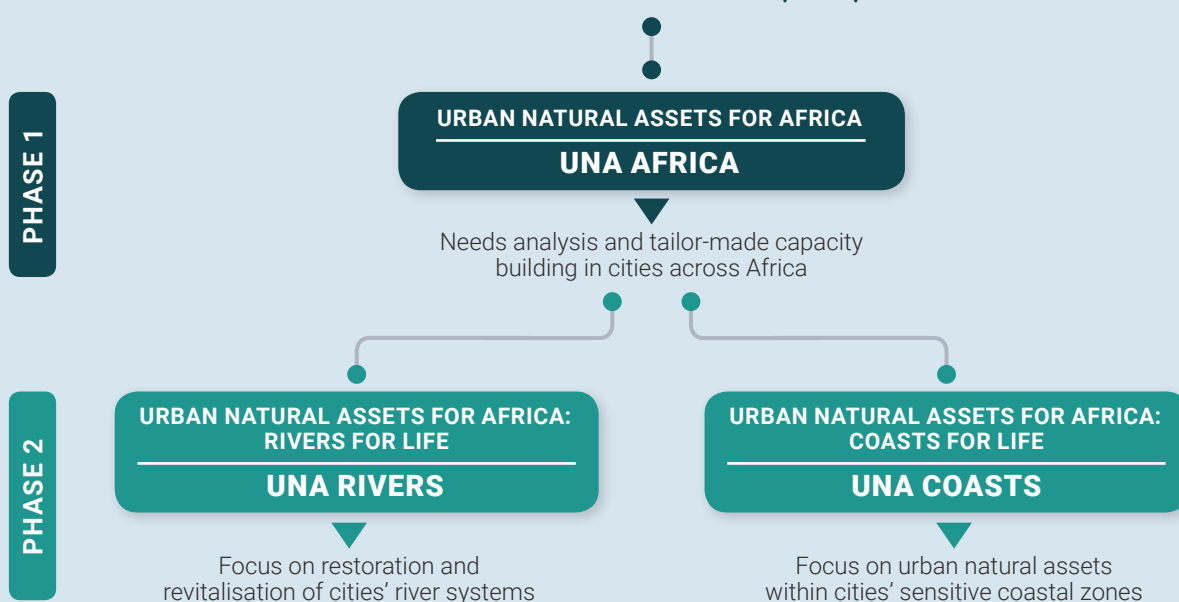
By sharing approaches that have been successfully tailored to African cities, these handbooks seek to support the development of future urban sustainability projects that are both more effective and better suited to the local context. Learnings also shed light on how ICLEI Africa is working with local 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



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



PRIORITISING PROCESSES:

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN DIFFERENT SECTORS AND DISCIPLINES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



Through ICLEI Africa’s ongoing work on the continent, we’ve found that there’s a tendency to focus too much on “the what” and not enough on “the how” when running projects. One of our most significant learnings has been that the process followed to design and implement project activities can be at least as valuable as the end product itself. It is often the conversations that take place along the way – while on a journey towards a particular goal – that prove to have the highest transformative potential and that best translate into new ways of thinking.

With this in mind, the UNA Rivers and UNA Coasts projects take an innovative approach to facilitating processes that focus on “softer” deliverables and priorities, like relationship building (see Handbook 7) and the co-production of knowledge, and that create space for reflection, collaboration, dialogue and engagement (see Handbook 8). Our finding is that by doing so, we can generate invaluable learnings and shift the way different stakeholders work together. Such a shift then often unlocks new opportunities for nature-based considerations to be properly integrated into urban planning so that future resilient cities can be built.

In addition, by focusing on processes, and not just end results, we can avoid falling into the trap of addressing only the symptoms of a problem and not its cause, or of misunderstanding a problem entirely. A good process will build in time for the careful assessment of local needs and contexts to ensure that project activities align with a city’s development priorities and effectively respond to challenges on the ground.

Effective processes, once they’ve been established, should also be documented and shared so that they can inform future projects. When looking back on successful activities with the intention of learning from them, it’s important to develop an understanding of not just what was done, but *how* it was done (the approach) and *why* it was done that way (the reasoning). Unpacking *why* a particular process was followed can uncover important learnings that can be drawn on to up-scale projects more successfully.

THE PILLARS OF AN EFFECTIVE PROCESS

In order to bring about lasting and meaningful change for the improved management of urban natural assets, the UNA team has learnt that project processes need to:

- Be fun, stimulating, interactive and interdisciplinary.
- Introduce new ways of engaging (see Handbook 8).
- Encourage conversation and improve communication between stakeholders.
- Facilitate mind-set shifts.
- Disrupt power dynamics and break down silos, while valuing all knowledge sources equally.
- Focus on the underlying causes of problems.
- Prioritise the assessment of city needs.
- Be flexible and responsive to change.

USING PROCESS TO BRIDGE DIVIDES

A major barrier to the conservation of urban natural assets is a lack of collaboration and communication between different sectors and disciplines working within related fields¹. Different professionals tend to define and approach similar problems in different ways, but solutions and perspectives aren't often integrated.

Historically, town planners' training would emphasise the cultural, economic, political and social dimensions of city planning over ecological and environmental considerations². Similarly, environmental officers' education often didn't equip them with enough knowledge about the complexities of urban planning and development. As a result, quite a significant divide exists between these two fields and weakens efforts to protect and revitalise urban natural assets.

As climate change and urban sustainability are complex, nuanced issues, there is a great need to put an end to the idea that one area of knowledge is superior to another so that combined, interdisciplinary solutions can be found. The UNA programme makes use of methods that rely heavily on process to bridge divides between disciplines – especially between those who plan the future of cities and those with nature-related knowledge. By facilitating effective processes that bring together town planners, environmentalists and scientists, we've found that we can help stakeholders to integrate different perspectives and establish a more holistic view of cities as complex ecological systems (see Case Study 9A).

CASE STUDIES



FROM UNA RIVERS:

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN DIFFERENT SECTORS AND DISCIPLINES IN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA

CASE STUDY 9A VISIONING AND SCENARIO PLANNING IN TANZANIA

The processes of visioning and scenario planning proved to be instrumental in bringing about change in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania.

Various stakeholders from different disciplines were brought together in one room to engage in exercises that required them to imagine possible futures for their city. Initially, the focus of these activities was on producing visions as a main output. However, as time went on, it became clear that the approach itself was generating learnings and discussions that were far more valuable than a tangible end product.

While developing visions and planning for scenarios, officials engaged in conversations that significantly broadened their perspectives and unlocked new understandings. While some individuals' views of the future were fairly one-dimensional at the start of the exercise, they became more complex and layered as others shared their thoughts and flagged additional points that needed to be considered. Important areas of tension also emerged around whether or not current policies, plans and interventions were sufficient to positively alter the future, or whether bigger change was necessary in order to make certain visions a reality. Such discussions served as key learning opportunities for many participants, who subsequently changed their views and outlook on what needs to be achieved going forward.

In essence, these exercises helped to facilitate systems thinking and encourage stakeholders to see past their own blind spots^{3, 4, 5}. They exposed participants to alternative perspectives, shed light on areas of uncertainty and built strong, collaborative partnerships between town planners and environmentalists by giving them a common vision to work towards.

In this case, these activities only had such value because a) a diverse range of practitioners from different disciplines were included in the discussions and b) the focus was on the process, not just the outputs. Had the process itself not been prioritised – and had we simply hired consultants to produce visions and develop plans – it's unlikely we would have seen the same fundamental shifts in perspective that are so necessary if nature is to be put at the forefront of city planning.



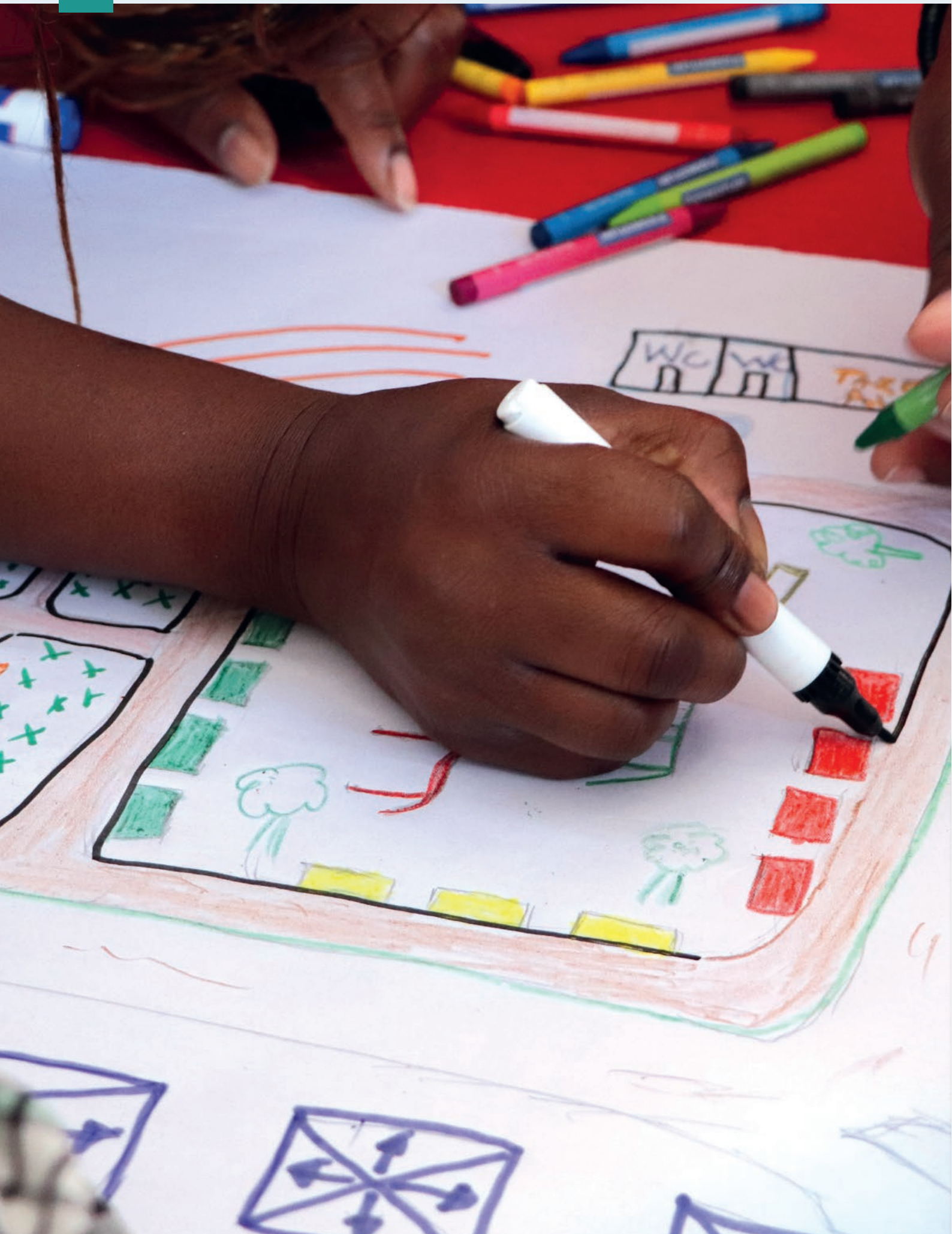
Nacala, Mozambique. Co-creating information together is crucial in shifting planning and decision making, thereby generating entry points for mainstreaming in practice.

CASE STUDY 9B DESIGNING HOTSPOT MAPS IN MALAWI

See Case Study 7B in Handbook 7 to learn more about how the process used to design hotspot maps in Malawi has served to close the gap between land-use planners and environmental officers.

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Stakeholders from a variety of backgrounds, disciplines, sectors and levels of governance develop action pathways to improve urban natural asset planning.





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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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