



Local Governments
for Sustainability
AFRICA

Addressing loss and damage in African cities

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The Covenant of Mayors in Sub-Saharan Africa (CoM SSA) is the regional chapter of the largest global alliance for city climate leadership, the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy. It is a partnership between city networks, development agencies and funding institutions, supporting cities in meeting the dual challenge of climate change and access to sustainable energy to achieve a low-emission, climate resilient and sustainable energy future.

Since 2015, CoM SSA has been a major catalyst for local climate action in the region, with political commitment from over 390 local governments. The purpose of CoM SSA is to support local governments in moving from climate planning to implementation, with a focus on unlocking climate finance at the local level.

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Addressing loss and damage in African cities

Global efforts to combat climate change are alarmingly off-track. As a result of locked-in carbon emissions and insufficient adaptation measures, many countries are grappling with unavoidable and irreversible climate impacts, which, under the Paris Agreement, are defined as "loss and damage." A 2023 global assessment estimated that developing countries incurred USD 109 billion in losses from major climate events in 2022 alone¹. By 2030, the Independent High-Level Expert Group on Climate Finance projects that developing countries may require between USD 200–400 billion annually to address loss and damage². Risk is disproportionately higher for low-income and climate-vulnerable populations; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [Sixth Assessment Report](#) (AR6) highlights rapidly rising exposure in African cities due to urbanization, infrastructure gaps and low-elevation coastal growth.

While climate impacts affect both urban and rural areas, cities bear heightened economic and non-economic loss and damage (NELD) due to their geographical exposure, high population densities, and the concentration of assets and economic activities. Rapidly urbanising countries are particularly vulnerable to loss and damage, with over one billion people living in informal settlements, which exacerbates their climate risks³. According to the⁴ IPCC (AR6), urban centres, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, face increased exposure to climate hazards such as floods, droughts, heatwaves, and sea-level rise. The compounded effects of these impacts on housing, infrastructure, livelihoods, health and ecosystems are particularly severe, disproportionately affecting women, children, the elderly, and low-income communities. For example, in 2019, Cyclone Idai caused catastrophic flooding in Beira, Mozambique, damaging 90% of the city's infrastructure and displacing thousands of people.

Despite the acute urban loss and damage, global discussions regarding the unavoidable consequences for cities is not given the attention, resources, and support that it requires, and the current discourse largely overlooks the specific vulnerabilities and needs of cities.

¹ Julie-Anne Richards et al., *The Loss and Damage Finance Landscape* (Washington, DC: Loss and Damage Collaboration / Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung, 2023).

² Songwe V., Stern N, and Bhattacharya A., [Finance for climate action: Scaling up investment for climate and development](#) (London: Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2022).

³ UN-Habitat, [World Cities Report 2020: The Value of Sustainable Urbanization](#), (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2022).

⁴ IPCC Sixth Assessment Report, Chapter 6: Cities, settlements and key infrastructure, 2022.

Moreover, there is a significant disconnect between the access to loss and damage finance and local actors interacting directly with vulnerable populations at the subnational level. Without direct access and simplified application processes of the financial mechanisms, African cities risk being excluded from the necessary resources to protect their populations, which may further perpetuate systemic inequities that leave urban communities marginalised in the global conversation on climate finance.

The ongoing evolution of the Loss and Damage (L&D) Fund (often referred to as the Fund for Responding to Loss and Damage (FRLD)), presents a unique opportunity for African cities to be central players in decision-making processes. Formal COP/CMA arrangements and Board decisions were adopted at COP29 (Baku), enabling the Fund to receive and disburse resources; the World Bank is serving as interim host/trustee under an independent Board. By proactively engaging in these conversations, through city-to-city solidarity and collaboration with like-minded organisations, cities can advocate for funding mechanisms that are more inclusive, flexible, and suited to their unique challenges. This is not only crucial for securing the financial resources needed but also for ensuring that urban areas have the capacity to manage data, adapt and build resilience against the residual impacts of climate change.



What is loss and damage?

Loss and damage, as defined by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), refers to the **residual impacts of climate change that cannot be prevented through mitigation or reduced through adaptation**. It includes **both sudden extreme events** (e.g. cyclones, floods, heatwaves) and **slow-onset processes** (e.g. sea-level rise, desertification, glacial retreat).

Key terms and definitions

Loss

Irreversible impacts that cannot be recovered or restored, including the loss of human life, cultural heritage, ecosystems, biodiversity, and livelihoods.

Damage

Impacts that are repairable or replaceable, such as damaged infrastructure, agricultural losses, or disruptions to services like health, education, and water.

Economic loss and damage

Tangible and quantifiable monetary losses related to market-based assets, such as property, infrastructure, agricultural production, and business revenue.

Non-economic loss and damage (NELD)

Losses that are not easily quantifiable in financial terms, such as loss of human life, cultural heritage, psychological well-being, community displacement, and loss or degradation of ecosystem services.

Vulnerability to loss and damage in urban areas is shaped by exposure, sensitivity, and adaptive capacity. **Here are three examples:**

Many cities experience **urban heat islands**, where dense infrastructure and reduced green spaces trap more heat, significantly amplifying the impacts of heatwaves. This results in higher mortality rates, particularly among vulnerable populations, and reduces labour productivity, which in turn strains local economies. The exposure of these cities to extreme heat is further exacerbated by the concentration of people and economic activities in urban centres.

Informal settlements, which house large portions of urban populations, are especially vulnerable to flooding and pollution. These areas often lack proper infrastructure, adequate drainage systems, and resilience to climate impacts, making them highly sensitive to the effects of extreme weather events. Furthermore, their adaptive capacity is often limited due to socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, inadequate access to resources, and the lack of social protection for informal workers, particularly women. Informal workers in these settlements face heightened vulnerability to economic shocks, such as job losses, wage reductions, and disrupted livelihoods caused by extreme weather events or disasters.

Coastal urban cities face increased risks from rising sea levels, which threaten critical infrastructure, displace communities, and exacerbate coastal erosion. These cities' exposure to sea-level rise is compounded by their sensitivity, as coastal infrastructure is often inadequately protected, and by limited adaptive capacity, with many cities lacking the financial and technical resources to implement effective coastal defences. In Lagos, recent analysis indicates up to ~3 m sea-level rise scenarios and extreme rainfall flooding by 2050, with ~1.4 million residents directly at risk absent further measures; the cost of inaction approaches tens of billions of dollars by 2050.

Challenges in valuation and reporting

- **Lack of consensus on methodologies** for calculating and attributing loss and damage, especially NELD, which poses ethical challenges when assigning financial value to elements such as human life or cultural identity. These impacts are often undervalued.
- **Indirect costs** (e.g. debt burdens, long-term economic loss) and slow-onset impacts often go unreported, while loss and damage costs are frequently calculated based on direct economic costs from disasters.
- **Limited tools for urban-specific loss and damage** assessment hinder effective city-level planning and resilience-building.

Equity, justice, and systemic barriers

- Loss and damage is fundamentally about **climate justice**, disproportionately affecting communities, cities and countries that have contributed least to global emissions. Vulnerabilities are compounded by factors such as gender, generation, location within cities, and informality.
- **Systemic barriers** such as limited adaptation financing, physical constraints, and delays in implementation exacerbate residual loss and damage, particularly as the frequency and intensity of extreme events continue to increase.

Loss and damage actions are part of a continuum

While there are definitional gaps—especially regarding the relationship between loss and damage, adaptation, and disaster risk reduction (DRR)—it is important to view actions as part of a continuum, including *ex-ante* (preventative) measures to reduce risk, such as adaptation and DRR strategies, and *ex-post* (reactive) measures for recovery, rehabilitation, and reconstruction following disasters.



The important role of cities in addressing loss and damage

Local governments and cities are uniquely positioned to act as first responders, leverage local knowledge, and implement tailored solutions for reducing the impacts of climate change. In this regard, numerous African cities are demonstrating innovative approaches to mitigate loss and damage.

Preparing for and anticipating climate risks

Cities are actively working to reduce loss and damage before they occur, through anticipatory measures such as land use planning, building codes, and zoning regulations. These urban governance tools help cities prepare for climate hazards like flooding, coastal erosion, and extreme heat. For instance, Freetown in Sierra Leone is investing in anticipatory land use planning to prevent informal construction in high-risk areas, such as floodplains and unstable slopes. This proactive approach not only reduces immediate exposure to climate risks but also helps build long-term resilience. Cities are building anticipatory capacity; for example, Freetown's Chief Heat Officer led the city's 2025 Heat Action Plan targeting market shade, reflective roofs and 'cool corridors' for vulnerable communities. These officers are responsible for raising awareness, coordinating heat action plans, encouraging nature-based approaches and ensuring that vulnerable populations are protected from heatwaves. Collaboration with national agencies on early warning systems further enhances preparedness, ensuring that climate risks are communicated effectively and timely to local communities.

Acting as early responders

During climate-related crises, cities often maintain essential services like emergency shelters, healthcare, and social assistance. Despite limited budgets, many cities redirect resources from long-term adaptation projects to immediate disaster relief. For example, several local governments have started allocating a portion of their budgets to DRR or partnering with international actors to generate innovative financing solutions, such as forecast-based financing and resilience bonds. Forecast-based financing allows cities to release funds for anticipatory actions when extreme weather is predicted, helping them respond quickly to imminent threats. Similarly, resilience bonds are being used to fund early warning systems and invest in critical infrastructure like flood barriers or digital payment platforms for disaster relief.

Generating data and evidence

Cities, with their proximity to communities, are in a prime position to collect local data on both economic and non-economic loss and damage. Through collaborations with local communities, city governments can identify vulnerabilities, assess risks, and target interventions more effectively.

Local data allows cities to generate evidence of the specific types of losses their populations face, whether in terms of damaged infrastructure, loss of livelihoods, or impacts on social well-being, including mental health and community displacement. This data is essential for both local decision-making and for advocating for more context-specific support at the national and international levels. For instance, Dakar has developed a citywide climate impact database, tracking economic and non-economic losses to inform local resilience planning and international funding applications.

Promoting cooperation and advocacy for international and regional agendas

Cities can also play a vital role in global climate action by sharing their expertise, building solidarity through subnational networks, and advocating for their interests in global forums. Initiatives such as mayoral diplomacy and joint statements or calls-to-action are powerful tools for cities to influence national and multilateral discussions on loss and damage. Furthermore, African cities' active participation in forums such as the African Climate Summit and Covenant of Mayors in Sub-Saharan Africa's Regional Mayors Forum has strengthened their collective voice on loss and damage.

Leading and delivering loss and damage programming

Many cities have disaster management, humanitarian aid programming, and adaptation projects in place, but often these efforts are not recognised within national or international frameworks due to a lack of shared definitions or clear categorisation of loss and damage actions. Cities need to be recognised for the critical role they play in addressing both the immediate and long-term impacts of climate change. Without formal recognition, cities will struggle to access critical loss and damage funding, despite being responsible for frontline response efforts.

While African cities play a crucial role in addressing loss and damage, their ability to do so is often constrained by overstretched budgets and insufficient investment in critical infrastructure, such as flood protection, urban planning, and disaster management systems.

Moreover, global climate finance architecture is not designed to meet the specific needs of cities, particularly in low-income countries. Only a small fraction of global climate finance is directed toward urban resilience, and most of this funding is allocated to middle-income countries. As a result, many African cities struggle to access the resources they need to tackle loss and damage. Africa attracted USD 43.7 bn in 2021/22 (up 48% vs. 2019/20), but this remains far below needs; the adaptation share slipped to 32% from 39% in 2019/20. This underfunding further exacerbates existing vulnerabilities and hampers cities' ability to drive the structural transformation needed to enhance resilience and reduce long-term risks.

The evolving policy and finance landscape for loss and damage

The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund (L&D Fund) at COP27 in November 2022 marked a significant milestone in the global response to climate change impacts, particularly for vulnerable countries and communities. However, while the Fund acknowledges the financing gap for local governments, questions remain about how it will operationalise direct urban access. This Fund aims to address the substantial financing gap that these regions face as they cope with escalating losses and damages. Historically, subnational actors—including cities—have struggled to access international climate finance due to restrictive eligibility criteria and administrative burdens.

In practice, ensuring local access requires simplified procedures and unconditional, grant-based financing targeted at the most vulnerable. This means prioritising rapid, transparent and predictable disbursements to frontline cities and community-based organisations. Simplifying access procedures will be critical to the effectiveness of the Fund, particularly for local actors who may not have the infrastructure to navigate complex financial systems⁵. Lessons can be drawn from past challenges, such as the Green Climate Fund's (GCF) lengthy accreditation process, which has often excluded municipal actors from direct access.

While the Fund's establishment is a major step forward, pledges totalled ~USD 788.8 million as of 30 June 2025, well short of the USD 200–400 billion/yr estimated need by 2030 for loss and damage in developing countries. Formal COP/CMA arrangements adopted at COP29 have enabled the Fund to start receiving and disbursing resources, with the World Bank serving as interim host/trustee under an independent Board. Although a significant commitment, this falls far short of the USD 400 billion needed annually to address loss and damage in developing countries. For context, adaptation finance alone has faced persistent shortfalls—developed countries committed to mobilising USD 100 billion annually by 2020, but this target was only partially met years later. This shortfall highlights a stark reality: financial commitments must be both increased and sustained to ensure that vulnerable communities are adequately supported. Cities – the frontlines of climate impacts – cannot afford further delays in accessing financial relief. Developed nations, as the primary historical contributors to climate change, must play a pivotal role in closing this funding gap to meet the urgent needs of those facing mounting climate impacts. The size and replenishment of the fund will dictate its long-term capacity to respond to loss and damage globally, including the level of support it can offer to cities and other stakeholders involved in climate adaptation and resilience-building efforts.

⁵ Pill, M and Hammersley, G., [A climate loss and damage fund that works](#) (Lowy Institute's IndoPacific Development Centre, 9 September 2024).

Without substantial and reliable funding, the ambition and scale of the fund will remain constrained, limiting its ability to address the increasing urgency of climate impacts. Moreover, it is critical that the fund includes a dedicated financing window for urban areas, which face unique climate risks. Many previous climate finance mechanisms have overlooked urban resilience needs, resulting in a lack of funding for key priorities such as informal settlement upgrading, flood protection, and urban early warning systems. Yet, cities, particularly in the Global South, are experiencing increasingly severe climate shocks, including urban heat islands, pollution, flooding, and coastal erosion. The vulnerabilities of informal settlements and secondary cities, which typically lack the necessary infrastructure and services, require urgent attention. Without a dedicated mechanism for urban resilience, these communities risk being left behind in the fund's broader distribution.

In addition to physical risks, slow-onset events—such as sea-level rise and desertification—pose structural threats to urban economies and infrastructure. It is also essential that NELD, including displacement, the erosion of cultural heritage, and the loss of traditional livelihoods, be incorporated into the fund's operational guidelines. These aspects are often underrepresented, despite their significance for affected communities. One of the core challenges of the fund's operationalisation lies in defining vulnerability and establishing eligibility criteria. Currently, there is no universally accepted framework for determining which entities qualify for funding. Suggested approaches include assessing vulnerability to risk based on metrics such as GDP percentage, economic activity disruptions, or the number of affected individuals. However, such frameworks often fail to capture the full complexity of urban vulnerability, particularly the challenges posed by informal economies, informal settlements, urban migration, and demographic pressures that significantly heighten the risks faced by cities. Therefore, any eligibility criteria must reflect the diversity of urban contexts and ensure that vulnerable urban populations are adequately recognised. Drawing on successful models of devolved climate finance, such as Kenya's County Climate Funds, could help guide the design of urban-accessible mechanisms within the L&D Fund.

While finance is critical, capacity building is equally essential to ensure that local governments can absorb and deploy funding effectively. Aligning the L&D Fund's objectives with existing mechanisms, such as the Santiago Network for Loss and Damage (SNLD) and the Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage (WIM), is essential to ensure that cities receive targeted, urban-specific resources that support climate adaptation at the community level. Capacity-building initiatives should focus on providing technical assistance, project preparation support, and streamlined reporting requirements to ease the burden on under-resourced local governments. Additionally, it is critical to provide accessible information in local languages and formats, ensuring that inclusive participation is possible in recovery and resilience planning efforts.

As the loss and damage landscape continues to evolve, significant decisions regarding scope, scale, eligibility, and operational modalities are still under discussion.

Despite the major strides in terms of operationalisation, progress is still needed to establish direct mechanisms for urban access. The formal arrangements between the COP (overseeing the Paris Agreement), the CMA (governing the UNFCCC), and the fund's board were endorsed at COP29, allowing the fund to begin receiving and disbursing funds. However, the current funding architecture remains insufficient for addressing the full scope of urban challenges, and cities must take an active role in advocating for specific urban-focused provisions within the fund.

Given the complex, multifactorial nature of climate impacts, no single financial mechanism will be able to address all aspects of urban loss and damage. In addition, the escalating costs of both economic and non-economic losses are becoming increasingly evident. Economic losses alone are projected to range from USD 447 billion to USD 894 billion per year by 2030 for developing countries. With complex matters and rising costs, the need for effective and accessible support therefore requires a layered approach, combining various funding mechanisms to meet the diverse immediate and long-term impacts of climate change on urban areas. Alternative financing options, for instance, through private-sector contributions, philanthropy and bonds should be carefully considered by the international community.

The following table outlines several innovative financial mechanisms options (non-exhaustive list) for cities in addressing loss and damage, showcasing a diverse set of instruments that can complement each other and fill gaps in the current financing landscape. By integrating multiple financial instruments, cities can create a more resilient response system that can adapt to various types of climate shocks and stresses. These mechanisms can also be complemented by social protection systems and other socially inclusive insurance schemes.



Innovative financial tools and risk instruments⁶

Risk reduction	Forecast-based financing	Anticipatory action taken before an event happens. This includes early action protocols that define responses and trigger disbursements. These measures mitigate greater loss and damage, and include planned evacuations and early warning systems.
	Remittances	Money or goods and services sent from migrant workers and diaspora members to personal networks in home countries. They can finance sudden and slow onset responses and have direct household benefits. Remittances provide a stable source of income and enable long-term planning. See box below.
	Diaspora bonds	Debt instruments issued by a city and purchased by diaspora to raise finance towards loss and damage measures. See box below.

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⁶ Adapted from D Tänzler and T Bernstein, [The landscape of financing options to address human mobility in the context of climate change: Instruments and approaches to finance measures on climate change related migration, displacement and relocation](#) (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH/ adelphi, Bonn and Eschborn/Berlin, 2022).



Risk reduction	Bonds	Debt instruments where a holder pays for the bond with an interest rate over a period, until repaid. Bond structuring can be flexible. Impact bonds can tie rates and repayment to climate-linked targets. Catastrophe bonds are insurance products where maturity and payback are linked to a disaster not happening.
	Microcredit	Access to credit for climate-affected people to take preventative measures. Requires local infrastructure for disbursement.
	Grants, loans, loan forgiveness	Larger loans or grants usually to a governing entity, often tied to a specific programme or outcome. Governments are the recipients, but the beneficiaries can be individuals. Concessional loans can be granted at below market rates. Loan forgiveness can be used to reduce indebtedness and free up resources to respond to climate crises.

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Risk retention	Budget contingency	Provides funds budgeted for in advance and drawn upon when climate events occur. Can occur at national, regional or municipal levels and be disbursed through a range of instruments like small grants, cash, and microcredit.
	Trust funds	Funds specifically to act on climate impacts. Can be established collectively by civil society, government, multilaterals and private actors for specific objectives, such as an urban resilience measure. Pledges can be once-off or regular contributions.
	Climate land banks	Trusts to hold land assets to be used for relocations as and when needed for people vulnerable to climate impacts. They could include housing. Land swaps allow people to exchange existing climate-vulnerable land for banked land.

Risk transfer	Insurance or microinsurance	Transfer risk from the policy holder to provider. Can be used at micro or macro levels to claim for loss and damage after a climate event. If paid quickly it can prevent forced displacement or enable relocation. Insurance schemes are more difficult to define for slow-onset impacts.
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Cash transfers to Malawian cyclone victims

In 2023, the Scottish government, in partnership with the NGO GiveDirectly, provided mobile cash transfers to survivors of Tropical Cyclone Freddy in Nsanje District, southern Malawi. Transfers ranged from USD 766 - 2,676 and were directed to families that had voluntarily relocated with government support. Community members used the cash to meet their basic needs, construct houses and recover assets and livelihoods. Recipients also invested in livestock or started new businesses. Households reported increased savings (200%), increased livestock holdings (145%) and more children in school (21%). Given the highly individualised impacts of disasters, community members appreciated the autonomy to choose how to use their funds. In addition, the use of cash locally, boosted the local economy, minimising some of the cascading loss and damage and easing tensions.

Despite these gains, most recipients remained below pre-cyclone living standards and faced difficult choices between reconstruction and recovery. Livelihood support and other complementary investments or programmes are suggested to amplify the impact of the transfers further.

Large, unrestricted and direct cash transfers are a scalable and community-led approach to loss and damage support, effective in both rural and urban settings. Cash transfers are also transferable and can assist with areas that are not covered in humanitarian or disaster responses. However, urban cash transfer programmes require a higher degree of coordination and a wider level of consultation to stakeholders and service providers than rural environments. Mapping stakeholders and thoroughly understanding local complexities, systems, populations and potential risks is paramount. Existing tools, such as the Cash Transfer Programming in Urban Emergencies Toolkit, can be adapted for urban loss and damage responses.



Remittances for climate action

Remittances have become the most significant external financial flows into Africa, reaching USD 100 billion in 2022 and accounting for nearly 6% of the continent's GDP. Remittances have proven particularly resilient in fragile situations where they comprise an even higher proportion of GDP and are far more equitable than official climate funding concentrated in a few countries. They play a direct role in building household resilience to climate change. Remittance volumes increase during disasters. In 2022, Mercy Corps piloted a programme in conjunction with Remitly to deliver early cyclone warnings to about 5,000 remittance senders. The programme included a discount or free transfer code if people opted to transfer funds to areas of Guatemala forecast to be struck. Digitisation and mobile transfers improve the speed and accessibility of transfers, enable rapid disbursement before a disaster, and provide a database of remittance providers and receivers. Similar forecast-based financing can also apply to slow-onset impacts such as sea-level rise or drought. Remittances are even more impactful when matched by city or national services or funding to enhance their impacts.

Diaspora bonds are debt instruments a city/country issue to raise finance from its diaspora. Countries have issued diaspora bonds to raise funds, diversify funders and engage diaspora populations in long-term infrastructure projects such as the Grand Renaissance Dam in Ethiopia. Diaspora members saw the dam construction as an asset for the country and a way of securing economic security and clean energy. Diaspora bonds can be offered at below-market rates and can be used to raise funds for infrastructure projects, social safety nets, or other projects. Cities could offer similar bonds to diaspora members to address loss and damage.



Data availability, vulnerability assessments and attribution science for loss and damage

Within the loss and damage discourse there is a lack of standardised, comparable, and accessible data. This gap prevents cities from fully understanding the extent of climate risks to their populations, quantify losses, advocate for funding, and implement targeted adaptation strategies. To improve data collection and vulnerability assessments, cities should prioritise gathering **disaggregated, geo-located data**, particularly focusing on the most vulnerable frontline communities. These communities must be at the centre of vulnerability assessments to ensure that solutions address their specific needs. Participatory approaches—where local residents contribute to data collection and risk assessments—are essential for ensuring that policies reflect lived realities.

Additionally, assessments must **incorporate NELD**, which include intangible but profound impacts, such as cultural heritage loss, displacement and mental health effects. These aspects are often overlooked, yet they are crucial in capturing the true costs of climate change on effected communities. A comprehensive approach that includes NELD will ensure that financial and policy responses adequately address the full scope of climate-induced harm, providing meaningful support to communities beyond just economic recovery⁷.

International and national funds, including the L&D Fund, require robust data and reliable projections to support funding requests. This highlights the critical importance of **accurate climate data, exposure mapping and vulnerability assessments** for cities seeking to access these financial resources. Investing in high-quality Climate Vulnerability and Risk Assessments (CVRAs)—which include hazard mapping, exposure analysis, and vulnerability profiling—positions cities to better advocate for funding from the L&D Fund, national governments, and other climate finance sources⁸. Strong, reliable data also supports the replenishment of the L&D Fund and enables the scaling of relevant projects that effectively reduce loss and damage risks.

Cities that have completed CVRAs are far more likely to report on long-term climate risks and take proactive adaptation actions. According to CDP's Africa Report on [Benchmarking Progress Towards Climate Safe Cities, States and Regions](#), cities with CVRAs are 2.7 times more likely to report long-term climate risks and take 5.7 times more adaptation actions.

⁷ A Chautard, Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD): policy gaps and recommendations, weADAPT, 3 January 2024, www.preventionweb.net/news/non-economic-loss-and-damage-neld-policy-gaps-and-recommendations

⁸ C40 Cities, Loss and Damage, Challenges and opportunities for city leadership, 2023.

However, despite these promising statistics, completing comprehensive vulnerability assessments is often hindered by limited resources, data silos, and poor coordination between different levels of government (vertical integration) and across various agencies (horizontal integration). In 2023, 1,100 cities reported progress through CDP-ICLEI Track, with all cities on the 'A List' having disclosed adaptation plans and completed CVRAs. In 2024, 112 cities achieved CDP's A-List, including Cape Town and Johannesburg—with A-List cities rising from 13% (2023) to 15% of scored cities.”⁹.

Another crucial factor in securing funding from the L&D Fund, or any climate finance mechanism, is the ability to **attribute the loss or damage to climate change**. The science of attribution links extreme weather events and their impacts to human-induced climate change, providing the necessary evidence to justify funding requests. Without clear attribution, cities risk having their claims deprioritised or dismissed.

Attribution science has made significant advances in recent years, using climate models and historical weather data to determine how much more likely or severe an event was due to climate change. However, many cities lack access to localised attribution studies particularly in African urban environments. Gaps in meteorological monitoring, historical climate records, and research capacity further hinder cities from making strong loss and damage claims.

Many African cities, especially those signatories to the Covenant of Mayors in Sub-Saharan Africa (CoM SSA), face challenges in collecting robust data and developing comprehensive CVRAs due to financial constraints and limited technical capacity. Closing these data gaps and integrating attribution science¹⁰ into urban risk assessments are essential for unlocking loss and damage finance. By addressing these challenges, cities can better position themselves to access critical financial resources needed for climate adaptation and recovery.

⁹ CoM SSA, ICLEI Africa & CDP, TRACKING TRANSFORMATION: How African cities are driving global climate action through local data, June 2025

¹⁰ Attribution science ensures that the losses experienced are linked directly to climate change, improving eligibility for funding from the L&D Fund and other climate finance sources.

Collaborative efforts with international organisations, civil society, and local communities are key to strengthening data collection and climate risk analysis. Organisations such as ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability - Africa, C40, USAID, UNDP, and the United Nations University, offer training programmes, peer exchange opportunities, and open-source tools to help cities build technical capacity. For example, by December 2023, ICLEI Africa as hosts of the CoM SSA secretariat supported 107 CoM SSA signatory cities in formulating components of their climate action plans. Many NGOs also play a key role in supporting grassroots and community-level participation, providing crucial assistance in conducting participatory assessments that reflect local realities¹¹.

Cities can also leverage resources of the SNLD to develop standardised CVRAs and methodologies for assessing loss and damage. The SNLD issued its first Request for Proposals in November 2024, focusing on loss and damage responses in Vanuatu. By engaging with SNLD and other expert networks, cities can strengthen their technical capacities, improve data reliability, and develop stronger loss and damage responses that align with international funding criteria.



¹¹ D Roberts and M Spires, [Building African cities that cope with climate shocks – experts outline what it will take](#) (The Conversation, 1 December 2023).

Utilising existing platforms and building advocacy alliances for loss and damage

As international and national negotiations continue, cities and local communities must actively engage in existing advocacy platforms to amplify their needs and influence decision-making. Ensuring that the final governance arrangements of the L&D Fund reflect urban realities requires sustained pressure on policymakers. **Key advocacy channels include:**

The Local Governments and Municipal Authorities Constituency (LGMA) – the official voice of cities and regions in the climate negotiating process.

City networks such as ICLEI and the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), which coordinate joint advocacy efforts.

At COP29, local and regional governments mobilised over 100 political leaders and 500 delegates to advocate for urban interests. The dedicated Multilevel Action and Urbanisation Pavilion, coordinated by ICLEI, focused on highlighting the vital role of cities in loss and damage solutions. Additionally, a [Positioning Paper on Loss and Damage](#) and a [Call to Action](#) was launched by the LGMA, UCLG and the Global Taskforce for Local and Regional Governments¹².

This document called for the inclusion of local governments in the decision-making process and emphasised the need for targeted, city-specific loss and damage action.

These city networks are pushing for observer status on the L&D Fund Board. While the L&D Fund Governance Instrument allows for observer participation, the criteria for observer status are still being decided. ICLEI and other organisations are advocating for cities to have a formal seat at the table to ensure that local perspectives are included in shaping global loss and damage finance policies.

Without strong urban advocacy and clear data-driven claims, cities risk being marginalised in loss and damage financing discussions. Now is the time for cities to strengthen their data systems, invest in attribution science, and collectively push for direct urban access to the L&D Fund.

¹² UCLG, [UCLG Positioning Paper on Loss and Damage](#), COP29, November 2024.

Maximising the benefits of city-to-city solidarity and mayoral influence

City networks are powerful mechanisms for mobilising financial resources, facilitating technical exchanges, and promoting city-to-city peer learning. Between 2015 and 2021, decentralised development assistance, often channelled through city networks, increased by 38%. Notable examples include C40 Cities, which advances inclusive urban climate action and has produced key [reports](#) on urban loss and damage, equipping city leaders with tools for risk prevention and disaster preparedness.

City-to-city solidarity is also evident in initiatives like the Mayors Migration Council's [Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees](#), addressing climate-induced migration, and the C40-Mayor Migration Council's [Global Mayors Task Force on Climate and Migration](#), which fosters cooperation on displacement challenges. Such collaborations enable mayors to influence global loss and damage discussions, mobilising public opinion and strengthening political will. When mayors present unified positions, particularly on urban climate justice, they significantly impact national and international negotiations, aggregate resources, and enhance collective city influence on the global stage.

Enhancing multilevel governance approaches for loss and damage

Multilevel governance is essential for integrating loss and damage responses into climate adaptation, disaster risk management, and development planning. However, poor coordination between local, regional, and national levels often hinders effective risk assessments, adaptation planning, and implementation. Many national governments are still developing their approach to loss and damage and may lack resources and expertise to address it comprehensively. This presents an opportunity for cities to lead by engaging in national task forces, legal frameworks and policy dialogues.

At COP22, the UNFCCC invited its Parties to appoint a **loss and damage contact point**, yet only 16 African countries have done so¹³. By engaging with these national contact persons, cities can influence policy decisions and improve funding access.

¹³ These countries include Benin, Burundi, the Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Gambia, Ghana, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Sudan, and Togo.

Advocating for the integration of urban loss and damage in NDCs

Cities, local governments and city networks have long advocated for integrating urban issues into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). While 49 out of 54 African countries reference urban sustainability in their NDCs, the depth of integration varies. Only 14 countries prioritise urban issues¹⁴, and loss and damage remains significantly underrepresented¹⁵. A 2022 CARE study found that most African NDCs quantify adaptation costs but lack specific methodologies or guidance on incorporating loss and damage into climate planning. Currently, only Guinea and Comoros mention it in their NDCs¹⁶. Initiatives such as the **Coalition for High Ambition Multilevel Partnerships for Climate Action (CHAMP)**, launched at COP28, promote the inclusion of subnational actors in NDC co-design and implementation. To address these gaps, cities, in collaboration with technical organisations like ICLEI Africa, can help develop tools and capacity-building programmes to integrate urban loss and damage considerations into national climate plans¹⁷.



¹⁴ African Development Bank, [Urban Development and the African NDCs: From national commitments to City Climate Action](#) (SDU, 2022) page 34.

¹⁵ T Fransen et al, [9 Things to Know About National Climate Plans \(NDCs\)](#) (World Resources Institute, 7 December 2023).

¹⁶ S Harmeling, [Climate loss and damage in Africa: massive costs on the horizon](#) (CARE International, 10 November 2022).

¹⁷ <https://talkofthecities.iclei.org/catalysing-multilevel-climate-action-champ-endorsers-strategize-together-at-daring-cities-roundtable/>

Recommended actions for cities to address loss and damage

Funding mechanisms for loss and damage

- Advocate for new, additional, sufficient, and predictable funding streams for loss and damage for cities, ensuring these funds are not repurposed from development or climate finance.
- Request direct access and disbursement modalities for cities and subnational entities ensuring the L&D Fund reflects the principle of subsidiarity to enable faster, localised and effective responses to urban challenges.
- Advocate for a dedicated urban funding window within the L&D Fund to address the unique dimensions of loss and damage in cities, including informal settlements, informal economies, secondary cities, urban heat islands, flooding, rural-to-urban displacement, and population density.
- Ensure that the L&D Fund's allocation mechanism accounts for multiple urban vulnerabilities and prioritise support for women, gender-diverse individuals, children and youth, indigenous peoples, people living with disabilities, and climate migrants.
- Push for simplified application processes and the reduction of restrictive conditionalities and bureaucratic burdens to improve city access to the L&D Fund.
- Advocate for a transparent and accountable framework for tracking and reporting for the Fund's distribution to uphold its commitments to cities and vulnerable communities.
- Call for the active involvement of cities, mayors, and residents in shaping loss and damage funding solutions to ensure locally driven, demand-responsive approaches.
- Promote grant-based funding that does not exacerbate the heavy debt burden of African countries, while scaling up foreign exchange risk instruments, debt forgiveness, and local currency lending, and opposing non-concessional loans and export credits.
- Expand eligibility criteria to include urban-specific vulnerabilities such as climate-induced displacement and public health challenges.
- Advocate for the recognition of loss and damage as a third pillar of climate finance, alongside mitigation and adaptation, and push for sustained, equitable and accessible funding commitments for cities.
- Explore innovative financial solutions tailored to urban contexts, such as remittances, cash transfers, mobile operations, and crowdfunding, and develop guidelines for their effective implementation.
- Launch small-scale, city-level projects to demonstrate capacity, build credibility, and unlock further funding from national and international sources, including readiness support for accessing additional funding pools.

- Push for continued progress in climate negotiations to scale up funding and technical support for African cities.

Data collection, attribution science, and vulnerability assessment strategies

- Invest in high-quality climate vulnerability and risk assessments to strengthen funding proposals and loss and damage responses.
- Prioritise disaggregated and geo-located data to better understand climate impacts in urban hotspots.
- Partner with existing research platforms and institutions to reduce costs and enhance capacity.
- Strengthen attribution science capabilities to link climate events with impacts – critical for loss and damage funding.
- Advocate for standardised methodologies to ensure consistency assessing climate-related loss and damage.
- Promote inclusive and equitable participation in data collection to capture non-economic losses, such as cultural and psychological impacts.

City-to-government engagement for addressing loss and damage

- Promote multi-level governance solutions to strengthen coordination between local, regional and national governments in addressing loss and damage, climate risk, and adaptation.
- Emphasise the frontline role of cities and local governments in addressing loss and damage, advocating for greater involvement of mayors in national policy formulation and climate action programming.
- Ensure urban vulnerabilities are integrated into national climate and development policies, budgets, and reporting frameworks such as NAPs, NDCs, and Biennial Transparency Reports (BTRs), using urban-specific data to inform decision-making.
- Advocate national endorsement of CHAMP (endorsed by 77 countries as of October 2025) to strengthen multilevel climate cooperation and embed cities in NDC/NAP processes.
- Establish dedicated task forces focused on localisation and city-to-city solidarity to drive inclusive and effective decision-making.
- Strengthen technical capacity for national and city-level loss and damage focal points to improve access to and utilisation of the L&D Fund for effective climate action.



Strengthening city-to-city cooperation for loss and damage

- Foster city-to-city cooperation to share resources, knowledge, and best practices, and to mobilise support for loss and damage action.
- Leverage in-kind technical support from other cities, networks, and civil society organisations.
- Strengthen collaboration among cities within the same country to align loss and damage planning and influence national policy and government actions.
- Align city advocacy with key messages from civil society and city networks through forums like the CoM SSA RMF to create a unified voice on loss and damage issues.
- Utilise bilateral partnerships (e.g. sister cities) and city networks for technical assistance, fostering cross-city learning and resource sharing.
- Amplify city voices on urban-specific loss and damage issues such as cultural heritage protection, displacement, climate migration, restoration, and service delivery systems.
- Drive global advocacy partnerships to secure robust and equitable loss and damage financing by maintaining momentum and pressure on international climate agenda.
- Engage global forums and climate negotiations, including COP meetings, to strengthen the role of cities and local governments in shaping loss and damage responses.

Building partnerships for effective loss and damage responses

- Engage with international and African technical support and capacity-building initiatives.
- Collaborate with city networks (ICLEI, UCLG and C40) to influence global loss and damage developments regarding the L&D Fund, its access modalities, and operational frameworks.
- Work with research institutions and technical partners to develop methodologies for integrating urban loss and damage into climate policies.
- Strengthen local government capacity to access and utilise climate finance effectively.

Conclusion

African cities must be recognised not just as recipients of loss and damage funding but as active decision-makers in shaping its allocation and mobilisation. Direct access to funding is crucial to avoid delays and bureaucratic hurdles that hinder rapid response efforts.

Cities across Africa have already demonstrated leadership in locally led adaptation, blending traditional knowledge with innovation to build resilience. These experiences should inform global and national loss and damage mechanisms to ensure they address both physical destruction and intangible, non-economic damage and loss in urban areas.

As frontline responders to climate impacts, cities are also hubs of innovation and political influence. Their proximity to affected communities allows them to swiftly implement locally tailored solutions. Thus, they must play a central role in shaping policy frameworks that reflect their specific needs. By leveraging networks, forming strategic alliances, and participating in high-level negotiations, cities can ensure that urban priorities are integrated into the evolving L&D Fund.

With critical decisions on the fund's distribution mechanisms expected by 2025—including at COP30—cities have a pivotal opportunity to influence its structure. To avoid the pitfalls of past climate finance mechanisms, funding must be direct, timely, and accountable, prioritising the most vulnerable populations. By actively engaging in these processes, cities can help shape a transformative climate finance system that strengthens urban resilience and effectively addresses the growing challenges of loss and damage.



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