



August 2026

ACTION DOCUMENT

Commitments and actions for building resilience across African cities

AFRICAN CONTINENTAL DIALOGUE SYMPOSIUM
Urban resilience in African cities





OBJECTIVES OF THE SYMPOSIUM

THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL DIALOGUE SYMPOSIUM WAS CONVENED IN JUNE 2026 WITH THE FOLLOWING OBJECTIVES:

- To **take stock** of the current state of urban resilience across African cities, drawing on evidence from practice, policy and community experience.
- To provide a structured space for **peer-to-peer learning** and south-south knowledge exchange between African urban practitioners and policymakers.
- To collectively **envision resilient urban futures** rooted in African contexts, values and aspirations — including principles of solidarity, collective responsibility, and community agency.
- To identify the **systemic changes** — in governance, finance, knowledge, technology, and community practice — needed to accelerate urban resilience across the continent.
- To produce a shared, continent-wide **action agenda** that translates workshop dialogue into concrete, implementable commitments.
- To establish or strengthen partnerships and **collaborative networks** between African cities, regional institutions, development partners, and academic bodies.
- To amplify **African voices and African solutions** in global urban resilience dialogues — including processes under the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement, the New Urban Agenda, and Agenda 2063.

OUR SHARED DIAGNOSIS: WHERE AFRICAN CITIES ARE NOW

Using the **Three Horizons Framework** as part of a visioning methodology, symposium participants began by taking stock of the current realities facing African cities, identifying the dominant systems, pressures and practices that shape urban resilience today. While contexts differ across geographies, city sizes, and national settings, participants identified a set of structural challenges that are broadly shared across the continent. The symposium was attended by city leaders from across diverse African regions.



STRUCTURAL AND POLITICAL BARRIERS

Colonial spatial legacies continue to shape fragmented and inequitable urban landscapes, concentrating infrastructure and services in certain areas while leaving large populations – often in informal settlements – without adequate access to basic services.

Corruption, political instability, and the tendency to politicise technical and administrative functions undermine the continuity of resilience efforts. Election cycles create incentives for short-termism, with projects and investments abandoned or redirected when governments change. African cities also have increasing examples of more participatory governance mechanisms for supporting urban resilience (e.g. multi-stakeholder climate forums chaired by mayors), with a growing recognition of the importance of decentralising governance structures for facilitating meaningful delivery of resilience interventions.

The dynamic nature of African urban areas creates an important opportunity to embed resilience into development pathways from the outset, while avoiding the replication of risk patterns that have emerged in other urban contexts globally. This can help to ensure that African cities adopt resilience measures that are efficient, robust and future-proof.



GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSTRAINTS

There is a strong commitment to effective and inclusive urban governance for resilience building in Africa. Still, action is often hampered by fragmented systems: different spheres of government often operate in silos, resources are often locked in inflexible bureaucratic processes, and local governments often lack the authority and financial capacity needed to act decisively. Resilience is still often treated as the exclusive domain of environmental or climate change departments, rather than being mainstreamed across all functions of city government.

Citizen engagement forums exist in many cities but lack the institutional agency to shape planning outcomes. Weak institutionalisation of gender equality and disability inclusion further constrains governance by limiting the systematic integration of inclusive policies, meaningful participation of youth, women and persons with disabilities in decision-making, and the allocation of adequate resources to address their needs, thereby reinforcing existing inequalities in resilience planning and implementation.

Despite these challenges, African city leaders are increasingly adopting collaborative approaches to addressing governance challenges, with significant participation across the continent in partnerships and networks to support policy revision, advocate for greater agency for cities to address frontline resilience needs, and ensure that the unique challenges and opportunities of urban Africa are accounted for in national and regional governance systems.



FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS AND REACTIVE FUNDING

Municipal budgets are severely constrained, with small tax bases and weak revenue systems. Funding is often reactive, triggered by disaster events, rather than focusing on supporting anticipatory and proactive planning and actions for resilience building. When disasters strike, cities have shown leadership in acting swiftly to support affected communities, but this often requires diverting critical resources from capital investment and service delivery toward emergency response and recovery, deepening long-term infrastructure gaps.

As the global funding landscape shifts and external funding for resilience action becomes more difficult to access, African cities need a stronger mix of public investment, risk-layering, and risk-transfer mechanisms, including partnerships around parametric insurance and other instruments that can protect households, municipal assets, and essential services.

These funding challenges also create space for the development and implementation of equitable, locally appropriate revenue innovations – for example, small emergency or resilience levies, transparently governed and reinvested in disaster risk reduction and preparedness – alongside project preparation, de-risking and diversification of revenue streams that can be scaled responsibly.



INFRASTRUCTURE, INFORMALITY AND RAPID URBANISATION

Rapid urbanisation, including migration and climate-related vulnerability, is raising demands on infrastructure across African cities, particularly water, sanitation, stormwater management, and solid waste systems. Planning and implementation must therefore account for the interconnected movement of people, goods and services within and between informal settlements, peri-urban areas and city centres. This includes safe walkways, accessible public transport, sanitation connections and emergency access routes, bearing in mind that migrants, refugees and displaced populations can face additional barriers to services, tenure and participation.

Widespread informality in housing, livelihoods, and land use creates significant exposure and vulnerability to flooding, fire, heat stress, and other climate hazards. Yet informal settlements and sectors are also sites of critical social capital, innovation and adaptive capacity, providing important foundations for inclusive and resilient urban futures. While informal settlement upgrading processes can face severe bureaucratic bottlenecks, if streamlined and undertaken within an effective and inclusive resilience framework, they can support development of community hubs that have deep societal capacity for resilience programmes that bridge urban and peri-urban systems.

Resilience-oriented, participatory upgrading should therefore be streamlined through planning, land-management and capacity-support processes that enable residents and local authorities to reduce risk together, including through incentives for household and community risk reduction.



CLIMATE HAZARDS AND HUMAN INDUCED PRESSURES

Cities across the continent are facing an increasingly complex hazard profile, including flooding, drought, coastal erosion, sea-level rise, desertification, heat waves, cyclones, landslides, building collapse, and air pollution. These risks are compounded by human pressures such as deforestation, sand mining, unplanned development in high-risk areas, unsafe construction, overflowing landfills, degraded waterways and inadequate wastewater management. Strengthening urban resilience therefore requires more than technical responses alone.

It also requires proactive risk-informed land-use planning, safe and affordable construction, and rights-based de-risking and, where unavoidable, planned relocation undertaken with affected communities rather than through eviction.

Africa's rich indigenous and local knowledge systems can complement scientific approaches by informing forecasting, land and water management, agricultural practices, building techniques and locally appropriate adaptation strategies. At the same time, cultural values that emphasise relationships between people, land, water and ecosystems can support more sustainable urban development when they are meaningfully embedded in planning, governance and everyday urban systems.



DATA, KNOWLEDGE AND TECHNOLOGY GAPS

Many cities lack the data infrastructure, modelling capabilities, and early warning systems needed to understand and respond to climate risks. While examples of successful systems exist — such as community-led early warning systems — there is a need to access new technologies, generate local data, and integrate diverse knowledge systems more strongly within institutional processes.

Communities themselves hold rich knowledge of local hazards, but this knowledge is frequently excluded from formal planning processes. Furthermore, city-generated data remains underutilised, serving primarily reporting requirements rather than informing evidence based development planning and decision making.



OUR VISION: WHAT AFRICAN CITIES CAN BECOME

Participants were invited to articulate bold, ambitious visions for resilient African cities — visions unencumbered by the constraints of the status quo. These visions shared a set of common threads that together constitute an African urban resilience aspiration.

We envision African cities that are **people-centred, inclusive, and interconnected** — where every resident, regardless of income, tenure status, gender, age, or origin, has access to safe, dignified housing; quality education; reliable public services; and meaningful opportunities for economic participation. We envision cities that have moved beyond the colonial spatial order and the Eurocentric planning paradigm — cities that are shaped by African values, African knowledge, and African imaginations.

We envision cities that are **proactively adaptive** — where risks are anticipated and planned for rather than merely responded to; where climate budgets are mainstreamed; where nature-based solutions are woven into the urban fabric; and where communities are empowered as the first line of resilience rather than the last line of defence. We envision cities with robust, inclusive early warning systems — where no household is caught off guard by a flood, storm, or heat event.

We envision smart, walkable cities where **essential services are accessible** within fifteen minutes; where digital infrastructure enables efficient, responsive, and transparent governance; where public transport is a right rather than a commodity; and where the informal sector is recognised, supported, and integrated into the city economy. We envision cities governed by strong, technically capable, and politically insulated institutions — where decentralisation is real, devolution is meaningful, and local communities have genuine power over their own futures.

Above all, we envision a city that is built on solidarity, mutual care, and collective responsibility; a city where no one is left behind when disaster strikes; a city that harnesses its diversity of cultures, knowledge, and imaginations as its greatest asset.



ACTIONS: OUR CONTINENTAL COMMITMENTS



The following actions represent the collective commitments of Symposium participants. They are organised into eight thematic pillars, each grounded in the shared diagnosis and shared vision developed through the Three Horizons process.

They affirm the **agency, authority and frontline role** of African city and local governments, while recognising that resilient cities are built through partnerships rather than by any single actor alone.

The commitments are addressed to city governments, national governments, regional bodies, development partners, civil society, the private sector and academic institutions, with shared but differentiated responsibilities for implementation.



ACTION AREA 1

GOVERNANCE, COORDINATION AND PLANNING

Effective urban resilience demands **transparent, inclusive governance systems** that mainstream resilience across all city functions. Participants identified persistent fragmentation across spheres of government, political interference in technical processes, and a lack of continuity in implementation as the most critical governance barriers to address.



1

Adopt systems that shift towards **transparent, proactive and accountable** governance and planning — drawing a clear line between political decision-making and technical administration and support continuity of projects across political administrations.

2

Strengthen capacity for data-driven decision-making and planning at local government level, including investment in monitoring and evaluation systems to track resilience outcomes.

3

Establish **clear, sequenced implementation plans** that mainstream resilience at the city level, with measurable milestones and assigned accountability.

4

Ensure **multi-level stakeholder engagement** throughout all planning and decision-making processes, building on existing community structures such as ward committees and neighbourhood forums.

5

Strengthen **cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms** to break down siloed approaches to resilience, ensuring finance, infrastructure, environment, and social sectors work in alignment.

6

Carry out **effective communication strategies** and ensure accountability in the delivery of resilience commitments — including those developed in collaboration with vulnerable and marginalised communities.

7

Pursue decentralisation and meaningful **devolution of power** to local government, enabling municipalities to direct resources and shape policy in response to local conditions.

ACTION AREA 2

FINANCE AND INVESTMENT

Chronic underinvestment and reactive funding cycles are among the most significant structural barriers to urban resilience in Africa. Participants called for a fundamental reorientation of financing — from disaster response toward anticipatory, proactive investment — alongside new mechanisms to expand municipal revenue and leverage private capital.



1

Establish **risk-layering and risk-sharing** mechanisms for strengthened resilience, and mainstream these into relevant municipal policy and financial planning frameworks.

2

Develop **project preparation pipelines** that strengthen project feasibility, bankability and cities' ability to attract finance, while also improving expenditure planning, transparent accounting and tracking of resilience investments and outcomes.

3

Expand **municipal own-source revenue** through transparent, equitable and locally appropriate approaches across income groups, including ability-to-pay systems for integrating the informal economy into the revenue base. Revenue collection arrangements should be clear, accountable and designed to protect, rather than penalise, low-income and vulnerable groups.

4

Leverage new **risk-based finance approaches** to enhance local revenue for resilience spending, including parametric insurance, catastrophe bonds, and climate risk financing instruments.

5

Commit to new **land governance frameworks**, such as land value capture, which reinvests in solutions for climate-vulnerable communities and safeguards natural assets from encroachment and degradation.

6

Build strong, **accountable public-private and community partnerships** as a structured means of accessing finance and delivering climate resilience projects, with clear safeguards for public value, affordability, community benefit and rights.

7

Reform funding models, cycles and financing systems to facilitate proactive and anticipatory resilience investment – moving from reactive disaster relief to long-term capital planning – and improve direct, predictable access to funding for local governments within enabling national frameworks.

8

Explore options for implementing **revolving loan facilities**, developed in collaboration with both communities and local municipalities.

ACTION AREA 3

CAPACITIES AND TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE

A deficit in technical and institutional capacity consistently undermines implementation of urban resilience initiatives in African cities. Participants emphasised the need to build **enduring knowledge systems, retain talent, and embed resilience skills** directly within local government — insulated from political churn and short-termism.



1

Establish systems to capture and share lessons from post-disaster and post-crisis experience, enabling **structured learning and improved future action** across and within cities.

2

Implement **Continuous Professional Development programmes** within local government to ensure modern technologies can be understood, procured, and utilised effectively.

3

Conduct **benchmarking exercises** to track challenges and progress against resilience indicators, enabling cities to compare performance and identify priority areas for capacity support.

4

Undertake **action orientated research** to enhance technical knowledge, including risk assessments, hazard mapping, and vulnerability analyses tailored to the local context.

5

Support **targeted training and a broader mindset shift** toward long-term, sustainable, and preventative approaches — challenging reactive default modes within institutions.

6

Restructure recruitment, training and retention systems to **retain talent, mentor youth, and institutionalise skills** — preventing knowledge loss when staff turn over.

7

Embed critical resilience skills — including risk assessment, spatial mapping, community outreach, and climate modelling — as core competencies within municipal departments.

8

Leverage **academic sector partnerships** for knowledge generation, capacity development, and the co-production of locally relevant resilience solutions.

ACTION AREA 4

TECHNOLOGY, DATA AND MULTI-HAZARD APPROACHES

Cities across the continent are grappling with multiple, interacting hazards. Participants called for **investments in integrated, locally-owned data platforms and early warning systems** — emphasising that technology must be accessible, affordable, and accompanied by the capacity to use and maintain it.



1

Encourage **ongoing training and capacity building** to keep pace with emerging technologies and data tools, enabling cities to better understand and address multi-hazard climate risks.

2

Invest in and utilise **accessible, inclusive and actionable urban early warning systems (EWS)**, supported by national government and integrated with local response arrangements, as well as awareness-raising campaigns that use a mix of mobile networks, social media, television, community radio and locally trusted communication channels.

3

Make **data-driven decisions**, drawing on locally relevant and reliable sources — including community-generated data, two-way reporting systems, and integrated urban resilience models that cover food and water security, disaster response, energy and fuel security, as well as other relevant dimensions of resilience.

4

Digitalise and streamline municipal services to enable more effective, responsive government oversight and to reduce the resource burden of in-person service delivery.

5

Establish **integrated and cross-sectoral data platforms** that enable different spheres of government to share information and coordinate action.

6

Work in partnership with local research institutions and knowledge brokers to establish, maintain, and capacitate others to use new technologies — particularly those related to interrelated urban risks.

7

Strengthen **systems for technology sharing and practical skills transfer**, supported by hands-on training, while prioritising locally developed and locally maintained solutions that reduce reliance on costly external software licenses.

ACTION AREA 5

NATURE-BASED SOLUTIONS (NBS)

Africa's cities are deeply interconnected with their natural environments, yet rapid urbanisation, deforestation, sand mining, and inadequate spatial planning have eroded the ecological systems that buffer against climate hazards. Participants called for a **mainstreamed, holistic approach to Nature-Based Solutions (NBS)** that integrates indigenous knowledge, community participation, and nature-positive spatial planning.



1

Adopt a **comprehensive and mainstreamed approach** to NbS across relevant city departments, embedding NbS into capital project delivery, urban planning frameworks, and environmental regulations.

2

Manage urban waterways using water-sensitive design, nature-based solutions and green infrastructure, including flood mitigation and rehabilitation of degraded riparian areas.

3

Leverage indigenous, local and traditional agricultural knowledge, cultural beliefs and practices when designing and implementing NbS, integrating them into urban planning to shape effective, contextually appropriate and livelihood-supporting solutions.

4

Establish **urban ecological corridors** and commit to urban greening to support local biodiversity, capture carbon, naturally manage stormwater, offset urban heat island effects, and improve community wellbeing.

5

Incorporate **nature-positive landscape architecture** and green building practices into urban design guidelines and municipal regulations.

6

Leverage societal capacity for **environmental stewardship**, including community-led cleanups, reforestation, and waste management, through structured citizen science and engagement programmes.

7

Commit to and **incentivise reforestation initiatives**, linking tree-planting programmes to food security, livelihood development, and community ownership, thereby also supporting heat mitigation and carbon sequestration.

ACTION AREA 6

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND INFORMALITY

Informality is a defining feature of African cities that creates challenges but also spurs innovation and can provide opportunities to develop significant adaptive capacity and societal infrastructure. This includes informal and traditional settlements, where upgrading, restructuring or relocation may be needed but must be planned through rights-based, participatory processes. Participants stressed that **community-led approaches, incremental upgrading and participatory planning are not peripheral activities – they are the foundation of resilient cities.**



1

Partner with communities to upgrade informal and traditional settlement areas, strengthen provision of basic services, and address land and tenure constraints through secure and appropriate forms of tenure, transparent land governance and locally workable alternatives where individual purchase is not feasible.

2

Develop **spatial planning frameworks** for informal settlements collaboratively with residents, ensuring that community knowledge and priorities are embedded in all planning outcomes.

3

Establish **community by-laws** outlining resilient practices such as fire safety standards and acceptable land use, developed with and enforced by communities.

4

Scale successful **pilot projects**, such as fire detection systems with mobile alerts, reflective paint on informal structures to reduce heat stress, and community-based early warning systems, informed by local knowledge.

5

Strengthen **mechanisms and platforms for participatory planning**, building on existing social structures such as neighbourhood committees, traditional leadership structures, and community savings groups.

6

Invest in **co-produced and interoperable early warning systems** that are explicitly action-focused, ensuring that communities not only receive warnings but understand what to do and have the capacity to act.

7

De-risk high-density informal settlements in a **rights-based manner**, working with communities rather than imposing displacement.

8

Leverage **sports, recreation and cultural initiatives** to build inclusivity, community cohesion and grassroots buy-in to resilience through nature-based and community-centred solutions.

ACTION AREA 7

INCLUSIVITY, EQUITY AND REDUCING URBAN INEQUALITIES

Resilience that does not address structural inequality, and account for the unique nature of urban inequality is incomplete. Participants emphasised the need to actively **include marginalised groups, women, youth, informal traders, persons with disabilities, and migrants** in planning, decision-making, and the distribution of resilience investments.



1

Ensure **inclusivity and accessibility** as core requirements of resilient infrastructure design and regulations — with particular attention to the needs of women, older persons, youth and people with disabilities.

2

Pursue a decisive **shift from motorist-centric planning to accessible public transport** and walkable cities, recognising public transport as an essential public service rather than a commercial product.

3

Establish programmes that **empower youth on resilience topics** through mobile training centres, community learning hubs, and digital platforms.

4

Invest in **intergenerational co-leadership** by recognising youth as agents of change rather than passive recipients of urban services.

5

Establish initiatives to **enhance the resilience** of the informal sector and small, medium and micro enterprises (SMMEs) while supporting economic growth.

6

Undertake **gender and inclusivity mainstreaming** across all resilience processes, applied consistently as a lens across governance, finance, infrastructure, and community engagement.

7

Establish and formalise **citizen engagement forums** to ensure that community voices are institutionally embedded in planning processes, not treated as consultations after decisions have been made.

ACTION AREA 8

LEARNING AND TRANS-LOCAL EXCHANGE

Africa's cities share common challenges and have developed diverse, innovative solutions. Participants emphasised the untapped potential of South-South learning and called for formal structures that enable cities to **learn from one another, share tools and knowledge, and build collective momentum** for urban resilience.



1

Establish and leverage **regional institutions** dedicated to knowledge transfer and capacity building for urban resilience — serving as repositories of African urban resilience practice and innovation.

2

Set up structured **sister city partnerships** between African cities, harnessing South-South learning through cross-city cooperation and formal knowledge exchange programmes.

3

Work in partnership with local and regional academic institutions to **co-produce knowledge**, develop capacity, and embed resilience expertise within African academic institutions, communities, and local governments.

4

Create and build on existing **shared digital knowledge platforms** and case study libraries to make successful pilots, tools, and approaches accessible to practitioners across the continent.

5

Curate consistent **city-level forums** for engagement, feedback and awareness-raising at the frontlines of resilience action.

6

Establish and participate in **communities of practice and city networks** to facilitate experience sharing, showcase efforts, undertake place-based learning and field trips, data gathering and sharing to unlock finance access, and influence regional and global policy.

7

Encourage **collaborative policy development**, resource pooling, and proactive planning across jurisdictions for transboundary resilience efforts.



OUR CALL TO ACTION

The climate crisis will not wait. African cities — home to hundreds of millions of people, and the fastest-growing urban centres on Earth — cannot afford another decade of reactive, fragmented, underfunded resilience efforts. **The communities that are already living on the frontlines of climate risk deserve transformative, sustained, and principled action.**

We, the participants of the African Continental Dialogue Symposium, present this statement as a local government contribution to shaping and grounding the African Urban Resilience Programme. It reflects the priorities, experiences and commitments of African cities and seeks to ensure that the AURP is informed by the realities of urban implementation across the continent. We call upon:

- **African city and local governments** to adopt these actions as guiding commitments within their resilience strategies, climate action plans, integrated development plans and local governance systems — and to report on implementation progress within twelve months through sharing updates with the African Union, GIZ and ICLEI Africa as implementing partners.
- **National governments** to fulfil their obligations under the Sendai Framework, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda by devolving meaningful financial and governance authority to local governments, and by creating enabling policy, regulatory and fiscal environments for urban resilience.
- **The African Union and regional bodies** to formally recognise this local government statement as an input into the African Urban Resilience Programme, and to support its implementation by establishing institutional homes for African urban resilience knowledge, coordinating technical assistance, and advocating for African urban priorities within global climate and development processes.
- **NGOs** to build effective and appropriate partnerships with local and national governments in their areas of operation, strengthening direct relationships and aligning interventions with locally identified resilience priorities.
- **Development partners and international financial institutions** to align climate finance with African-identified priorities, reduce bureaucratic barriers to accessing resilience funding, and move resources at the speed and scale the crisis demands.
- **The private sector** to engage meaningfully in urban resilience through public-private partnerships, pro-poor investment, and respect for community rights — and not merely as a source of profit extraction from climate risk.
- **Academic and research institutions** to co-produce knowledge with African cities, build local research capacity, and ensure that the evidence base for African urban resilience is generated and owned in Africa.
- **Civil society and community organisations** to continue holding all of the above to account — insisting on inclusive processes, transparent governance, and equity in the distribution of resilience benefits.

We commit to returning — to this forum, and to the continent's emerging community of urban resilience practice — to share what we have done, what has worked, what has not, and what we have learned. The African urban resilience agenda is long-term. It requires patience, consistency, and solidarity. It also requires urgency.



NOTES

NOTES



This project is funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) and supported by the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, through the regional project Resilience Initiative Africa (RIA). The project is implemented by ICLEI Africa in partnership with the African Union Commission and GIZ.