



2025 URBAN ACTION FESTIVAL BY RISE AFRICA

REALISING UNBOUND POSSIBILITIES THROUGH POLICY, RESEARCH, CREATIVITY AND PRACTICE

CONVENED BY ICLEI AFRICA AND CHANGING CITIES

**RISE
AFRICA**
Inspiring Action for Sustainable Cities

CHANGING
CITIES

ICLEI
Local Governments
for Sustainability
AFRICA

Acknowledgements

The 2025 Action Festival by RISE Africa could not have taken place without technical support for sessions from:

Our generous and engaged partners and facilitators who enriched the programme and made the festival a successful event:

Umi Fund, World Resources Institute, Our Future Cities, African Centre for Cities, City of Cape Town, Surge Africa, Wits School of Governance, OECD, Twyg, The Nature of Cities, Africa Circular, Strong Cities Network, South x South, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre, Sand Technologies, Open Cities Lab, Climate Story Lab, African Climate Alliance, Procomun, Radio Savia, Cityscapes, Food Jams & Making Kos

Our diligent technical support team and rapporteurs:

Zakiyya Atkins, Sinethemba Mthethwa, Amy Murgatroyd, Luka Dreyer, Mulesa Lumina, Kabelo Williams, Jarita Kassen, Erin Hill, Ruby Schalit, Jodi Allemeier, Niklas Scheuer, Ivan Pauw, Kiera Crowe Pettersson, Jokudu Guya, Tiago Damasceno, Bongiwwe Simka, Clara Marais & Luke Metelerkamp.

A big thank you to all who joined RISE Africa 2025 as facilitators, panellists, speakers and participants!

Please cite this document as: ICLEI Africa. 2025. 2025 Urban Action Festival by RISE Africa. Cape Town: ICLEI Africa

This report was compiled by: Vida Madighi-Oghu and Paul Currie

Design and layout: Widaad Pienaar





Foreword

Africa's urban future demands that we move beyond conventional approaches. As our cities grapple with the interconnected challenges of climate impacts, resource constraints and rapid growth, we cannot afford inaction. Instead, we must embrace hope as an active force for transformation.

RISE Africa's fifth Urban Action Festival, Realising Unbound Possibilities, represents a pivotal moment in our collective journey. Over five years, we have built a movement that refuses to separate dreaming from doing, creativity from policy, or research from practice. This year's theme challenged us to break down silos and forge unlikely collaborations across disciplines, sectors and perspectives.

The path to inclusive, resilient and sustainable cities requires more than incremental change. It demands imaginative policy-making, localised solutions, and the courage to venture into uncharted territory. Our cities are sites of both crisis and innovation, and we must harness their transformative potential together if we are to create an urban future where communities thrive.

This is our collective dream. Let us rise to meet it.

Kobie Brand
Regional Director: ICLEI Africa



Reimagining by Deborah Johnson

There is a running joke in my country
They say when you're born Nigerian it
means life and the rest of the world
have already scored you a two-zero.

This means when you have skin like
mine the starting line transforms into
something you have to climb to reach

While others are already running

We laugh about it but it's not really
funny

This joke leaves a bitter taste in our
mouths

Crawls into our hearts and fills it with
worry

Because we did not invent this joke

Our grandparents did

And after all these years.

It can still be said

Because nothing has changed

And so just like those who came
before us we have to pretend it is still
funny

I am asked what my greatest fears are
and I say cockroaches

Because it is too much of a mouthful
to say that my greatest fear is having
Africa be that bitter taste in my mouth
that crawls into my chest and fills it
with worry

Or be the heirloom joke we hand down
to a new generation where they laugh
because nothing has changed

Or that I don't want us to be an eternal
ball of potential

Spinning around what could have
been

Instead of becoming something
So what can we become ?

What do you believe we can become ?
How far do you think our hands will
stretch,

Can we touch the moon from here?

Can we build a babel that leads us
into in each others tounge

Can we build cities that do not
crumble under the weight of the
mountains our faith could not move

Will we have enough water and
children in schools

Will our air be clean enough to
breathe

Will our forests become arid or grow
Lillies in spring

What boxes have you put our cities in

Where do you think is our limit

Where do you think is YOUR limit in
this skin

So Yes the rest of the word is running

And we are not the rest of the world
We are people who defy odds to exist
in spite of

Watch us turn sand into dynasties

Leap upon the water they try to drown
us in,

Soar, even when we have no physical
wings

So we must run the way we know
how

We run with our culture

With our drums

With faith in these minds that know
how to dream up solutions

We run with our visions

And our songs

With these feet that were born
dancing

To the rhythm in our blood

We run with conviction that our Africa
Is so much more than they know

And it takes a special kind of people
to look at and see that there is glory
ahead

To hear an abundance of rain in a
drought

To imagine

And then become

So the question is

Are we those kind of people?



Setting the scene

Urbanisation is an irreversible reality already shaping Africa's future; we must embrace and actively transform our cities... or risk being overwhelmed by them.

We live in a state of catalytic tension. Steeped in a polycrisis that interlays access to resources, climate impacts, unemployment, limited mobility, human-nature conflict and deficits of leadership, it is easy for us to become paralysed, especially when many of the drivers of these crises seem beyond our control. As individuals and communities, we are impacted by the choices and actions made by others — by businesses, networks, organisations, leaders, neighbours — both within and beyond the African context. Despite the paralytic potential of this polycrisis, we ask, **'How can we not act?!'** Amidst acknowledging the already strained systems in our African cities, we are still drawn to them as sites of hope and innovation. Hope has an incredible property that helps us navigate the winding pathways of possibility, revealing that even in the midst of calamity, there are always ways to address our challenges. How might we inspire individuals and communities to take action to meet their present and future dreams? Better yet, what transformations need to take place for their imaginaries to become tangible, positively impacting their lives?

As thinkers, doers and enablers, we find ourselves in cycles of learning and unlearning, striving for placemaking strategies that drive positive change. Cities demonstrate how the everyday choices made by world-builders — individuals, communities, businesses and others — directly and indirectly influence one another. The interconnected nature of our cities necessitates mutual recognition and understanding. Our urban environments are complex and multifaceted, requiring a range of perspectives to be reflected through stages of daydreaming, developing and realising cities. Creativity fosters these diverse viewpoints, leading to comprehensive research that informs sound policy decisions, thus driving truly transformative cycles that shape societal practices and pave the future. As stakeholders in Africa's urban futures, our objective is to shape better futures through improved policies and governance that take on imaginative, whole-of-society approaches. Shaping modes of transformation begins with conversations that cut across silos, sectors, expertise and disciplines. In the words of Ugandan filmmaker and visual storyteller Abul Ajak, **'Our future is not a personal pursuit but a collective dream.'**

”

“The festival has inspired me to “to think of different cultural aspects, especially regarding the formation, process and metabolism of cities and urban sector,”

~ Minwoo Chun, ICLEI Korea

The African Union's 2024 Africa Urban Forum emphasised the need to fast-track actions to realise UN Sustainable Development Goal 11 — to create inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements — as well to address the looming climate change crisis. Faced with this imperative, it is tempting to cling to familiar systems and only entertain unknown possibilities in daydreams. As we address the various urban challenges around us, we may default to normative processes that have 'always worked'. We need to fundamentally challenge this practice and allow innovative policy-making to become the starting point: processes that take on a more localised, consultative and transdisciplinary approach; that invoke creativity in how we convene, learn and decide; that inspire new ways of thinking and doing. We need to rethink how practice informs research and vice versa to enable pragmatic approaches that influence residents' lived realities. **Affecting change demands venturing into uncharted territory with the support of unlikely allies,** building collaborations that can mobilise, strengthen and better inform the urban realities we need. Here, hope acts not as a parachute, distraction or lie, but as the very impetus that propels us forward.

In the last 5 years, RISE Africa has woven disciplinary and emotive themes through 4 virtual festivals. NEXT URBAN CHAMPIONS (2021) amplified the efforts of those pushing novel ideas and projects to rethink and reanimate urban spaces.

CREATIVITY / AGENCY / URGENCY (2022) spoke to the tension that African urbanists experience in driving thoughtful, imaginative, contextually appropriate, empowering and participatory processes, in the midst of growing anxiety and urgency to make change happen now.

The Cities We Want (2023) echoed the African Union Agenda 2063's 'The Africa We Want', critiquing the minimal acknowledgement of urbanism in Agenda 2063, and embraced a range of visions for how cities could achieve the aspiration of shared prosperity.

SOLUTIONS ONLY: failures also (2024) expanded on the provocation that if we wish to become 'solutions oriented' we must centre solutions in our discourse, not challenges, and broadened our exploration to acknowledge and welcome the power of failure as necessary for innovation and learning.



REALISING UNBOUND POSSIBILITIES through Policy, Research, Creativity & Practice offers a nod to the core ethos of RISE Africa, beckoning unlikely allies to embrace the tension and complexity of our time, to centre joy and possibility as sources of innovation, and to cross disciplinary and sectoral boundaries. In this way, RISE Africa invites us to collectively articulate tangible pathways to meet our greatest aspirations. Realising boundless possibilities is not the burden of a singular individual, city or government, but requires the collective effort of diverse thinkers, city dwellers and change-makers. Under this banner, we rise to Abul Ajak's call for our dreams to be boundless, stretching beyond the current conditions of our cities and collectively looking towards what they could become.

RISE Africa welcomed all who dare to REALISE UNBOUND POSSIBILITIES to bring your dreams, knowledge, experiences and commitments to the 5th edition of the Urban Action Festival by RISE Africa.

249

Attendees

74

Speakers

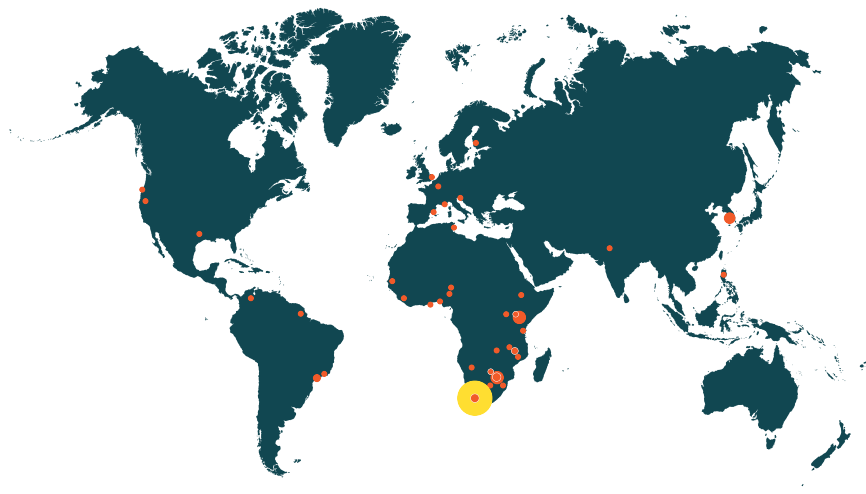
37

Sessions



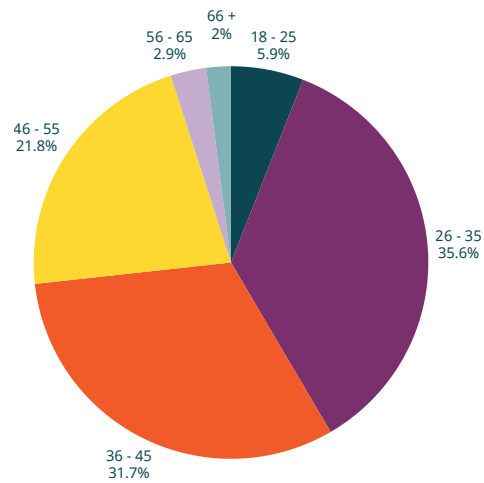


Who was at the 2025 Urban Action Festival?

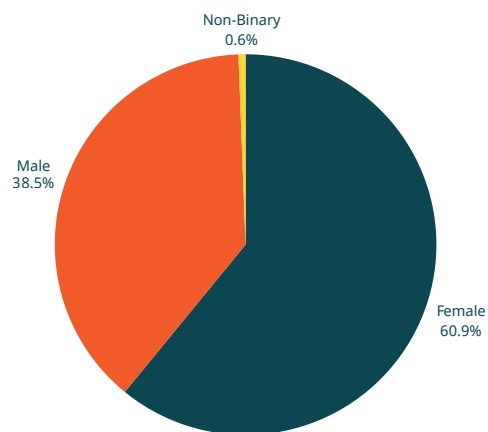




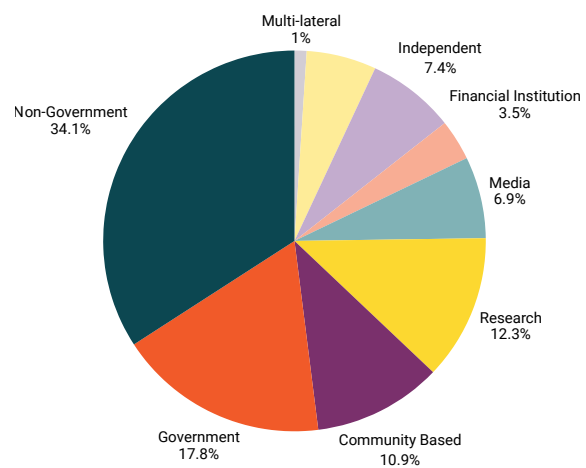
% Of total attendees per age group



% Of total attendees per gender category



% Of total attendees per organisation



What happened at the 2025 Urban Action Festival?

[Link to festival mural board](#)

In summary

At the entrance of the District Six Homecoming Centre, anyone crossing the threshold was asked two questions: *How hopeful or dismal do we believe our future will be, and how much agency do we feel we have to drive change?*

For six years, RISE Africa, convened by ICLEI Africa, in partnership with Changing Cities, has gathered a diverse, passionate audience invested in homegrown solutions for sustainable African cities. This year, meeting in person for the first time after years of virtually connecting, the anticipation to embrace familiar strangers was palpable. Poised at the edge of four days of questioning the gap between our present realities and the futures we demand, most participants positioned themselves in hope for what might come.

The festival offered space to air the lingering question – what comes after dreaming?

The responses were charged by provocative thought leaders, atypical approaches to convening, and an openness to challenge the room we stood in.

One answer stood out: people are hungry for what Reil Miller described in the opening plenary as “good compost” – ideas not bound by ambitions of legacy or preservation but that allow flexible, evolving futures built for everyone in our cities.

One standout session, *Urban central: Redefining intermediary cities*, explored the overlooked role of intermediary cities in Africa’s development. Participants examined models such as Lusaka’s Community Development Fund, empowering local councillors and communities to shape priorities. The conversation also highlighted neglect of informal economies in planning, calling for informality to be embraced as a source of resilience and creativity. In the second plenary, *Navigating the joys and anguish of African cities*, Rose Molokoane urged inclusion:

”

“You are talking about 2050. I am talking about now. People are making plans but are not including us in the plans.”

~ Rose Molokoane

In *Kickstarting your city’s digital and data transformation*, hosted by Open Cities Lab, participants explored the importance of data maturity in governance through a four-stage framework to improve data quality, openness and reliability.

The session highlighted how transparent data ecosystems can enable more inclusive decision-making.

Speculative sessions like *Time Warp* invited participants to stretch imaginations beyond immediate crises, shifting narratives from scarcity, to possibility and care. Similarly, *Our Futures, Our Stories* unpacked myths about African youth, calling for honest engagement with both challenges and radical potential. Participants shared reflections on what it means to live and build futures in cities marked by crises but also extraordinary creativity.

A recurring theme was the cost and politics of sustainable development. Speakers noted that while sustainable building costs more upfront, it is an essential investment in ecological and social resilience. Edgar Pieterse urged, “embody a profound scepticism of everything that feels firm and solid in our projections of what our cities should be. Step into the decay and grief, and dance in those cracks to reimagine a new understanding of city making, in a strictly African way.”

Across discussions, key themes included climate resilience, community co-creation, open data, and narrative change reflecting lived African realities. These reaffirmed the importance of spaces like RISE Africa – where honesty, imagination and solidarity seed new ways of making cities more just and inclusive.

”

“Change demands courage. Warns the city dweller. Ask the buchu, protea, and geraniums... An audacious flame paging through concrete and steel. Prying stories open to seed new growth.”

~ Siphokazi Jonas at the festival's close

There are no clear answers yet for what will emerge when ideas mingle between plans and action. But Jonas left us with a provocation – to embody the spirit of the fynbos when confronted with the regenerative power of fire, and to say: *more, more, more.*

”

“The festival inspired me to incorporate human rights-based approaches in all project implementation if I want them to be sustainable.”

~ Henry Powell, Chief Administrator, Bo City Council

”

“The Festival has inspired me to actively seek out and connect with others doing similar work. Hearing diverse perspectives and approaches has reminded me of the value of collaboration and learning from peers. I plan to be more intentional about building relationships and sharing experiences within and beyond my organisation.”

~ Mawande Ngidi, AMALI Data Programme Lead

Cities in motion exhibition

This exhibition brought together six years of visual storytelling from the RISE Africa photo competitions, tracing urban life across the continent and inviting us to explore motion not as mere movement, but as a layered, living language of transformation, evolution and growth.

[Link to virtual exhibition](#)

[Link to catalogue](#)





Nyumani (Home) By Ben Kamuntu

Goma njo nyumbani (Goma is Home)
Goma a choisi la vie
Goma njo nyumbani (Goma is Home)
Goma njo nyumbani (Goma is Home)
Goma a choisi la vie
Goma njo nyumbani (Goma is Home)

La vue de ton volcan est hors pair
Sa flamme affronte les nuages
Je la sens dans la profondeur de ton cratère
Ma plume tremblote et y nage

La nuit sur des cartouches timorées
des lâches abrutis
Le matin ton visage rayonne sous les éclairs de l'aurore
Enracinée tu as déjà optée pour la vie
Tes pierres volcaniques réchauffent ta poésie multicolore

Résiliente tu es, résistante tu es,
résilience tu es !
Ballotée, méprisée, même suffocante
tu poursuis tes pas
Ton lac Kivu t'arrose de son air parfumé
Tes artistes talentueux brillent comme tes volcans

La boue jusqu'au genou tu continues ton trimard
Tu glisses tu tombes mais tu n'hésites de te relever
Tu traverses le couloir de te pires cauchemars
Tes larmes c'est de l'eau et du sel qui soignent tes plaies

Je te rêve en vraie Ville touristique
Capitale non humanitaire mais avec pleine d'humanité
Le bord de ton Lac accessible à tout le public
Avec des pas sur le sable teintés d'hétérogénéité

Tes challenges te fortifient
Dans ta transcendance notre dessein est encre
Tes merveilles font rimer nos goûts et nos envies
Avec toi c'est l'histoire d'amour et d'amitié

Avec toi j'ai compris le sens de sourire
Des liens intimes et la force de résister
J'ai appris le sens de petites qualités à murir
J'ai remporté des petites victoires à célébrer
Avec toi je crédite mon compte de mes meilleurs souvenirs
Que je raconterai à mes enfants quand je serai vieux

Goma au ciel d'azur plongé dans ton lac
Goma orangé et violet est ton silence
Ton lac de lave fait voguer ton salut sur le kayak
Goma au lac vers abreuvoir de ton espérance
Même embrasée impossible de consumer ce que tu nous as enseigné
Nkulula calciné mais son courage ne cesse d'inspirer
Même suffocante, ton cœur n'arrête de battre pour ta destinée

Celle de vivre et de continuer à aimer

A PJB filles et garçons continuent à
dinker (in basket ball)

Détruisez leur terrain mais dans leurs
âmes l'esprit d'équipe est déjà encre

Au foyer culturel les jeunes continuent
à jouer au djembé

Et la rythmique de Jo continue à les
tonifier

Le parc de Virunga n'a pas le projet
d'immigrer ni Key ni TMB ni Yolé

Le Jogging haïku (n'a pas arrêté)
arrêter, chaque dimanche matin
toutes nos routes sont bondées

Amani Festival fait vibrer nos cœurs
chaque année

Goma Slam Session progresse avec
ses slameurs amoureux et révoltés

La Lucha n'arrête de percer le tunnel
social de justice et de dignité

Comme le dit les jeunes de l'Office :
en tout cas Goma ne tombera jamais

Goma njo nyumbani

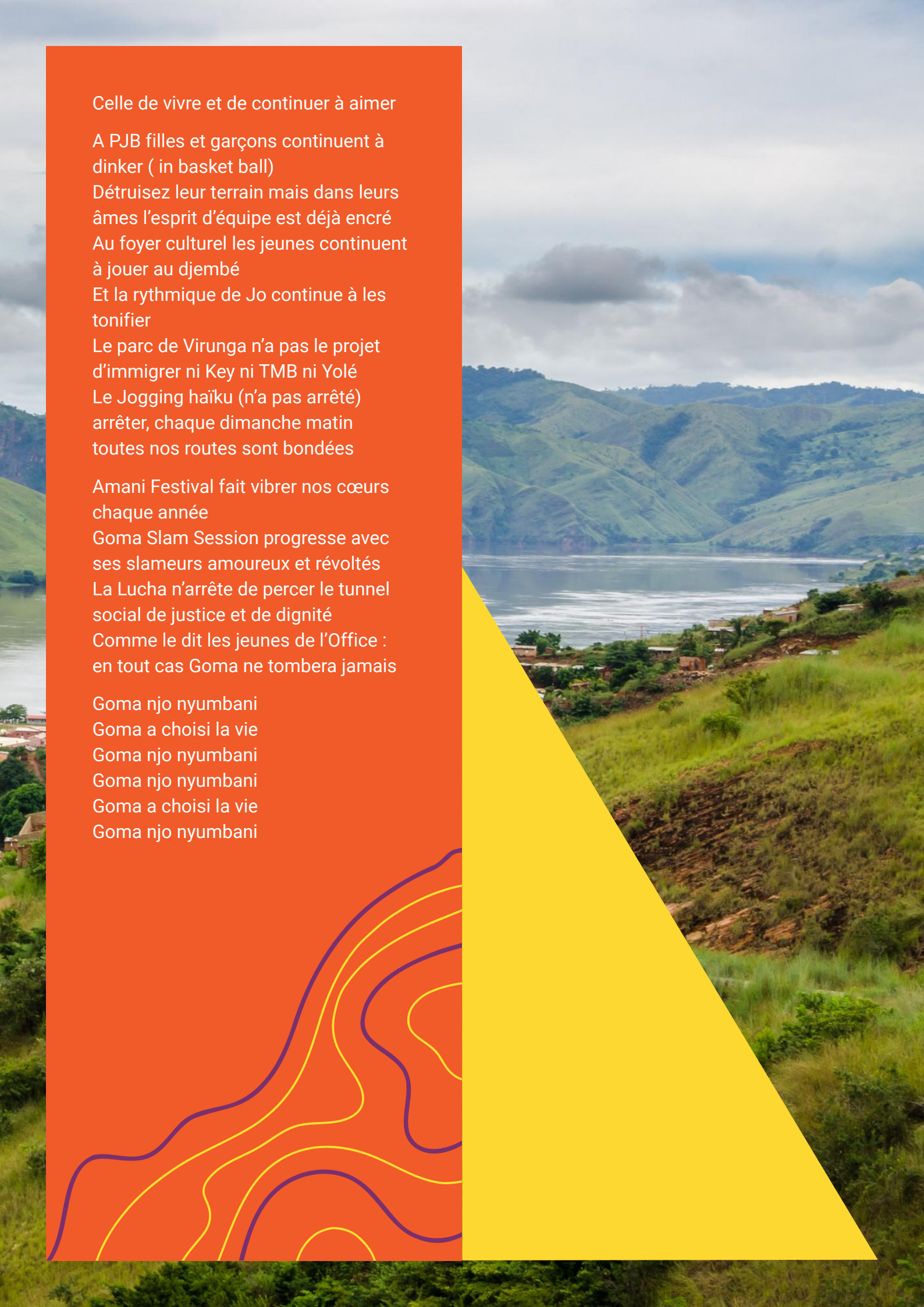
Goma a choisi la vie

Goma njo nyumbani

Goma njo nyumbani

Goma a choisi la vie

Goma njo nyumbani



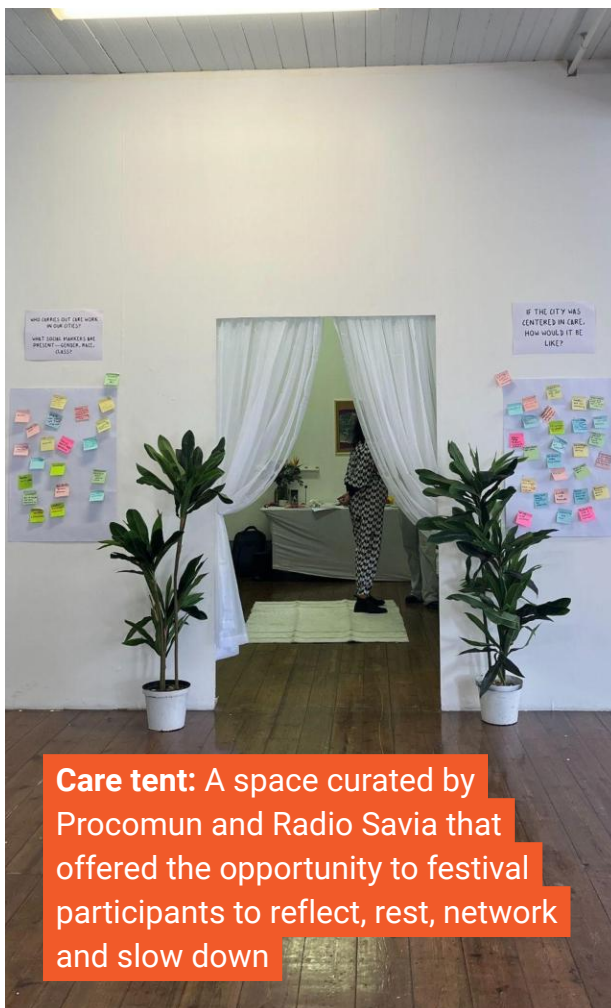
Festival highlights



Workshop: Igniting social action - Impact campaign with climate story lab



Installation: Message to the Future, presented by Climate Lounge & DearTomorrow



Care tent: A space curated by Procomun and Radio Savia that offered the opportunity to festival participants to reflect, rest, network and slow down



Dining experience: Weaving indigenous through local traditions - Encouraging our palates to be African



Microtalks: Engaging two-minute presentations by festival participants highlighting their locally-driven actions towards shaping more sustainable African cities



Workshop: Exploring urban futures, human rights and nature in a changing climate



Exhibition: Our futures, our stories: Ideas, imaginaries and climate perspectives from youth in the global South

Plenary sessions

A curated journey through insights and solutions presented by Africa's leading sustainability experts and policy changemakers.

”

“I commit to working and living with(more) care(fully). I really enjoyed the care room and how that really made me reflect on the need to create spaces of care and reflection in all gatherings, businesses, public spaces etc.”

~ Jackie May, Twyg Founder





Cultivating imaginative capabilities & embracing uncertain futures

Urban future experts, philosophers and creative practitioners grounded the festival in the reminder that cities are more than physical structures; they are living systems with flows and cracks, shaped by critical intangible processes.

”

“As a philosopher of process, I am rightfully suspicious of design. Decay is just as prestigious as design. Cities are making and unmaking; as are our bodies. Cracks invite us to play, to grieve and to experiment in a regenerative, empowering context.”

~ Bayo Akomolafe, Executive Director and Chief Curator, Emergence Network



Speakers

Geci Karuri-Sebina, Wits School of Governance, Conjuring_X, Associate Professor, Co-Curator

Edgar Pieterse, African Centre for Cities, Founding Director

Bayo Akomolafe, Emergence Network, Executive Director and Chief Curator

Riel Miller, Wits School of Governance, Adjunct Professor

Malika Ndlovu, RISE Africa Poetry Curator

Hadiza Abubakar Ali, Federal Ministry of Art, Culture, Tourism & Creative Economy, Special Assistant to the President on Industry

[Link to mural window](#)

Navigating the joys and anguish of African cities

Reality and the urgency for action

This session reminded us that silence has a cost. When urban development proceeds without the voices of those most affected, we lose the chance to build truly resilient cities. Through shared cases and evidence, leaders across sectors made a strong call for inclusion, collaboration and accountability in shaping our urban futures.

”

“What we always want to remember when we are discussing resilience is people.”

~ Arthur Adeya, Co-Founder, Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI)



Speakers

Mao Amis, African Centre For A Green Economy, Co-founder and Executive Director

Jane Battersby, University of Cape Town, Senior researcher

Ayanda Roji, Johannesburg City Council, Senior Manager: Environmental Education and Research

Hellen Wanjohi, World Resources Institute, Climate & Engagement Lead (Africa)

Jaen Adams, Sand Technologies, Technical Programme Lead

Arthur Adeya, KDI, Co-founder and board treasurer

Dorah Marema, South African Local Government Association, Head Municipal Sustainability Portfolio

Rose Molokoane, Slum Dwellers International, Vice President

Philipp Heinrigs, OECD/SWAC, Head of Division

[Link to mural window](#)





Moving from ideas to action

So, what exactly is an action festival?

The session explored ways to dismantle institutional silos that hinder urban progress, bringing together mayors, innovation experts, advocates and philanthropists in a series of curated dialogues on how collaboration can drive systemic change in cities.

”

“Change happens when we create spaces that make it difficult for people to keep looking away – spaces that serve as tools for building better societies and finding solutions.”

~ Miki Redelinghuys, Director of the Climate Story Lab & Mother City Documentary



Speakers

Aya Chebbi, Nalafem, Founder & President
Chilando Chitangala, City of Lusaka, Zambia, Lord Mayor

Kudzayi Ngwerume, UMI Fund, Head of Communications & Engagement

Georgia Nicolau, Procomum and SouthxSouth, Executive Director

Paul Currie, ICLEI Africa, Director: Urban Systems Unit

Amollo Ambole, Open Cities Lab, Strategic Partnerships Lead

Edwin Andrews, City of Cape Town, Deputy Mayor

Emily Wanja, Doc Society, Director of African Programmes

[Link to mural window](#)

Action sessions

A series of workshops, dialogues and presentations convened by festival organisational partners to inform and inspire action towards more sustainable future cities.

”

“Day one was full of different ways of thinking and I believe we need more of these platforms for expression, dialogue and engagement.”

~ Kathryn Ewing, senior lecturer of urban design and programme convenor MUD programme at the university of Cape Town





Urban Central

Redefining intermediary cities through multilateral partnerships

African cities are learning more from one another than from distant international models. This session by Surge Africa unpacked how peer-exchanges across Africa provide local governments with tangible examples that can inform local solutions.

”

“We need to look for projects that can be driven by the community and outlive the administration.”

~ Mayor Chilando Chitangala,
Lusaka, Zambia



Speakers

Nasreen Al-Amin, Surge Africa, Founder & Director



[Link to mural window](#)

Future of urban food environments workshop

This session explored how food systems must be adaptable to demographic and environmental changes in cities, and touched on how Informal food markets are central to urban food access, and must be recognised in policy.

”

“If you don't have the same value of what should happen in the future, then it will be hard to agree on actions.”

~ Jodi Allemeier, Senior Specialist:
Urban Systems, ICLEI Africa



Speakers

Jodi Allemeier, ICLEI Africa, Senior Specialist:
Urban Systems

Ivan Pauw, ICLEI Africa, Professional Officer



[Link to mural](#)





Futuring in practice

Exploring foresight in urban planning and placemaking

Dr. Maape explored the tension and interaction between two different worldviews, western scientific/archeological knowledge and indigenous knowledge system, particularly in ritual sacred spaces.

”

“What is beautiful for me about experimentation is the recognition of the uncertainty and unknowing, and the real possibility of failure, and of thinking something different tomorrow.”

~ Geci Karuri-Sebina, Associate Professor University of Witwatersrand



Speakers

Sechaba Maape, University of the Witwatersrand



[Link to mural](#)

Mini data strategy inception masterclass

In this session, Amollo Ambole pressed that working with data is not just about collecting data; it is an act of collecting people. Data were presented as humans, their lives and their activities.

”

“We all face challenges in our lives, what matters is how we rise.”

~ Dr Amollo, Partnerships Lead, Open Cities Lab



Speakers

Amollo Ambole, Open Cities Lab, Strategic Partnerships Lead



OPEN CITIES LAB

[Link to mural](#)





Scaling localised solutions with SouthxSouth cities

By bringing together participants from global south countries to share their experiences and solutions, this session unpacked how cultural and traditional knowledge has and can be the source of solutions for urban and environmental challenges we are facing in our communities.

”

“Mobility is not just infrastructure; it is about access, dignity, but it also holds a lot of power.”

~ Akshay Gupta, Haivyya



Speakers

Nasreen Al-Amin, Surge Africa, Founder & Director

Asiphile Khanyile, GroundWork, Zero Waste Project Campaigner



***SUL X SOUTH
SOUTH X SUL***

[Link to mural](#)

Rights, restoration and resilience

Lessons from the Urban Natural Assets programme

City officials working towards human-rights based approaches for nature-based solutions in their cities discussed how language shapes inclusion. It can empower or exclude, and vernacularising human rights is essential for its relevance and uptake in African contexts.

”

“Human rights-based approaches are not about ticking boxes – it’s about being intentional about designing interventions in an inclusive way.”

~ Bongiwe Simka, Professional Officer: Urban Nature & Nature-based Solutions, ICLEI Africa



Speakers

Bongiwe Simka, ICLEI Africa, Professional Officer: Urban Nature & Nature-based Solutions
Kenneth Yaoh Ketor, Cape Coast Metropolitan Assembly, Metropolitan Planning Officer
Henry Powell, Bo City Council, Chief administrator



URBAN NATURAL ASSETS FOR AFRICA
Resilience & restoration for life



Local Governments
for Sustainability

[Link to mural](#)





Cities Redefining Urban Safety and Security

Innovative Approaches for Building Cohesive and Resilient Communities in East & Southern Africa

Urban safety professionals share from their experiences that safety is not a stand-alone service but the result of coordinated action across departments from planning to water, infrastructure and beyond. Breaking silos allows for equitable access to basic services and inclusive policies, which drives efforts to dismantle historical inequalities.

”

“It is not just about criminality — we need to ensure that safety services also address other issues that shape people’s living environments.”

~ Eric Apelgren, Former Head of Department, eThekweni Municipality



Speakers

Eric Apelgren, eThekweni/Durban Municipality ,
Former Head of Department - International and
Intergovernmental Relations

Charl Kitching, Stellenbosch Municipality, Senior
Manager – Protections Services

Cllr Mzwakhe Nqavashe, City of Cape Town,
Councillor

Geofrey Ochieng, Strong Cities ESA Regional
Hub, Networks Officer

**Strong Cities
Network**

[Link to mural](#)

Making partnership work

How cities can drive collective impact

Expert in impact-driven partnerships, Lorryn Steenkamp led a conversation about how effective partnerships are built on clearly defined needs, shared priorities, and long-term relationships.

”

“When you think about impact, it is key to work with cities because this is where challenges are concentrated.”

~ Camille Chaigneau, Senior Projects Lead, AFD



Speakers

Lorryn Steenkamp, City of Cape Town, Technical Partnerships Lead



CITY OF CAPE TOWN
ISIXEKO SASEKAPA
STAD KAAPSTAD

[Link to mural](#)





Leveraging nature in an urban context

Lessons from implementing nature-based solutions and collaborative urban design processes

Drawing from experiences of working with community participants to implement nature-based solutions and foster climate resilience in informal settlements, this session highlighted how such solutions are deeply rooted in indigenous knowledge and lived practice.

”

“One of the keys to building support for NbS, and the preservation of natural spaces, is to quantify their economic value to both the community AND the government.”

~ Sabrina Ohler, Planning Principle, KDI



Speakers

Sabrina Ohler, Planning Principal, Kounkuey Design Initiative



[Link to mural](#)

Time warp

A futures board game

As a session rooted in games and interactive based participation, this session curated by futuring expert Geci Karuri-Sebina, exposed how speculative play can invite broader participation in shaping urban futures.

”

“A game space creates a container for agreeing and disagreeing because it is part of the game.”

~ Leila Kidson, Co-founder, OCTOPI – Social Design



Speakers

Lemeeze Davids, A4 Arts Foundation, ACC, Curator, Facilitator

Blain van Rooyen, Cityscapes Magazine, Graphic Designer

Geci Karuri-Sebina, Wits School of Governance, Conjuring_X, Associate Professor, Co-Curator



URBAN BEYOND GEOGRAPHY
cityscapes

[Link to mural](#)





Arriving at the future

Reporting from the cities we dream of

Through narrative play, this session explored why movements rooted in hope are three times more likely to achieve lasting impact, and how future thinking and storytelling can transform vision into strategy.



Speakers

Claudia Misteli, The Nature of Cities, Associate Director Europe



[Link to mural](#)

From the margins to the mainstream

Equitable water governance in Africa's cities

This session was anchored by the questions: what relationship do you have to water in your city?; who controls water in your city?; who benefits most from water?; and who is left vulnerable or underserved?



Speakers

Hellen Wanjohi, Climate & Engagement Lead (Africa), World Resources Institute



WORLD
RESOURCES
INSTITUTE

[Link to mural](#)

Not just another learning lab

Challenging the concept, rethinking the practice

Based on hands-on work with local communities, this session revealed how the Learning Lab approach can spark innovative solutions for our most pressing socio-ecological challenges, supporting both ongoing learning and targeted interventions.

”

“We need to build cultural norms around behaviour change for climate resilience.”

~ Paul Currie, Director: Urban Systems Unit, ICLEI Africa



Speakers

Kate Strachan, ICLEI Africa, Senior Manager: Climate Change Resilience, Coastal Management & DRR

Hayley Leck, ICLEI Africa, Senior Specialist: Climate Change Research and Resilience

Joanne Douwes, ICLEI Africa, Senior Professional Officer

[Link to mural](#)





Our futures, our stories

Ideas, imaginaries, and climate perspectives from youth in the global South

This session coordinated and led by young urban practitioners, storytellers and advocates debunked the many myths surrounding working with young people, and instead emphasised how young people are the leaders of tomorrow, today.

”

“If we want to talk about African youth, we have to first talk about what it means to be African.”

~ Aya Chebbi



Speakers

Stella Hertantyo, African Climate Alliance, Communications & Storytelling Manager
Deborah Johnson, Rise Young Storytellers
Kevin Ochieng, SomasoAfrika, Co-founder
Akshay Gupta, Haiyya, Programs Director



AFRICAN CLIMATE ALLIANCE



Somaso Afrika

[Link to mural](#)

Africa's urbanisation dynamics 2025

Planning for urban expansion

The African Urbanisation Dynamics report provided a data-driven overview of Africa's current urban landscape and its projected evolution. Highlighting that most growth will occur in secondary and inland cities, the session framed urbanisation as both a political challenge and a strategic opportunity for development.

”

“We need to move away from short-term fragmented effort to long-term integrated strategies.”

~ Victoria Flattau, Urban Development Specialist, African Development Bank



Speakers

Philipp Heinrigs, OECD/SWAC, Head of Division

Kobie Brand, ICLEI, Deputy secretary general & ICLEI Africa, Regional director

Amollo Ambole, Open Cities Lab, Strategic Partnerships Lead

Victoria Flattau, African Development Bank, Senior Urban Development Officer



OPEN CITIES LAB



[Link to mural](#)





Hands-on creative storytelling workshop

Through hands-on participation, this session explored storytelling as a strategic tool for change, capturing the realities and human qualities that are often left out of reports used by decision-makers and policy-makers.

”

“These visuals tell stories that feel familiar and relatable, not only on a personal level but also within the diverse contexts of African cities (paraphrased).”

~ Hellen Wanjohi, Climate & Engagement Lead (Africa), World Resources Institute



Speakers

Claudia Misteli, The Nature of Cities, Associate Director Europe



[Link to mural](#)

The role of AI in human-centred urban development

The Sand Technology team explored how AI can be a tool for communities, helping deliver services more efficiently, and reach those who need them most.

”

“You need to unlearn; first thing you need to do is get out of your office and reach the people.”

~ Jaen Adams, Technical Program Lead, Sand Technologies



Speakers

Priyanka Thakur, Sand Technologies, Business, Analyst

Jaen Adams, Sand Technologies, Technical Programme Lead

Jonas Allen, Sand Technologies, Vice President

Simon Woodland, Sand Technologies, Research Lead



[Link to mural](#)





Nuancing our climate justice narratives

This session bridged the lived perspectives of global south urban systems professionals and climate advocates, and provoked the way climate narratives are shaped to encourage more human centered designed solutions.

”

“My father lives in a place that never should have been built.”

~ Malika Ndlovu, RISE Africa Poetry Coordinator



Speakers

María Paula Murcia Huertas, Mutante, Co-founder, Impact and Project Editor
Nasreen Al-Amin, Surge Africa, Founder & Director



SUL X SOUTH
SOUTH X SUL



[Link to mural](#)

Fire by Siphokazi Jonas

Kill the fire, cries the farmer
Whose rows of crops tremble before
the smoke

Extinugish it, plead the houses
Whose paint blisters
and inner walls sweat
These are the old ways they say
How we have always done things

More, more, more sings the fynbos
To the wind, basking in the blaze
Bulbous bodies unearthed
Out of their tombs by heat
Fire is water to fynbos
Awakening seeds asleep for several
cycles
of regeneration

More, more, more the city move
Kuyafukuzwa
Akulalwa
Kuyabulawa
Kuyavukwa, kuvukw' emaqandeni

Work where you can't afford to live
some make their own affordable
Out of your pocket, from your wrist,
off your back
With knife or employment contract
Taxis graze roads amaphela scavenge
what remains
Big mama, small mama, ou tannie
stall of
Cut flowers, hot magwinya, and
overnight fruit
At the terminus

Make way, make a way,
make a wish big dreamer
Dreams are city always
under construction and never
finished,

City gates buckle under the weight of
looking

Looking for a better life
Looking to leave the villages
Looking for lost ones
Looking to get lost
For something to send back home
Or to build a home
I'm only here for a short while they
said

Decades ago
The city swallows and swallows and
swallows
Then spits amathambo, vumani bo!

Change demands courage
Warns the city dweller
Ask the buchu, protea, and geraniums
Scattering seeds before the charred
air

Brandblom daises sprouting out of
soot

A new cycle begins
Out of phantom bodies
When we commit to the act of
More, more, more,
An audacious flame paging through
concrete and steel
Prying stories open to seed new
growth

The city surrenders to
seasons of fire and
is quenched.



Out and about



Innovative construction and education: Exploring the Dome Classroom and experiential gardens at Green Point Park



”

“Look to nature – it will give you the solutions.”

~ Lindie Buirski, Head: Environmental Capacity Building, Training & Education, City of Cape Town

Cape Town Fresh Produce Market



”

“Culture is the competitive edge that public markets have over supermarkets.”

~ Luke Metelerkamp, Head: African City Food Centre, ICLEI Africa

Circular economy in action: Walk and work the Potsdam circular farm



”

“There is an ability to use whatever space you have to contribute to the food system.”

~ Liezel Kruger-Fountain, Senior Professional Officer, City of Cape Town

~~BBB 47~~

James Taylor

Nam

Jakin May.

~~Calvin~~

Ana Rose Cross

~~Sam~~

2 ~~Wend~~

~~June~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

Hui

Maria Paula Murcia Huertas

AKM

~~Benny~~

Ben

~~Eliza~~

~~Eliza~~

Osaka

~~Jul~~

Ligia Paz

~~John~~

~~T. G.~~

AFR

Inspiring Action for

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

MS

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

Mira Shoh

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

K. Williams

~~Wend~~

~~Wend~~

Kidson.

hmp
D.
sc.

Yamaguchi

~~Star~~
fukken

Alfred Nale
P. P. P.

Claudia Nisteli

AKSHAY

raya Barrios

FAZ

Ali

~~Frank~~
J. P.

Frank

MD

V. S. S. S.

MD

RISE
RICA

for Sustainable Cities

AP. P.

Hellen Wanjohi

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD
Daniel

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

MD

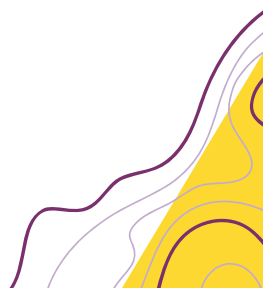
MD

MD

MD

MD

MD



URBAN ACTION
FESTIVAL 2025
by RISE Africa

REALISING UNBOUND POSSIBILITIES

through policy • research • creativity • practice



@ICLEIAfrica



@FutureAfricanCities



ICLEI Africa



www.riseafrica.iclei.org

**RISE
AFRICA**
Inspiring Action for Sustainable Cities

CHANGING
CITIES

ICLEI
Local Governments
for Sustainability
AFRICA