



# URBAN RESILIENCE IN AFRICA



Policy  
Pathways

# INTRODUCTION



African cities are at the forefront of the continent's transformation. They are engines of economic opportunity, hubs of innovation and centres of demographic growth. Yet, they are also the places where climate risks, environmental pressures, service deficits and governance challenges intersect most sharply. Ensuring the ability of African cities to absorb shocks, adapt to emerging risks and steer long-term development pathways is not a secondary concern, as the evidence increasingly shows that the costs of inaction far exceed the costs of investing in prevention, preparedness, disaster risk reduction, and resilience-building measures. Urban resilience is therefore a vital foundation for the continent's future prosperity. It is not merely a technical imperative, but represents a strategic investment in stability, social inclusion and sustainable economic growth across the continent.

Governments at all levels have a central responsibility and unique opportunity to shape resilient urban futures. Through effective policies, institutions, planning systems, financing mechanisms, and multi-hazard early warning and early action systems, they can reduce risk, protect development gains, and safeguard vulnerable populations. Building urban resilience is therefore not only about managing current risks but also about ensuring that rapid urbanisation contributes to sustainable and inclusive growth rather than creating new vulnerabilities.

Recognising this imperative, the African Union Commission (AUC) established the Africa Urban Resilience Programme (AURP) and positioned urban resilience as a continental development priority. The AURP guides Member States, regional institutions and local communities to adopt coordinated, context-specific, and multistakeholder approaches to urban disaster risk reduction, climate adaptation, resilience-building, and urban governance.





## URBAN RESILIENCE IN AFRICA: A CONTINENTAL REVIEW

A first-of-its-kind continental baseline that provides an assessment of urban resilience in Africa and serves as a key evidence base for implementing the AURP. Covering 50 urban areas across 40 countries and all five regions of Africa, the report examines how cities are addressing climate change, disaster risk reduction, early warning and early action systems, governance, infrastructure, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Five in-depth city case studies (Bargny, Senegal; Damietta, Egypt; Ngaoundéré, Cameroon; Windhoek, Namibia; and Zanzibar, Tanzania), illustrate how resilience challenges and opportunities manifest at the local level. The report, which informs this policy brief, identifies priority actions and policy recommendations to strengthen risk-informed urban development, enhance multi-hazard early warning systems, build resilience to current and future shocks, and support coordinated implementation of the AURP across the continent.

## A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO URBAN RESILIENCE IN AFRICA

To assess resilience across diverse African urban contexts, the baseline report uses a six-step approach, asking six guiding questions:



This structured approach enables systemic comparison across highly diverse settings, while keeping the realities of cities and communities central to the analysis. The robust evidence base presented in the report supports policy, investment and multilevel governance reform, enabling Member States to inform and implement measurable action on urban resilience.

## EVIDENCE EMERGING FROM THE CONTINENTAL BASELINE

The report findings are both sobering and encouraging. They indicate that although momentum for resilience is emerging, African urban areas still face deep-rooted constraints in governance, financing, service deliver and climate preparedness. Yet, the continent also demonstrates distinct ingenuity, community-driven innovation and rapidly evolving institutional practices that can be scaled through coherent policy pathways and coordinated action. Collectively, the findings challenge conventional assumptions about urban resilience and point to a number of pertinent cross-cutting results, including the three highlighted below:

### Stronger governance facilitates more effective urban resilience initiatives.

Infrastructure deficits and climate hazards are major known challenges, but the report findings from 50 urban areas shine the spotlight on fragmented governance as a critical underlying barrier to resilience. Overlapping mandates, weak municipal authority and constrained fiscal autonomy hinder cities' ability to turn plans into sustained action. Yet, donor funding remains heavily skewed towards physical infrastructure. Addressing this imbalance is critical for long-term resilience

### Community and informal systems are central to urban resilience.

Community savings groups, women's cooperatives, neighbourhood associations and informal service providers are consistently among the first responders when cities face shocks. Strategies that bypass these systems are incomplete and measurably less effective. The findings illustrate the need to institutionalise community participation in resilience planning and financing to significantly strengthen the reach and durability of resilience efforts

### Closing the gap between ambition and implementation is key to real progress.

Across the continent, resilience plans consistently prioritise stakeholder participation, integrated planning and social cohesion. However, in reality, investment is largely focused on infrastructure, concentrated in larger cities and dependent on short-term external funding. Closing the gap between ambition and implementation is therefore essential to inclusive urban resilience progress

Building on these findings, this policy brief presents eight policy pathways to translate the continental baseline into strategic priorities to strengthen urban resilience across diverse African contexts.

# EIGHT POLICY PATHWAYS



## 1. STRENGTHEN GOVERNANCE COHERENCE AND INSTITUTIONAL MANDATES

### KEY MESSAGE

Coherent governance frameworks accelerate informed decision-making, strengthen implementation and support long-term urban resilience. Overlapping mandates, inconsistent regulations and weak municipal authority are barriers to urban resilience.

### ACTIONS

- Advance a continental roadmap for AU-wide urban resilience governance under the AURP, led by the AUC, including guiding principles, indicative institutional arrangements, and a common set of indicators to support implementation by Member States.
- Align the continental urban resilience roadmap with Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want, relevant AU strategies, continental urbanisation frameworks, and climate agendas through the AURP.
- Support Regional Economic Communities (RECs) in harmonising urban management standards and institutionalising cross-border coordination mechanisms to advance coherent and effective urban resilience governance.
- Enable effective urban resilience governance through clear legal mandates, enhanced municipal empowerment, and formal mechanisms for coordination and collaboration between national and subnational authorities.





## 2. INSTITUTIONALISE MULTI-HAZARD, RISK-INFORMED URBAN PLANNING

### KEY MESSAGE

Risk-informed urban planning strengthens resilience and reduces future losses. Urban planning systems are mostly reactive and siloed, with limited integration of risk assessments, climate scenarios and multi-hazard information. Hazard maps and emergency plans are seldom embedded within statutory processes and investment frameworks.

### ACTIONS

- Promote continental standards for urban risk profiling, covering climate projections, spatial expansion, demographic trends, environmental degradation, and displacement, whilst providing guidance for integrating risk considerations into spatial planning, building codes, and infrastructure development through the AUC under the AURP.
- Integrate multi-hazard risk assessments into urban planning and investment systems, including master plans, zoning regulations, infrastructure design, and public investment frameworks, led by Member States.
- Leverage frontier technologies and data-driven tools to support risk-informed planning, monitoring, and decision-making at national and local levels.
- Strengthen local risk-analysis capacity by supporting municipalities to embed risk scenarios into development standards and planning processes, while fostering partnerships with universities, meteorological services, and research institutions to enhance analytical rigour.



### 3. ENHANCE MUNICIPAL CAPACITY AND FISCAL AUTONOMY

#### KEY MESSAGE

Strong municipal capacity is fundamental to effective spatial planning, service provision and early disaster response. Weak municipal capacity, inadequate staffing and lack of stable financing limit effective resilience strategies, coordination and delivery, as well as long-term investment in resilience.

#### ACTIONS

- Strengthen urban resilience capacities across all levels of government through targeted training in disaster risk management, risk-informed planning, budgeting, procurement, and monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), led by the AUC under the AURP.
- Provide continental guidance on decentralisation and urban finance, including fiscal frameworks that empower cities to mobilise, manage, and sustain resources for resilience investments, through the AUC under the AURP.
- Enhance municipal institutional and financial capacity, particularly in smaller cities, by supporting long-term urban resilience planning and integrating resilience considerations into budgeting, procurement, and public investment management, led by Member States and national authorities.
- Strengthen resilience financing and accountability by expanding local revenue mobilisation, promoting innovative financing mechanisms, and scaling adaptive social protection and risk-transfer instruments for urban resilience, led by Member States.



## 4 ALIGN FINANCING FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN RESILIENCE

### KEY MESSAGE

Integrated financing approaches unlocks resilience and socio-economic development. Financing for urban resilience is often fragmented, misaligned with planning cycles and reliant on short term projects. Weak integration of resilience criteria in urban development and management constrains long-term change.

### ACTIONS

- Promote a shared framework for urban resilience and socio-economic development, bringing together development, climate, and financing partners under the leadership of the AUC through the AURP.
- Adopt common assessment frameworks, screening tools, and indicators that integrate socio-economic development, climate resilience, and risk reduction outcomes, led by the AUC under the AURP.
- Align short-, medium-, and long-term financing priorities to support resilient, inclusive, and sustainable urban development and improve the effectiveness of public and development investments.
- Strengthen coordination and coherence of investments across development and climate finance streams to accelerate resilient urban growth, reduce vulnerability, and enhance socio-economic outcomes.





## 5. LEVERAGE COMMUNITY AND INFORMAL SYSTEMS

### KEY MESSAGE

Community networks systems are central to how African cities respond and adapt to climate shocks. Informal systems increase residents' risk exposure, yet community networks are central to urban resilience and disaster response, though still under-represented in formal planning and decision-making, thereby limiting effective urban resilience interventions.

### ACTIONS

- Provide continental guidance on community-centred urban resilience approaches, including participatory planning, inclusive decision-making, and local accountability mechanisms, through the AUC under the AURP.
- Facilitate peer learning and knowledge exchange on community-based resilience practices, including settlement upgrading, community-led early warning systems, and locally driven recovery, through RECs.
- Strengthen the inclusion of informal settlements and vulnerable groups in urban resilience governance by scaling up inclusive upgrading programmes and ensuring meaningful participation in decision-making, implementation, and MEL, led by Member States and local governments.
- Support community-led resilience building through improved basic services, tenure security, adaptive social protection, and multi-stakeholder partnerships involving public institutions, community organisations, utilities, the private sector, and academia to enhance local ownership, service delivery, and resilience outcomes.



## 6. INSTITUTIONALISE DATA SYSTEMS, LEARNING AND PEER EXCHANGE

### KEY MESSAGE

Evidence-based resilience depends on strong data, learning and peer exchange. Weak MEL and data systems and limited inter-city sharing constrain evidence-based decision-making and cities' ability to adapt effectively, track progress, anticipate new risks, reduce actions that increase vulnerability and scale up successful approaches.

### ACTIONS

- Establish continental and regional platforms for urban resilience data, knowledge sharing, and peer learning, including harmonised indicators and common reporting frameworks, led by the AUC and RECs.
- Strengthen MEL systems by embedding participatory monitoring mechanisms, standardising resilience measurement frameworks, and investing in urban observatories, interoperable data platforms, and research partnerships to support evidence-based planning, led by Member States and local governments.
- Institutionalise adaptive planning and accountability by integrating resilience monitoring into planning and investment cycles, enabling cities to track progress, identify gaps, and adjust priorities based on evolving risks and emerging evidence.
- Build sustainable institutional and technical capacity through dedicated resilience units, workforce development and retention strategies, academic and technical partnerships, and the deployment of emerging technologies to improve data collection, analysis, decision-making, and peer exchange at all levels.





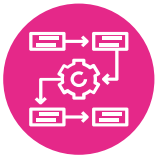
## 7. INCORPORATE URBAN-RURAL SYSTEMS INTO NATIONAL AND REGIONAL RESILIENCE STRATEGIES

### KEY MESSAGE

Integrated urban-rural approaches strengthen resilience outcomes. Urban resilience is shaped by interdependencies such as food systems, water catchments and migration that extend beyond cities but are overlooked in national development frameworks and urban planning.

### ACTIONS

- Promote the integration of urban resilience into territorial development frameworks, including regional development corridors, food-system strategies, peri-urban planning, and climate adaptation initiatives, led by the AUC and RECs.
- Align urban, rural, and regional development policies to strengthen territorial resilience, manage shared risks and resources, and support balanced and inclusive socio-economic development across urban-rural systems, led by Member States.
- Strengthen urban-rural connectivity and coordination by incorporating mobility, migration, and market dynamics into resilience assessments and planning processes, while enhancing intermunicipal and cross-jurisdictional collaboration among local governments and regional authorities.



## 8. PRIORITISE ANTICIPATORY AND TRANSFORMATIVE URBAN RESILIENCE APPROACHES

### KEY MESSAGE

Anticipatory and transformative approaches help cities to adapt to growing and compounding risks. Urban resilience efforts still focus mainly on infrastructure and services to withstand immediate shocks, with limited attention to underlying risk drivers such as unplanned urban expansion, environmental degradation and governance fragmentation.

### ACTIONS

- Promote a shift from reactive and defensive approaches to anticipatory and transformative urban resilience, including nature-based solutions, urban governance innovation, and long-term resilience planning, through continental guidance and incentives provided by the AUC under the AURP.
- Mainstream forward-looking resilience approaches into urban planning and investment decisions by incorporating scenario-based planning, scaling nature-based and resilient infrastructure solutions, and developing financing mechanisms that incentivise preventive and adaptive investments, led by Member States and local governments.
- Strengthen enabling policy, regulatory, and institutional frameworks by reforming land-use systems, updating building regulations and zoning practices, and supporting adaptive governance arrangements that enable cities to pursue transformative resilience objectives, led by national authorities.





# COORDINATED ACTION FOR CLIMATE AND DISASTER RESILIENT AFRICAN CITIES

## URBAN RESILIENCE IS AFRICA'S DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITY

Urban resilience is not merely a technical or humanitarian concern, such as responding to floods, failing infrastructure or climate risks. The comprehensive evidence from the baseline study demonstrates that resilience is a governance and investment choice with profound implications for Africa's long-term development.

The eight priority policy pathways outlined in this brief draw on evidence from 50 cities across 40 countries, to identify the highest-impact opportunities for action. When implemented in a coordinated manner, these pathways can help African cities move from fragmented, donor-dependent resilience initiatives to integrated resilience systems that are locally led, self-sustaining and effective in the long term.

## THE MULTIPLIER EFFECT OF COORDINATED ACTION

Each of the eight priority policy pathways delivers value independently. Their full impact, however, results from coordinated implementation. Strengthened governance enables risk-informed planning; effective planning improves the allocation and impact of financing; sustained financing builds municipal capacity; and stronger capacity supports meaningful community participation. Coordinated systems improve data quality, while better data underpins continuous learning and knowledge exchange.

Coordinated action is what links these elements into a functioning system. Without it, efforts will remain fragmented, delivering isolated gains that are difficult to scale or sustain beyond individual project cycles.



## IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL POLICY

For national policymakers shaping urban and development agendas, resilience offers a way of aligning infrastructure investment, fiscal reform, decentralisation and climate adaptation so they can reinforce one another. Integrating resilience within national development planning strengthens policy coherence and makes public investment more effective.

Countries that act now will be better positioned to mobilise aligned climate finance, meet commitments under the AU's Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want and advance implementation of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, the Paris Agreement and the New Urban Agenda, while delivering tangible and credible outcomes for citizens.

The evidence presented in this policy brief, alongside the Urban Resilience in Africa: A Continental Review report, provides a strong foundation for these efforts. It establishes a continental baseline for assessing national progress and adapting and operationalising priority pathways in local contexts.

## AFRICA'S AGENDA, AFRICA'S EVIDENCE AND AFRICA'S OPPORTUNITY

This policy brief, developed by the AUC under the AURP, reflects a growing body of African-led evidence on what works. Across the continent, cities are already delivering practical resilience solutions, innovating, adapting and governing under fiscal and institutional constraints. These examples provide a credible foundation for national and regional action. The priority now is to move beyond isolated success and translate proven approaches into coordinated, system-wide progress at scale.

Rather than expanding parallel initiatives, the continent needs coordinated efforts anchored in shared evidence, common standards and clear national leadership. Once policy, finance and institutional mandates around resilience are aligned, existing investments can make a far greater impact and accelerate delivery across sectors.

African urban economies, societies and risk profiles are already changing. The choices governments make today will determine whether this transition results in more resilient, inclusive and prosperous cities or lead to increased risk exposure, inequality and long-term pressure on public finances. **We need action now.** By working with partners and institutions at different levels, national governments can help shape a more resilient future for the continent's cities.

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