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POLICY BRIEF

Socially inclusive and innovative policy making for climate resilient urban strategies for informal settlements in dryland Africa

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Local
Governments
for Sustainability



In response to growing interrelated threats, many cities are engaging in more inclusive governance to increase their resilience and sustainabilityⁱ. A range of evidenceⁱⁱ now suggests that alternative models of knowledge production and decision-making are required for building good governance systems in cities, particularly in emerging economies in the Global South. At the forefront of these discussions are social inclusivity and innovation, key elements that should accompany resilient urban strategies and policymaking. **Social innovations are new social practices that aim to meet social needs in a better way than the existing solutions.**

This is particularly important for African cities, which account for more than a quarter of the world's fastest growing cities, and where 'by 2050, almost regardless of government policies, its urban population will have tripledⁱⁱⁱ'. This population growth is occurring in an expansive form, resulting in higher rates of land use change than population growth rates alone might imply^{iv} - with consequent social and ecological impacts. In this context, not only are informal settlements more likely to be in vulnerable parts of the city but residents are less likely to have access to basic services and infrastructure that can reduce climate-related risks like flooding and landslides. Residents are also likely to lack secure tenure, reducing their incentive to upgrade housing and invest in amenities. Yet, typically urban planning processes for climate change, typically, do not adequately incorporate informal community voices in the planning processes.

Policies will have little effect without the acceptance and understanding of the people directly affected by the changes. Similarly, city-level action to meet various international agreements for climate resilience will be impossible to meet without social inclusivity.

To identify key scalable and replicable lessons, numerous interviews and conversations with different groups of stakeholders conducted under the "[Peri-Urban Resilient Ecosystems](#)" partnership have been compiled to inform the following **ten practical recommendations which are a golden thread for any policy maker to follow when planning, developing and implementing inclusive urban climate policies.** Key themes relate to democratic accountability, transparent and inclusive decision making, and community co-production.



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS



Recommendation 1: Build on existing work and understand institutional landscapes.

An important driver of urban change is the concept of deep-scaling, or building on dialogues and activities that have already occurred. Although too often overlooked, engaging with previous and ongoing work done in a city prior to policy design is an essential element for understanding policy formulation, development and delivery, ensuring earlier mistakes are not repeated, and beware of the political climate and local context. Another value-added, is that this can help connect individuals or groups with other existing engagement processes which are essential in increasing effectiveness and coherence, and reducing inefficiencies. When deep-scaling, it is essential to spend time understanding the institutional landscape of the city. This helps ensure that there is a better chance of not repeating past mistakes, or duplicating efforts, and increases chances of success and sustainability of interventions.



Recommendation 2: Embrace reflective and adaptive processes.

Due to the dynamic nature of African cities and the complexity of decision-making, effective policies are ones that embrace agile processes that are highly reflexive and adaptive. Flexibility and a willingness to pause, think and adapt to what is happening on the ground is essential to be responsive to city needs. Embracing processes that support an institutional culture of adaptive policymaking responsive to the realities on the ground is key to urban transformative change. Policy development through creative methods (e.g. visioning and participatory scenario development), is also important for promoting a flexible structure that leaves room for critical thinking, reflection, and knowledge co-production that encourages transformative change. At key junctures however, it is then essential to find ways to clearly articulate the value-added of these kinds of interventions, in ways that make sense to the target audience. Multiple stakeholder peer-to-peer learning exchanges while implementing upgrading activities are also opportunities for such reflections.



Recommendation 3: Focus on process not just the output.

Too often, the focus when developing urban strategies is on “the what” and not on “the how” or “the why”, and yet the process followed to design activities is at least as valuable as the end product. It is important to recognise the impact that designing effective processes can have, like ones focused on collaboration between disciplines, on the co-production of knowledge, or creating spaces for learning and dialogue. Such spaces facilitate systems thinking, encourage perception changes and lead to new ways of addressing old challenges to support sustainable change. In addition, these spaces often breakdown power dynamics in a room. It is critical that these transformative spaces are carefully designed and well facilitated.



Recommendation 4: Continually align with needs.

It is well-recognised that taking the time to understand the local context when designing urban resilient strategies is essential. Extended and inclusive planning processes that rely on assessments can help prioritise specific needs of a city and its communities. Co-producing^v relevant interventions, based on real needs and broad-spectrum community engagement, is crucial to ensure social ownership of strategies. A successful and socially innovative climate resilient strategy should result in the empowerment of those most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, including informal and formal sector and across lines of social differentiation. This requires policy making that improves local authorities’ ability to be responsive to community needs in timely manner and be adaptive, so local communities feel they are empowered to make meaningfully contributions. This is essential to directly tackling inequality and transitioning to a far more inclusive path.



Recommendation 5: Strategise for informal settlement upgrading.

Upgrading of informal settlements in cities is a key component of building urban climate resilience and therefore should be considered in policy making. Civil society organisations have a critical role to play in harnessing networks for buy-in and support of government-led upgrading, advising government in the design where and how the upgrading can best be done. In some African countries national policies support upgrading schemes. For example, the Gobabis Freedom Square Upgrading Project which piloted the Flexible Land Tenure Act in Namibia^{vi} is a prime example to provide affordable tenure security to inhabitants of informal settlement by establishing an interchangeable tenure registration system which complements formal tenure.

The private sector is also critical for upgrading measures whilst key in improving the capacity for innovation. This illustrates the power of co-creation and that these organisations have a critical role to play in policy-making.



Recommendation 6: Proactively plan for urban agro-pastoral livelihoods.

Agropastoral livelihoods^{viii} are becoming increasingly precarious due to direct climatic changes, lower fodder availability, and smaller land parcels or land fragmentation. One adaptation strategy for these agro-pastoralists is to then migrate to urban centres. This impacts on waste and sanitation management and the maintenance of other services, all of which influences resilience. Climate resilience strategies implemented in drylands should therefore consider this unique livelihood reliance and through interventions raise awareness, control grazing patterns and manage carrying capacities effectively. Municipalities therefore need to adopt flexible strategies across seasons to ensure livestock have access to fodder, as employed by the Oshikati municipality in Northern Namibia.



Recommendation 7: Embrace the media for raising awareness and encouraging participation.

Policies and strategies that are innovative and that lead to tangible actions that benefit the most vulnerable are attractive stories for all forms of media (including social media). This opportunity can be used to raise awareness and encourage participation and inclusive engagements. Developing a stakeholder engagement plan, a media strategy and establishing contacts that actively report on the development process, are good ways of harnessing the media to keep the public engaged and informed. This can aid in real time access to early warning systems, provide communities with information about their rights and increase participation in consultative forums. Media campaigns should be fully inclusive through allowing engagement in all local vernacular languages.



Recommendation 8: Strategise for implementation.

It is crucial to work hand-in-hand with those who will put policy into practice. These are the actors the public will be in direct contact with, so their communication and relationship building skills are crucial. Developing a strategy to provide the necessary knowledge and skills to these actors will prove worthwhile. In addition, public awareness and sensitisation campaigns go a long way to realise the Sustainable Development Goal 2 of leaving no one behind.



Recommendation 9: Engage communities in policy development.

It is widely accepted that it's important to involve community members in planning processes right from the outset of policy development. However, for this to happen in reality, there needs to be a culture focused on fostering community engagement among city officials. Policy development should use innovative tools to inspire community ownership and encourage local on-the-ground action such as making use of processes such as PhotoVoice^{viii}. In addition, development should ensure it adequately accounts for inequality through allowing a diversity of voices to be heard as well as inclusion of a social justice perspective. Allowing communities to participate in the policy development, on their own terms, might take time, but will foster acceptance in the long term. It is important to note, however, that the climate resilient transition might not be first on community's agenda as they face a myriad of other local challenges. It is recommended that engagements and policies explicitly highlight the potential to solve problematic issues, using a systems approach, as part of the ancillary benefits of building climate resilience.



Recommendation 10: Invest in building relationships and trust in the long term.

Much of the success of urban policy development hinges on the energy invested in building relationships with key stakeholders. Strong relationships are the foundation on which we achieve change, and hence, a significant part of strategy development processes should be devoted to fostering connections based on trust. Trust in the abilities and good intentions of stakeholders and decision-makers is a key factor for the acceptability of new policies. Participatory processes are a good way to strengthen trust, especially with disadvantaged groups. Giving people opportunities to express concerns and fostering wider dialogue can avoid polarisation of opposing groups which can block successful planning processes. Sound partnerships between city leads, and between different sectors and governance levels, allow for deeper engagement, accelerated action and more meaningful outcomes.

Case study: Socially innovative policy making in Windhoek, Namibia

Windhoek's Integrated Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (ICCSAP) was the first national effort to develop a municipal strategy on climate change adaptation. The name of this strategy changed during the course of its development - from the Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (CCSAP) to the ICCSAP. This change reflected the move to a more socially inclusive and innovative approach and was the direct response to the principles supported by the *Future Resilience for African CiTies and Lands* (FRACTAL) project. This project provided an important space for a wide range of stakeholders to give input to the ICCSAP and put many of the above policy recommendations at the forefront of policy development.

The Windhoek case advocates for the importance of inclusive and integrated processes for developing city strategies and policies. See more [here](#) ^{ix}.



Case study: Gobabis Freedom Square informal settlement upgrading in Namibia

The Shack Dwellers Federation of Namibia and their NGO, Namibia Housing Action Group worked with the Ministry of Urban and Rural Development in Namibia to implement the Community Land Information Program (CLIP). The CLIP assisted local informal settlement inhabitants in collaboration with their Local Authorities to collect information about the socio-economic and environmental conditions, as well as the priority needs in their Informal settlements. CLIP is also an important tool for community engagement in policy formulation as it helps to adequately understand community realities.

During the city-wide CLIP in Gobabis the Freedom Square community used their information feedback session to demand not to be relocated from their area of occupation. Peer-to-peer learning by Local Authority and community members with in Cape Town/Stellenbosch expose the Namibians where re-blocking to address urgent needs of the community resulted in the stakeholders agreeing to the community to become part of the planning, and implementation of the upgrading of the informal settlements. Additional to the first multi-stakeholder partnership supporting bottom up processes this project became also a pilot for implementing the Flexible Land Tenure Act. As a result, 1088 households secured tenure and completed the installation of water and sewer reticulation. Through sharing the learning during the implementation nine other towns in Namibia, involving 14 informal settlements embarked on similar processes.

Freedom Square is now also the site for international learning exchanges, where delegations from other African countries have come to learn from. Examples of these are Kenya, Liberia, Uganda, South Africa, and Zambia (see:

<http://ilmi.nust.na/sites/default/files/ILMI-DN-The-role-of-universities-in-participatory-slum-upgrading-Namibia-Kenya-Uganda-Zambia-WEB.pdf> and <http://urbanforum.nust.na/?q=node/54>).

Link to the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5538qA8PLh4>,

Link to article: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0956247820903981>.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- ⁱArias-Maldonado, M. (2013). Rethinking sustainability in the Anthropocene. *Environmental Politics*, 22, 3, 428-446.
- ⁱⁱAllam, Z.; Newman, P. Redefining the Smart City: Culture, Metabolism and Governance. *Smart Cities* 2018, 1, 4-25.
- ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.stockholmresilience.org/research/research-news/2012-10-15-cities-and-biodiversity-outlook.html>
- ^{iv}Dodman, D., Leck, H., Rusca, M., & Colenbrander, S. (2017). African Urbanisation and Urbanism: Implications for risk and accumulation and reduction. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, 26, 7-15.
- ^v**Co-production** is a practice in the delivery of public services in which citizens are involved in the creation of public policies and services.
- ^{vi}<https://www.lac.org.na/laws/2012/4963.pdf>
- ^{vii}<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7152485/>
- ^{viii}<https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/photovoice/main#:~:text=Photovoice%20is%20a%20process%20in,and%20share%20them%20with%20others.>
- ^{ix}<http://www.fractal.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/IS9-Moving-towards-integrated-and-inclusive-climate-change-planning-in-Windhoek.pdf>

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