



# PROMISING PRACTICES ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN URBAN SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA



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HS Number: HS/024/12E  
ISBN Number: (Volume) 978-92-1-132439-6

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## **Acknowledgements**

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Design and layout: Samuel Kinyanjui/UNON  
Editor: Thierry Naudin  
Printer: UNON, Publishing Services Section, Nairobi,  
ISO14001:2004-certified.

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# INTRODUCTION

## PROMISING PRACTICES ON CLIMATE CHANGE IN URBAN SUB- SAHARAN AFRICA



Humankind faces a very dangerous threat. Fuelled by development and manipulation of the environment in the industrial age, the effects of urbanization and climate change are converging in dangerous ways.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a case in point. Desertification, destructive floods and other disasters expose decades of nonexistent urban planning and huge backlogs in basic services. It is not just the Millennium Development Goals, poverty reduction or food security that are now coming under threat, but also the foundations of socio-economic development.

However, alongside these threats is an equally compelling set of opportunities. Although urban areas, with their high concentration of population, industries and infrastructure, are likely to face the most severe impacts of climate change, urbanization will also offer many opportunities to develop cohesive mitigation and adaptation strategies to deal with climate change. The populations, enterprises and authorities of urban centres have major roles to play in these strategies.

### UN-Habitat's Cities and Climate Change Initiative

Many governments south of the Sahara have developed National Adaptation Plans of Action with support from the secretariat of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). However, most of these plans tend to overlook the central roles of urban areas and urbanisation in development, or the specific way climate change is going to affect them. UN-Habitat's *Cities and Climate Change Initiative* was launched in early 2008 and has already attracted some 30 cities in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Its basic rationale is that since cities contribute so much to climate change, they must also provide a large part of the solution. In this sense, the Initiative builds on the momentum gathered over the past decade by the *Sustainable Cities and Local Agenda 21* programmes.

Faced with climate change, cities must reduce the vulnerability of natural and human systems against actual or expected effects (adaptation), as well as reduce greenhouse gas emissions and enhance carbon sinks (mitigation). As case studies in this *Compendium* go to show, these efforts require improved capacities from local authorities. UN-Habitat is there to help improve policy dialogue, synergies and links between national and local climate change policies and programmes.

### Three main lessons and the 'green' promise

Adequate urban services and effective planning controls in the face of demographic expansion provide municipal authorities with solid defences against the effects of climate change, and this *Compendium* shows as much. During a two-day workshop in Nairobi, Kenya in early May 2011, representatives from municipal bodies, the voluntary and the private sectors in 15 selected Sub-Saharan locations discussed their early experiences against a variety of odds, including socio-economic disintegration or the prospect of submergence. The three main lessons were as follows: (1) climate change and demographic expansion can be tackled with existing instruments, but cities need new resources and donors have a major role to play; (2) nothing can be done without well-entrenched political will, and (3) little can be durably achieved without central government support.

The other perspective emerging from this wealth of experience is that a conjunction of Sub-Saharan Africa's natural (biodiversity) and human (increasing employable population) capitals has the potential to pave the way for climate-resilient, low-carbon socio-economic development. In doing so, Africa would be better poised to ward off the current and future effects of climate change.

### **'Promising' v. 'best' practice**

At least this is the promise. As workshop participants knew too well, fulfilling the promise must start *now*, and all stakeholders must be involved, including the private and voluntary sectors and whole urban populations. Since this is a largely unprecedented undertaking, workshop participants had no 'best practice' to offer yet. Instead, they agreed that some 'promising practices' were emerging, which they began to share between themselves.

The promising practices from the 15 Sub-Saharan cities or countries share five defining features, as follows: (1) a *process*- rather than a result-oriented perspective, anticipating on the next problem or challenge rather than just relying on past experience or solutions; (2) an evolving, learning, sharing process, instead of competition, performance and selection; (3) a two-way relationship with multiple stakeholders that takes in local priorities, knowledge and 'voice', as opposed to one-way command-and-control or top-down expertise; (4) looking for convergences between environmental concerns and prevailing traditional cultures, instead of carrot-and-stick social engineering; and (5) an ongoing process that facilitates updates and inputs in local languages from a variety of stakeholders (with a designated correspondent to record developments), rather than formal, one-off documentation.

### **Rewards for promising practice**

UN-Habitat manages, co-manages or is connected with various awards: the *Habitat Scroll of Honour*, the *Dubai International Award for Best Practices*, the *World Habitat Awards*, the *Habitat Business Award* and the *Rafik Hariri UN-Habitat Memorial Award*. These awards document, recognize,

publicize and disseminate outstanding solutions to various human settlements problems. Submissions received for the Dubai International Award are classified into 'best', 'good' and 'promising' practices.

### **The major criteria for a Best Practice include:**

- Improved living environments, particularly for the poor and disadvantaged
- Partnership between at least two entities that meet the criteria in the guidelines
- Sustainability, through lasting changes in legislation, social policies, institutional frameworks and management systems
- Leadership and community empowerment
- Gender equality and social inclusion
- Innovation within local context and transferability
- Tangible impact resulting from the transfer of ideas, skills, processes, knowledge, expertise or technology.

For the purposes of the Dubai International Award, a practice is 'promising' if it meets the following three criteria: (1) it comes under one of the relevant areas; (2) it features the basic elements of the minimum criteria; and (3) it shows good potential but its lifetime (usually less than two years) is too short for meaningful assessment. When submitted for the award, practices assessed as 'promising' are provided substantive feedback and encouraged to apply in the following cycle when not selected first time around.

In this *Compendium*, Sub-Saharan Africa's promising practices are presented in four (colour-coded) categories in an easy-to-read format that takes into account the multiple dimensions of climate change. Hopes are that through sharing and learning across cities, these practices will eventually come to be considered as 'best'. The four categories are the following:

- Major roles for gender, youth and business
- Adaptation: infrastructure, slums and deserts
- How coastal cities face up to climate change
- Enhancing and spreading awareness of climate change

### **For further information**

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## SECTION

# 1

## MAJOR ROLES FOR GENDER, YOUTH AND BUSINESS

### Lake Victoria:

An integrated model for climate change-proof water utilities

### Mombasa:

A youth initiative to sustain mangroves and livelihoods

### Kampala:

Mobilising women for climate change adaptation



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