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What is RISE Africa?

One idea can shape the future

RISE Africa is a movement and a platform that brings together thinkers, doers and enablers from across the continent and the world to inspire action for sustainable cities. It curates monthly meetings or engagements, photographic competitions, thought pieces and networking events, taking a whole-of-society approach to imagining and enacting African urban futures. Notably, it aims to broker relationships between committed government, civil society and private sector actors, each of whom tend to speak different ‘languages’, and follow different approaches to socio-economic and environmental development, yet each of whom are all vital to achieving sustainable cities and communities.

The RISE Africa platform was launched in May 2020 with a series of virtual engagements. At the heart of RISE Africa is an annual event convenned around Africa Day and focused on critically and enthusiastically demonstrating how to make our urban imaginaries real – and exploring how to forge ideas into action.

Collaborative art and creative expression are central threads that hold our deliberations together. Expressing and celebrating multiple perspectives, cultures, visions and actions is vital for making inclusive and vibrant cities that resonate as African.

RISE Africa is based around four objectives:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>To offer a platform for thought-leadership and partnering [in Africa]</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Networking</td>
<td>To bring together diverse actors and perspectives, and to build active networks.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>To inspire participants &amp; provoke new thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Action</td>
<td>To elicit commitments to action &amp; to follow up with support.</td>
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RISE Africa Roadmap 2020-21

In the lead-up the Action Festival, and afterwards, a series of happenings and thought pieces were convened on a monthly basis. These events invited participants to push the boundaries of traditionally conceptualized themes. These are detailed in the monthly mailers sent to the RISE Africa community.

**May-20**
RISE Africa Launch

**Aug-20**
African Urban Food Systems | Gender Equality

**Sep-20**
SDG Localisation

**Oct-20**
"Un-visioning the African city through futures literacy"

**Nov-20**
African Mobility Month 2020

**Dec-20**
Circular African Cities

**Jan-21**
Our Nature, Our Cities

**Feb-21**
Putting People First

**Mar-21**
Smart Cities in Africa

**Apr-21**
Valuing Water

**May-21**
RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival

**Jun-21**
Reflecting on the Festival

**Jul-21**
Planned & Unplanned City Resources

**Aug-21**
African CITYFOOD month 2021

**Sep-21**
Circular Economy

**Oct-21**
African Mobility Month 2021

**Nov-21**
Circularity in Africa

**One idea can shape the future**
RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival

This RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival, the inaugural RISE Africa annual event, was hosted from 24 to 28 May 2021. It was structured around a series of intersecting themes and offered a collaborative platform for African actors engaged in the urban space to exchange ideas and promising practices, and foster interdisciplinary, cross-sector, Pan-African coalitions for exchange and support towards action.

RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival was framed around the theme of NEXT URBAN CHAMPIONS* and explored the topics below:

- **Africa is the 21st century changemaker** – global outcomes of sustainable urban development
- **Our urban continent** – exploring AU Agenda 2063
- **Covid-19 in the City** – how a global pandemic realigns our priorities and visions for the future
- **Facilitate and demonstrate** – the role of local government in shaping collaborative movements
- **Smarter cities for empowered citizens** – behavioural science for wellbeing
- **Climate crisis and our cities** – embracing a new normal of uncertainty
- **Urban intelligence for the discerning decision maker** – using sound data and evidence
- **Looping our cities into the global circular economy** – key principles for urban resource management
- **Good development is good business** – private sector roles in urban wellbeing
- **African wisdom in the digital present** – traditional knowledge for modern living
- **Shaping urban African narratives** – using media, art and literature to rewrite the African city
- **Our nature, our city** – enhancing the benefits of urban ecosystem services
- **Bouncing forward** – crafting resilient societies
- **Financing the future** – unlocking investment for transformative infrastructure and services
- **Collaborate Create Celebrate** – promoting our individual and collective actions

This report reflects on the themes and events of the RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival and the outcomes which will inform future events. It is interspersed with poems, photographs, video provocations and cartoons that were developed as part of RISE Africa activities, and offer insights into our cities’ current states and future possibilities.

Many thanks to our poets, Afeefa Omar, Efe Paul Azino, Mutle Mothibe, Mwende ‘FreeQuency’ Katwiwa, Vusumuzi Mpfou, our cartoonists, Bethuel Mangena, Khalid Albaïh, Maya Adams, and to all who submitted photos to the competition ‘My Afro-future City is...’ and who provided video provocations to excited and challenge RISE Africa participants.

RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival was supported by the South African National Research Foundation.
RISE AFRICA ACTION FESTIVAL
24 - 28 May 2021
Forewords

Foreword by Kobie Brand
Director of ICLEI Africa,
Deputy Secretary General of ICLEI

Africa is well into its urban transition. As we know, this has put enormous pressure, unprecedented pressure, on our city administrations and our governments at the local and subnational level, who need to run these cities in a way that is functional, in a way that provides accessible and affordable services to everybody. That includes housing, public transport, it includes job opportunities, it includes safety in and around our homes. It includes access to water and sanitation, access to clean energy, access to nourishing food, access to green space for play and relaxation, and much more. Now, in times of increasing shocks and crises – in times of pandemics, or extreme weather events, some of them linked to climate change, or wars and conflicts – we need to be able to get in touch with, hear and support our citizens, our people, often the poorest of the poor. We need to give them early warning signals of flood or drought, or extreme weather events like storm surges – we need to engage them with new ways to access quality goods and services, in ways that do not perpetuate a consumption-driven ecological crisis. We need to find new ways to reach and engage with those living in informal settlements – who are often not counted in our census databases, and are not easy reachable, sometimes unreachable by emergency services, and paying huge costs in the cases of fire, safety, public health, sanitation and more. We are aware of these challenges and needs, and need new ways to address them collectively.

It is in these challenges and uncertainties that we can access new opportunities to make a living, and live a life in close proximity to our fellow Africans in a vibrant, buzzing, urban environment in our cities and in our towns.

To do this, it is therefore paramount that we all stand together and that we embrace whole of society solutions, in which everybody contributes to seeking and developing solutions, in which everybody becomes part of building and shaping the city they want – the city we want to live in - a place of refuge, a place of collectiveness, a place of togetherness, of vibrancy, of creativity, but also a safe haven where we feel that we and our loved ones are going to be able to live a secure, safe and fulfilling life where opportunities abound.

We know that we are living in unprecedented times. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected our daily lives and shown us the many steps we need to take in improving the structure of our cities and societies. The re-emergence of populism around the world is sharpening global geopolitics in ways we couldn't have dreamed, in ways we wouldn't have imagined would be possible in this day and age. And the repercussions on the African continent should not be underestimated. We realize more and more that Africa needs to take ownership of its future. We need to ensure that we build the cities we want, the Africa, we want, as manifested in the African Union Agenda 2063.

We see that cities are growing more and more vibrant with youth, the dominating age group in many of these cities. This is wonderful because the youth bring a vitality and inspiration, creativity, and bravery that is necessary today, to tackle tomorrow’s problems with a positive, can-do attitude, and with a unique African creativity. We must trust in, empower, and collaborate with our youth to ensure that our cities are not only shaped the way we want them to be, but in a way that is true to our African traditions, to our African way of living, living in harmony with nature, and with elements of earth. We are all part of one Earth. This continent is so deeply part of our skin, flesh, minds, hearts – and this has to be manifested in the way that we build and shape our cities. So, it is in this space, that we are celebrating Africa through the RISE Africa Platform – in this creative space, this positive space, this pragmatic space. Let us rise together to build and shape the Africa we want.
‘Sustainable cities’ is an important lodestar for all Africans committed to the pan-African vision of “an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens” as expressed in Agenda 2063. Sustainable cities make all kinds of spiritual, economic and social sense because most Africans will be urban, and urban adjacent, within the next fifteen years, and it is our cities that will be the cauldron of experimentation and radical change. To be clear, we cannot upend the legacies of colonialism, authoritarianism, economic dependency, and environmental degradation without a sharp break with what we have inherited as economic systems and the political armatures that support them. However, this enterprise involves so many dimensions of critique and change, it is very difficult to know where to start, how to prioritise, what coordination and sequencing might involve, especially if action must be taken at the continental, regional, national and subnational levels simultaneously. It is even harder if we believe in citizen-driven processes of institutional change and political becoming.

Sustainable cities can be both a clarion call and a framework for organisation. Sustainable cities hold the potential to become a shared language across cultures, political traditions, climatic regions and scales. Sustainable cities as discourse is always a provocation and an aesthetic register; a daily reminder that we need to simultaneously fight the structural forces that shape our default systems, instantiate alternatives and design new forms of collective action, love and imagination. This is the beautiful work of the soul, the heart and collective intelligence.

RISE Africa is the embodiment of these imperatives through curation and leadership. It is a generous and open invitation to Africans of all walks of life that want to be part of the great adventure to both dream and stitch the sustainable African city through their practice and solidarity. RISE Africa is a uniquely African public square that transects the virtual and the physical in the spirit of movement building and creativity. It is a twenty-first century embodiment of the spirit of Pan-Africanism, rooted in nature, diversity, beauty and regeneration. This report offers a record and celebration of the journey to date. Read it and be both inspired and seduced to enrich this important movement with your unique contribution to enhance the kaleidoscopic story of sustainable African cities on the rise.
In 2009, Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie presented a memorable TED talk entitled “The danger of a single story”. In it she spoke about the risk of reducing people and places to a single narrative and lens and the tangible impacts this can have on the futures they imagine, and the futures we imagine for them.

In her view, by reducing a person or place to a single story we lose the richness and complexity of the unique stories held by a space and its people. In this moment we also lose the opportunity to empower and humanise these individuals and groups to become change agents. We see this regularly in depictions of Africa and the African city, where the citizens of these spaces are represented only by the extremity and scale of problems faced in their daily lived experiences, and not by their capacity to overcome them.

Exalting the single story makes no space for those who work across disciplines, limiting people to their particular field or sector and purposefully excluding the voices of the informal trader, bus driver, healthcare worker and others as sources of knowledge for innovative African-driven solutions. Without cultivating the kinds of spaces that welcome multiple stories, we risk losing connections and collaborations that could be critical to the future of Africa’s cities.

Africa’s urban age has arrived and there can be no question about the urgency of collective action needed to make cities sustainable, resilient and liveable. It is estimated that an additional 1 billion people will move into urban areas on the continent in the coming 3 decades, but there is no guarantee that these urgent sustainability concerns will be enough to inspire the continent’s leadership and youth into tangible action, nor to galvanise in them the bold brand of leadership that is needed in order to build lasting and large-scale urban change.

Inequality continues to grow in many cities, amplified by the COVID-19 global pandemic which has made these realities apparent for all to see. Some best-intentioned new urban transport infrastructure projects are not nearly as viable as once thought. The impact of smart technology ideas and the smart city concepts are not making real inroads in poverty reduction or food security, and they have failed to meaningfully mitigate the impacts of climate change.

We need to write new stories for our cities, and we believe that building new, meaningful connections is now more important to voicing these new stories than ever before.

RISE Africa 2021 aims to be a platform for change-makers,
disruptors and advocates from across the African continent to drive innovation in their own unique and powerful way. Through these multiple and diverse stories, the event aims to spark new initiatives and build a community of actors committed to positive and substantive change in the continent’s cities.

We want to discuss ways to actively dismantle barriers created by siloed-thinking, and explore the possibilities of reimagining collaborationsystems in order to enable African local governments to partner swiftly and effectively with business, civil society and academia. Why do geographic and cultural barriers persist in this modern age? Which incentives and resources are absent in fostering and sustaining connections? What is the missing link in forming unusual but powerful collaborations, and how can they be deployed elsewhere?

RISE Africa 2021 seeks to bring urban champions together through a creative, interactive and immersive festival which will include performances, dialogue sessions, workshops, training, provocations and field trips.

By reaching for a collection of stories and accomplishments it will aim to catalyse and inspire new initiatives, projects, proposals, ideas and commitments. It will dare to set an African agenda for collective and individual action within this new-Normal world but will not steer clear from some of the tough conversations necessary to move towards sustainable, future cities.

How has the Covid-19 pandemic shaken or clarified our priorities and visions? Can we drive new energy into addressing the climate crisis? How can traditional knowledge be incorporated into city-making? Can “smarter cities” really improve wellbeing for the majority? What role does art, media and literature have in reframing the African city? How will future infrastructure and services be financed? How might improving urban food, water, energy and waste systems contribute to achieving other Sustainable Development Goals? What are we doing to regenerate the relationships between cities and nature? How might we make a case demonstrating the business value in improving the wellbeing of urban-dwellers?

We are trying to identify and accelerate a new generation of impactful actions rooted in their unique stories across the continent which will bring forth our new sustainable future city. This event has been conceived in the hope that the small and large actions of these African change-makers will contribute to writing a sustainable story of cities on our continent.

RISE-Africa 2021 is calling all urban champions*, advocates and actors for African-driven innovation, whose work builds on wide themes of sustainable, future African cities to join us for the RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival.

*Champion (noun)
– a champion of change: advocate, proponent, promoter, proposer, supporter, torch-bearer, defender, protector, upholder, entrepreneur, backer, exponent, patron, sponsor, prime mover, campaigner for, lobbyist for, activist.
Who came to the Action Festival?

In May 2021 we were joined online by 1463 unique participants from 206 African cities and over 160 more cities around the world, representing 380 different organisations, participating in 43 sessions, hosted from 24 different cities across the world, and contributing over 2515 hours [or 104.8 days] of their attention and interaction.
Participants of the RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival comprised many sectors, with the majority from Academia (28%) and Civil Society (26%), followed by Business (16%) and Government (10%). These represent the core constituents of RISE Africa, through whom knowledge and action are brokered. A large constituent of artists and cultural workers (Independent – 6%) joined the festival, as well as members of associations (7%), who can take the ideas from RISE Africa to wider and different audiences.

This was a truly pan-African festival, with most sessions hosted by African institutions and with 87% of registrants from Africa (30% from South Africa).
Visions

My vision for my city is ....
“The dethroning of the car and the reclaiming of the street.”

“A sustainable, equitable and safe multi generational haven under transformative governance and effective policy implementation.”

“To encourage a more robust community and social life.”

“To become a real african SMART city in a new era of afro dynamism with authentic creative and cultural vibrancy.”

“A beautiful melting pot at the frontier of African innovation, design, culture and sustainability.”

“One that excites citizens to step out from their homes, that has warm communities that are interested in each other and their surroundings, that brings natural ecosystems into everyday life, promotes dematerialisation and supports all citizens to live healthy, happy lives.”

“To make a tangible difference in GBV and women’s lived experiences. My vision is to see communities come together to uplift one another, to restore the degraded connections with ourselves and the earth. My vision for the city is a safe, green, communal space for innovation, sharing and celebration.”

“To become a carbon neutral community with happy citizens, who can live healthy and contribute to the Race for Net Zero.”

“To provide clean water and decent services to its citizens. Promote informal traders, include community in cleans ups and make them aware that this city is their city and by participating they take responsibility and ownership of it, uplifting themselves and encouraging all to achieve development goals on a micro scale.”

“An attractive, inclusive and green city that attracts investment.”

“To be as authentic to its socio-cultural dynamics as possible and less ‘colonial’ through contextual planning practices.”

“To see an improvement in sanitation, well constructed road networks, proper traffic management and reduction in poverty. My vision is also to see my city full of businesses and well planned communities.”

“A place full of public parks - with a working, functional public transport system that would lead to having less cars on the roads.”

“More green space, and cleaner, safer streets for people.”

“To have families living on a realistic living wage, violence free, equal opportunities and access for everyone (poor or rich), and has a clean environment.”

“Ecologically, socially and economically resilient.”

“To have a sustainable, resilient and intelligent city”
Each day of the festival was underpinned by a core session, each of which explored different elements of urban sensemaking, with day one setting the scene of how global megatrends would impact and be impacted by African urbanisation, day two focussing on creative expression as vital in shaping collective imaginaries and supporting multiple voices in urban development, day three exploring information, finance, technology and governance as key enablers for sustainable African cities, day four deepening conversation with CHAMPIONS who are leading urban transformation, and day five reflecting together on the festival and offering commitments to action.
WEDNESDAY 26 MAY 2021

Building the future now – How our cities are pushing the boundaries of planning, governance, finance and technology

Hosted by: ICLEI Africa
10:30 - 12:30 CAT

Local government stakeholders share innovative approaches for achieving urban sustainability through effective governance, improving access to finance and exploring opportunities for technological advancement in the fourth industrial revolution.

THURSDAY 27 MAY 2021

Next Urban Champions* - meet the innovators, practitioners and thinkers who are revolutionising African cities!

Hosted by: ICLEI Africa
10:30 - 12:30 CAT

What transformative actions are already improving our citizens’ mobility, energy, health, food, waste, water and ecological systems?

FRIDAY 28 MAY 2021

Celebrating our urban imaginaries: a joint reflection and commitment to action

Hosted by: ICLEI Africa
10:30 - 12:30 CAT

The closing RISE Africa Session invites you to join us to synthesise and reflect on the RISE Africa Festival and chart a route for future RISE Africa community activities.
Africa is the 21st century changemaker – global outcomes of sustainable development

The inaugural RISE Africa session, titled Africa is the 21st century changemaker – global outcomes of sustainable development, sets the motivation for the Action Festival. Moderated by Edgar Pieterse, Director African Centre for Cities, the session argued that achieving local and global sustainability goals hinges on sustainable urbanisation in Africa.

Edlam Yemeru, Chief of the Urbanisation and Development Section at UNECA highlighted the importance of integrating cities and urbanisation into continental policies and strategies. Presently, the urban agenda is often relegated to a sector or to the local scale. Transforming Africa however is contingent on transforming our cities, she argued. Cities and local governments would not only become drivers of COVID-19 recovery but economic transformation more broadly. They are the centres of production and consumption that will drive continental free trade and regional integration.

Aya Chebbi, African Union Youth Envoy highlighted the marginalisation of youth in Africa and noted the need to do away with the generational gap in leadership in Africa. She noted that Africa can fix many of her ills if we prioritise youth-centric sustainable development in our cities. Instead of thinking of the role of cities for sustainable development, we should think of the role of young people in developing sustainable cities. Echoing this sentiment, Edlam added that the question of youth and cities are highly interlinked. Youths in Africa will most likely live in cities, work in cities, and shape and transform cities.

Legend

You!
Yes!
You are the stuff legends are made from!

Look at how far you have come.
Look at how far you are going.
From the rubble of the city to royalty.
This poem was written about you.

“Yes! You Are The Stuff That Legends Are Made From!”
Legend In The Making

We came from Abantu of the crackling fire.
Abantu who came alive around the burning.
Abantu that set the air alight with blazing voices.
Abantu that chanted for freedom from the front lines,
Spreading struggle songs from yester-years like a wildfire
Igniting all the way up to touch the sky “Harambeeeeee!

I am from the urban legend who placed their lives on the lines.
I want to be heard. I want our stories to be told.
I want our songs to be sung by the children.
Go on then, tell the children that they are the stuff legends are made from.

Vusumuzi Mpfou
Kobie Brand, Regional Director of ICLEI Africa highlighted the role of inclusive governance in achieving sustainable cities. She noted that efforts must be geared towards improving governance systems and processes such that the voices of those who live in our cities are incorporated into the decision making that will shape the future of our cities. Along similar lines, Luc Gnacadja, President of Governance and Policies for Sustainable Development (GPS-Dev) argued that for Africa to develop sustainably, the ways of designing leadership processes and institutions must change to embrace inclusivity. Bottom-up design processes need to be prioritized and government must be humble enough to listen to, and involve everyone in conceiving the value proposition for each region, he added.

Malika Ndlovu, South African Poet emphasised the importance of creative expressions and the need to cherish and nurture our connections to our ancestral inheritance and indigenous knowledge. She noted that although embedded in the practice of artists is the desire to honour all voices and invoke something bigger than a single idea or narrative, artists are often not invited to multiple spaces in which changes that impact our lives are decided. Artists’ ability to contribute to and shape narratives and nation building must be acknowledged, she stated.

The session concluded by reiterating that through creativity, resilience, participation and agency, we will not only be able to learn and imagine future possibilities, but more importantly act to ensure sustainability in Africa.

**KEY QUOTES**

"Although we are fully aware of all of these systemic questions, there’s a different way of inhabiting the now, looking into the future, grounded in the past, of course, but absolutely insistent that we can begin to marshal, collectively, people’s agency, ingenuity, creativity, and most importantly, what people are already doing – and we must think through how to amplify that through better articulation.”

*Edgar Pieterse, Director African Centre for Cities*

"What we are advocating for as young people is an intergenerational co-leadership approach because we cannot inherit a system that is not co-designed by us. You are setting us up for failure!"

*Aya Chebbi, African Union Youth Envoy*

"If we really want to transform cities and local government, then we must see urban priorities featuring in investment frameworks, in budgetary allocations and in actual resource allocations to cities and local governments."

*Edlam Yemeru, Chief of the Urbanisation and Development Section, UNECA*

“No matter how much of our diamonds and coal are taken from the earth, if we lose this connection to arts, to our ancestral inheritance and indigenous knowledge, we have lost everything. And the fantastic news is we haven’t, because creativity is a regenerative resource by nature.”

*Malika Ndlovu, Poet*
STOP BLAMING YOUNG PEOPLE AND START INCLUDING THEM.
This Africa Day session held space for diverse reflection from artists, creators, practitioners and thinkers. The reflections discussed what African narratives are, how they are contextualised globally, and how we, as Africans, must advocate for a more inclusive and diverse narrative showcasing the expansiveness of African existences and capturing new and innovative ways to marry art and science, towards sustainable future African cities.

The conversation emphasised reclaiming African narratives that are contextually local and resonate globally. These African narratives reach all corners of the globe, including the cities/towns of origin, that show more than the current negative and disabling motifs that plague global platforms. Through art and creativity, more diverse and inclusive narratives are being told especially towards sustainable African futures. All citizens are called to continuously engage their imagination and through storytelling share and show what the future for Africa could be and how we want it to look. Celebrating artistry and creative expression as a way of being and doing, rather than a commodity to be used as part of a production process was emphasized.

In the second half of the session, artists guided us through examples of using creative outlets and art to take a step back and reassess our narratives, reflecting on the validity and basis of our opinions and biases. Taking the time to reflect and reimagine future African cities, including disadvantaged groups in our vision, creates connection and engagement towards a collective future African vision that we can truly envision ourselves within.

This session was thought provoking, broke down structured thinking and invited participants to reimagine and practice dreaming towards creating our collective, diverse and inclusive African future.

**KEY QUOTES**

“Art connects our communities and our cities to our common humanity, which is missing in this century”

Gugu Nonjinge, Senior Advocacy Officer at The Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

“What Cinema can bring to scientific approach... what could be possible, creating the dream of people. It is important that african and diaspora can reclaim their own narratives and own emotions”

Jean Fall, Founder and Executive Director, Cinewax
I am from

1
when people ask me where I am from
   I tell them I am from
   I am from red dirt in green hills
   Endless mango trees whose small sun of a fruit is always within arms reach
   Smells so sweet your stomach speaks in small roars of impatience
   As you sip your cup of chai waiting for meals to finish cooking
   I am from the sounds of my people
   Languages so rhythmic you’d think we spoke in song
   The melodies of matatus conductors waving on crowded city streets
   And the crow of roosters calling the sun from behind the horizon in the village

2
When people ask me where I am from
   I tell them
   I am from a country mispronounced into modernity
      By wandering white men
      From big men with small minds
   Who stole the spoils of our struggles with no shame or foresight
   I tell them I come from those who resisted
   Those whose dreams defied their bullets even after their breath was stolen from their bodies

3
When people ask me where it is I am from
   I tell them
   I am from a new story about this country, this continent, this world
      A new tale told by new authors
      Unafraid to wield the pen as a small spear
      Our ancestors as shield
      Our history as armour
   As we use our words to help write this world
      Anew

Mwende Freequency Katwiwa
DOCTOR'S ORDERS, MAM.
Building the future now – How our cities are pushing the boundaries of planning, governance, finance and technology

We are living in an urban age. Three fundamental urbanisation trends, observed by Patrick Musoke from Kampala City Council Authority, are that Africa is ‘urbanising younger’, which our economies are currently unable to support, and ‘urbanising poorer,’ contributing to growing inequality and ‘urbanising unsustainably’ due to ineffective urban planning resulting in inefficient urban forms that often consume productive land. As it stands, our cities are not leaning in to the opportunities that urbanization brings, such as diverse human capacity, economies of scale and the productive labour of a burgeoning youth population. Leveraging these urban opportunities while tackling urban challenges to ensure that African cities develop in a manner that is inclusive, resilient and climate friendly requires local and sub-national governments to apply innovative, forward thinking and whole of society approaches to governance, technology and finance with urgency.

It is no shock that equipping our urban environments with sufficient, efficient and climate resilient infrastructure and services to support growing populations requires immense funding. Carla Rooseboom from Alinea Advisory noted that there are vast amounts of funding and financing opportunities available to local and sub-national governments to support their sustainable development. Accessing these funds requires a level of innovative thinking, financial literacy, good understanding of the diverse financing options available and specific funder requirements, as well as well-structured projects and programmes that place climate action and SDG implementation at their core. According to Carla, the funding landscape is becoming more dynamic offering diverse financing opportunities for cities to access. Important considerations for cities are to promote good governance, financial sustainability, and good financial management as prerequisites to access funding.

Kyong-yung Lee of WeGO emphasised that technology and the implementation of smart applications can deliver good results in running efficient cities that are inclusive and sustainable. He illustrated that e-governance is important in creating smart cities that enable, for example, smart security systems, efficient home affairs services, platforms for civic participation, smart transportation, and municipal services, to name a few.

Brenda Strachan provided us with insightful examples and reflections from her experiences in implementing sustainability projects within the City of uMhlathuze, South Africa. She noted that it starts with a mindset change, admitting that there are problems, and then rallying a whole of government approach to seek and implement solutions, and embed sustainability within their programmes to effectively institutionalise sustainable development.

Inherited City:

To my future children I bequeath
this continent, borders lowered
& turned into a soft pile of dust
smooth sand under steady feet,
Your birthright is a country of flowers
A city that holds you even with your complicated lineage,
the way this city has held my heart, held its arms
out for all the lost people who found solace in it
your heirloom is this land and all its wormholes –
portals hidden in plain sight between city skyscrapers
where people here resemble people from faraway places,
and differences are muted while life happens

I reimagine you a country that does not cage its doves
A bequest of waters that pool precious histories
Mountains that stand guard to protect against the unknown
A nation who preserves compassion over all else
A mouth that can home many languages
And a spirit that rises above its fears

Afeefa Omar
This dialogue aimed to showcase urban champions who are transforming their cities and improving health, the built environment, circularity and ecological systems. Given that the world is changing drastically due to environmental crises and technological advancements, adaptive and innovative responses are required.

In reflecting on the possible approaches Next Urban Champions* could take, panellists reflected on enablers such as language as a starting point to championing a new future for African cities. Speaking the language of a community translates into understanding their needs and building WITH the community as CO-OWNERS and LEADERS of project implementation.

The discussion also emphasised that African cities are not locked into traditional thinking – and with a different type of thinking, cities are enabled to benefit from lessons from other places and define their own development trajectories.

Panellists remarked that Next Urban Champions are those who are willing to make change using innovative methodologies that challenge the status quo. It was suggested that Urban Champions can start small, by actively inviting communities into safe spaces of co-designing or adopting toolkits to engage with communities. It is important that Next Urban Champion start now in order for their ideas to gain momentum, take hold and lead to change.

This new era provides space for African solutions led by innovators, entrepreneurs, practitioners and urban champions. We can all be urbanists!

**KEY QUOTES**

"African cities are not locked into a particular way of thinking or trajectory... they can benefit from different ways of thinking”  
Rashiq Fataar, Director, Our Future Cities

"Innovation & critical thinking can help bring Africa back"  
Oladosu Adenike, Youth Climate Activist

"Eighty per cent of buildings needed in Africa by 2050 have still not been built. Building for mitigation as well as resilience & adaptation are key ... there are massive opportunities in Africa to leapfrog to renewables”  
Nigel Topping, UN High-Level Climate Action Champion for COP26

"For urban development in Africa, it's rather about doing, rather than doing it perfectly"  
Olamide Uduma-Ejorh, Director of the Lagos Urban Development Initiative (LUDI)

"The reason I work at the local level is that it is the only way we can design projects for impact... This is because you have to speak to the people for whom you are designing... as part of this process, a key question for me is ‘How do we better advocate for people seeing themselves as the solutions to the problems?’ “  
Malaika Toyo, Principal Director of Made Culture
“I am with others – I am an individual within a collective. It takes one to take ownership of our individual power [in a collective]”

Nabeel Petersen, Co-Director of Pivot Collective

“We are uniquely positioned to launch the next phase [of living and producing]. We have a fresh canvas”

Wekesa Zablon, Regional Coordinator for the African Circular Economy Network (ACEN)

When inspired fires fly.

We are moving into the city again this morning. Our dreams tucked under our arms and the bags under our eyes overflowing with hope.

We are moving this city again out of mourning. Cleaning our streams of consciousness with floodlight ideas to illuminate the workings of our inner scope.

We’ve masked our intentions anew. We’ve strengthened our bones, calcified our resilience and merged stillness to our minds using breath as the sinew.

We continue to forge a dreamscape across an arid land held hostage by reality.

We are watering smiles into the cracks in the concrete, reinventing laughter to sprout and fill the lulls in our conversations.

Yes, our windows open towards brick walls but our eyes are the source of sunlight.

We are living temples of light moving across the cityscape, mobile streetlamps the reflection of the heavens we rose from.

Mutle Mothibe
Celebrating our urban imaginaries: a joint reflection + commitment to action

This session invited insights from the 38 sessions hosted by organisations throughout the festival, to draw out collective themes and hear the outcomes and the proposed ways forward for each session. These are explored in more depth below. Throughout the festival we asked participants if they were inspired to commit to specific actions – these reflections are also shared below.

Let our voices ring

Let our voices ring
soft and strong
a million rainbow tongues
pushing our songs through the wind
let our stories dance out in step with the moon
let them boom from shanties in Soweto
rise through the sprawls of Cairo
straddle the contradictions of Lagos
let them tell of sweat and fear:
of backs bent to carry dreams too heavy for legs to bear
of old men whose visions of the future tether us to the past
let our voices come accompanied by Djembes, Talking Drums and all that jazz let our stories
speak of sex:
of probing tongues & grinding thighs against the Nairobi heat
of love that rises from the ashes of defeat
in Kigali
tapestries of our humanity
woven into beautiful colors of difference and diversity
this is who we are
and it’s to these voices we turn, time and again,
to remind us that we get past the pain
that we have once chiseled out beauty from mountains of self-doubt
and through the dark tunnels of despair these stories will lead us out
in Twi, in Swahili, in Yoruba
whatever the languages of our imaginations
let our voices never stop ringing
let our feet dance up spirits
let our pens conjure the ancient wisdom of the ancestors
excavate memories to find the civilizations we once built
before the barbarians barged through the doors
for we are a people too,
a universe of multiple dreams written into history
written out of war
written to the sound of thunder,
written in lightning
written, by million rainbow voices that never stop ringing

Efe Paul Azino
The winner

@ghana.must_go
Age of technology

I believe that education, technology and the youth are the driving force of a nations’ development thereby making tech investment a neccesity
Finalists

@through_ahairwes_lens
Ahairwebyona Monica
RISE FAST, RISE RIGHT

My Afro-Future City is in a process of growth. Experiencing different waves of development all at the same time unlike other continents which experienced these one at a time. My story is interrogating what that means for us as a continent. Nairobi city in Kenya was my subject. Below is the narrative.

Africa has, during the post-colonial era, grown an urban sprawl on the land it occupies like a spiraling goosebumps. In the East of Africa lies a city, Nairobi in Kenya –one of the fastest-growing cities in the region presumably because of the stature of their economy, and the level of their infrastructural development.

On my first contact with the city, Nairobi was a rather charming and thought-provoking city; from the iconic diversity it inheres, the alluring high rise buildings to the shacks –the innumerable labyrinths and the intricacy of the road network.

I tackled this topic through the lens of people and their surrounding environment. I perceive a city to be the manifestation of people’s needs, culture, and maybe choices. These spaces are in most cases an accurate depiction of the different social strata –the class of people trying to cope up with the upward trajectory of this urbanization.

Rising fast is a spectacular aspect of urbanization, but as we rise fast, there is a need to keep in mind that ‘as we rise fast, we should also rise right!’
“Unity will not make us rich, but it can at least make it difficult for Africa and the African peoples to be disregarded and humiliated”
Mwalimu Julius Nyerere

I have a dream on this day.
It is of a child in a deep sleep, with an afro so green that is of our nature and eco friendliness.

It is now, she says
That Africa is about to wake because young people are on the move, with this mission and slogans from our forefathers who were freedom fighters, who did not die in vain.

I see Africa reclaim its rightful dimensions on the globe.
Where our veins feed direct from these rivers of gold, with nature continuing to bless us as we grow more conscious of it and its resourcefulness. We then protect and defend it as well as the ideas that have been home bred.
I see us find our very own solutions to our own problems, communally as the folks before us once did.

A city where people power is the core of our growth in respect to all that is founded by this idea.
As we integrate into a bond, stronger than before with priority from the lowest level of being, paving way for trade relations, cultural exchange and infrastructural partnerships.

I have seen failed measures such as GDP so old, dead and buried, new and better modules designed in consideration of humanity and other well being aspects, from our own interests to an economy that is fully protected.

Imperialism with its evils and vices put down and a people so free and well informed because they have learnt of their history.
They now exercise their freedoms in speech and expression such as the media and gender equality being uplifted.

A city inspired by change from below.

Then we are in hammocks under money trees, planted by our effort and originality in what we consider wealth, together.
There are three bridges that connects the mainland to the island in Lagos city; Third mainland bridge, carter bridge and Eko bridge. Its hard to imagine how the city looks with these bridges, definitely beautiful as the picture depicts, showing the beautiful skyline, the ocean, and the colors the car light-rails form. The development and construction of these bridges over time is to aid easy movement, definitely the design of more bridges and alternative means of transportation like the overhead railway would add to the beauty of the city.
All urban development come at a price. While amenities for human living are put in place, nature and eco-sustainability ought not be displaced. An equilibrium between development and its effect on the environment needs to be found and maintained in order to attain an ideal and livable city.

Under the same sky in Nairobi there are two realities that ask us what the concept of development is. The photo shows us one of the largest slums in Africa but at the same time and in the same city the other photo shows us how the city of Nairobi has grown in infrastructure. The point is that having large infrastructures does not necessarily mean having development. It is necessary to promote sustainable development in cities where the person is the most fundamental, a holistic development is necessary not only based on economics. This is what people want to see in the future, truly developed cities where equity is taken into account more than equality in development opportunities.
I chose to show a future where people in African cities have sustainable access to resources and critical social facilities like healthcare, education, transport and housing. In a world where everyone is guaranteed the equitable distribution of such, the hierarchy of needs is equalized and with the basic needs met everyone can pursue personal fulfilment and contribute better to the welfare of their communities.

I chose a rooftop because nothing beats a good view and with a group of good friends/family all you need is some good food and music to have a good time.

The future of Nairobi is on a steep upward incline especially since the current technological trends hold a lot of promise for social, cultural and economic development for the city and Kenya at large. 2063 will be 100 years clocked since independence and by then the architecture, transport systems and economy of the city will be so different from the way things are today. A lot of it will be broken down and reset in the time between now and then. For instance, a lot of the suburban land will be filled with residential and commercial property several floors up. Access to energy will be a critical component of everyday activities and for that we will need clean electric energy that powers our homes and vehicles. Road transport may be so congested that inner city roads may have to be layered on top of each other (like in Johannesburg) like bypass valves funneling traffic around particularly busy roads. Alternatively, electric air transport may provide easier commute times between designated stations. Food technology will be transformed as well. Today food can be 3D printed in the form of jelly that is infused with particular nutrients. At the time, flavored jelly can be sold as ingredients you can use to customize your food and print them at home with plenty of publicly accessible recipes around which several unique cultural dishes can be developed making up a whole new cuisine.

With limited land available for farming in such densely populated areas, vertical farming techniques can be used to save space and resources. If you can grow your crops on shelves and feed them with Ultraviolet Lamps you won't need a lot of land or sunlight to get the same amount of produce. Indoor farming can produce enough food for a whole building. Scale that up to every residential building and you won't need much to keep your cities well fed.

A lot more can be realized but imagine the social and cultural output of such people bolstered by artificial intelligence and machine learning. Once we let the computers do all the computing we free ourselves to do the more human activities like taking care of each other and making films, music and art that enrich our lives as we travel and explore.

Economic empowerment for all will go a long way in eliminating classism that divides us all and pushes the wealth gap further beyond repair.
The RISE Africa Action Festival 2021 provided an array of boundary-pushing topics and showcased novel practices from several African cities. It is almost impossible to discuss the festival without acknowledging the context in which it took place – in the midst of the great global disruptor of the Covid-19 pandemic and associated government lockdowns, differentially enacted by different countries. This global health crisis fundamentally re-oriented all aspects of our lives, with a particular re-orientation within the fields of urban studies, urban planning, environmental planning, and urban design. Covid-19 forced the world to make rapid changes to the way in which we operate and many people and organisations were spurred into action in response to the resulting challenges. Additionally, many individuals were forced to take pause and found themselves with ample time to reflect; to look back on the way things have been done in the past, and how things may be done in the future, and to drastically reconsider our way of living. This is not to overlook that the pandemic halted many countries economies and saw the rates of unemployment and visible poverty skyrocket, with increasing despair present in our communities. Two key outcomes of this crisis were:

- The clear and unavoidable acknowledgement that STRUCTURAL challenges underpin homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, lack of services, reinforced disempowerment and limited livelihood opportunities in all our cities, and that they are inextricably linked and
- That rapid radical change is possible under the right set of circumstances – no person may ever suggest again that vital, radical changes in institutions, behaviours and outcomes are not possible.

The session Circular African Cities asked us, how can we “build back better” in a post-covid world? The call to “build back better” aligns with the Next Urban Champions* theme detailed in the Curatorial Statement, which served as touchpoint that guided the festival as a whole. It served as a rallying call for changemakers, disruptors and advocates from across the continent to come together and imagine future African cities. They were called upon to transform these imaginings into actionable plans. The Next Urban Champions* theme flowed throughout the festival and reinforced several emergent themes from the various hosted session: They are as follows:
Hosting a virtual festival at first seemed like a backup plan necessitated as a result of the pandemic. But the need to gather virtually served as a blessing in disguise, as it allowed for truly international participation. Audiences were gifted the opportunity to hear stories from across the continent and the diaspora. Many of the sessions were interactive and welcomed audience participation allowing the audience to share their own stories thus resulting in a week of free-flowing, open exchange.

The greatest learnings often come from people, organisations and government institutions sharing their personal stories, their histories, and their experiences within the cities in which they live or work. We learned that there are various ways that stories can be used in research for example; to explore, to document, to engage with others going through a similar experience, and to connect with others who may be different from ourselves. The session, We Are All African (WAAA) Podcast: The power of storytelling, emphasised that storytelling should be celebrated as a means of creating deeper levels of understanding between ourselves and the world around us.

The session, Mapping Voices explored how storytelling can be used as a means of more effective, accessible science communication. David Maddox, Founder and Director of the The Nature of Cities states, “Scientists have a lot of stuff to say to the world. Oftentimes these are written in technical notes that are difficult to comprehend for many. However, getting them [scientists] to explore storytelling will break down obvious barriers in communication.”

Storytelling is not simply an oral tradition as stories can be shared through art, dance and other mediums of creative expression. The sessions Cultural Aesthetics and Urbanisation focused on how art, music, architecture, food and language can all drive inclusive urbanisation on the continent while Decolonising Urban Taboos used drawing, dancing and storytelling as a means to raise awareness around taboo subjects in rural communities such as sanitation, menstruation and hygiene. In “Cultural Aesthetics and Urbanisation” Degan Omar stated, “Cultural diversity is the
common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations.”

The session, *Africa is the 21st century changemaker* argued for greater inclusion of artists into the spaces in which changes that impact our lives are decided citing artists’ ability to contribute to and shape narratives and nation building. Storytelling, art, music and other forms of knowledge sharing that exist outside the world of academia are powerful means of communication as they are accessible by all persons, they champion inclusive knowledge sharing practices and enable a wider audience to participate in knowledge sharing and changemaking practices. It is a means of knowledge sharing that welcomes and includes indigenous knowledge sources and voices that are often marginalised by mainstream academia.

**ALTERNATIVE CHANGEMAKERS**

As above mentioned, at the centre of the festival was the theme *Next Urban Champions*. This begged the question, “What makes an Urban Champion or a changemaker on the African continent?” In answering this question, it was uncovered that it takes the proverbial ‘blood, sweat and tears’ - a tenacious commitment to seeing positive tangible change on the ground. Societal actors can unconsciously become Urban Champions as a result of their community or activism work. Other times they are persons deliberately acting in the interest of urban spaces and the people who occupy them. No matter if conscious, or unconscious, it was unanimously established that **an Urban Champion is someone who listens to, and includes, the voices of those they are trying to serve.**

In the core session “Next Urban Champions” Olamide Udoma-Ejorh, Director of the Lagos Urban Development Space, talks about “finding people in their own space...rather than bringing them into your own,” while Malaika Toyo, Principal Director of Made Culture asks, “how do we better advocate for people seeing themselves as the solutions to the problems?”. These women seem to suggest that the Next Urban Champions already exist and are ready to take action, but need assistance from established practitioners to have their ideas heard and need to be supported in their efforts to champion new and improved urban spaces on the continent.
ADVANCING WOMEN & WOMEN’S VOICES IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENTAL POLICIES

The pandemic has amplified inequality in all its forms at the global, continent, country, city and even household level and disproportionately impacted already vulnerable and marginalised communities. Gaps between rich and poor have dramatically increased and many women have been forced to take on a greater domestic role and take a step back from their working lives. This in a world where women are already largely discounted and largely excluded from urban policies, plans and strategies. The inclusion of women in policy is not just for the benefit of women but for society as whole. “Sustainability and equitability can only be achieved if and when gender equality and women’s empowerment are addressed in climate change actions. Women are a vital part of the solution to climate change” - Tiffany Hodgson, climate change expert, Green Climate Fund talking in Financing Gender-sensitive Climate Action for African cities. By advocating for women’s voices to be heard, and indeed to matter, in urban policy, development and decision-making, we pave the way for more inclusive governance structures in the path towards achieving sustainable cities. If we are to attain the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) targets, governments have to incorporate all the voices of those who live in our cities in the decision-making process.

Dr Meggan Spires from ICLEI Africa explains that, “evidence shows that women are disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of climate change; particularly on our continent of Africa. It is therefore imperative that climate finance decisions prioritise infrastructure projects that support and promote the upliftment of women in society.”

THE POTENTIAL OF LOCALISED DATA SYSTEMS TO SUPPORT EMPIRICAL RESEARCH & FUTURE SCENARIO PLANNING

Effective urban planning, decision-making and research hinges on the types of local data that are gathered and used in projects within the private, government and non-government sectors. Good data can also help with disaster-risk preparedness. Good quality and detailed data are typically hard to come by in African cities due to a variety of factors, including a disconnect between traditional methodologies for data collection and on-the-ground reality, a lack of local level capacity and financial resources.

Three solutions to the problem of data gaps were explored during RISE Africa. Fractal Learning Labs are exploring better ways of collaboratively and inclusively developing climate information that incorporates insights from a variety of different knowledge types
and stakeholder experiences. (See Co-developing climate information for decision making through podcasts). ICLEI Africa has explored photographic narrative approaches to understanding resource flows in cities – these flows (informal, illegal, decentralised or unseen) are typically ‘hidden’ from decision makers, and thus excluded in policy (See A photographic dialogue).

Additionally, Resilience Academy, working in urban communities in Tanzania, have a collaborative data collection programme which equips students from partner universities to be able to identify and collect missing data on urban communities in Tanzania. (see Building localised community data).

However, despite these challenges, there are some inspiring cases showing the power of localised data systems, tailored and packaged and therefore able to respond to particular local urban challenges. Considering the African cities’ future development trajectory, we note the important role of current and emerging technologies in supporting economic, environmental and social growth. The example of applying Artificial Intelligence (AI) in smart city planning strategies in Cairo (see here) is a wonderful example of leveraging emerging technologies to positively enhance urban planning tools, while also making city infrastructure systems more robust and resilient.

There needs to be greater attention given to practices across African cities of the use and application of local data systems in evidence-based spatial and urban planning. These examples should celebrate both the public and private sectors, including key stakeholders in the NGO and academic fields.

NUANCED VIEWS OF PLACEMAKING ACROSS AFRICAN CITIES

The RISE Africa Action Festival showcased a number of important placemaking initiatives across different African cities. These places and spaces were the outcome of both the changemakers and urban champions driving collaborative processes but were also in some instances, indirect outcomes of social advocacy and related social action.

‘Partnering to develop shared public spaces in Johannesburg’ emphasised how we can learn from projects spurred by collaborative partnerships. Now more than ever, public spaces are garnering attention for their role as sites of reprieve and socialisation. The Covid-19 pandemic simply cemented our view on the importance of public spaces, the multi-functional roles it serves in cities, and the need
for equal access to such spaces by all city residents. As Ayanda Roji, General Manager of Johannesburg City Parks and Zoos states, “Covid-19 showed us the importance of squares, of markets and of transport hubs and informal workers given the nature of our economy and how these spaces sustain our livelihoods. They should be integrated in city making”.

The webinar ‘A New Placemaking Agenda for African Cities’ allowed participants to discuss and reframe the idea of ‘placemaking’. The webinar turned ideas of placemaking inside-out and considered ways in which placemaking can occur as a by-product of public services, art, culture and engagement. They even went so far as to question whether the word ‘placemaking’ was appropriate or if new terminology was needed. Stephanie Briers asked, “How do people create their own place? How is placemaking something that just happens kind of organically and can also adapt to people’s needs over time?” The webinar revealed the creative and tenacious emerging practices, people and services that are the driving force behind quality spaces - from a harm reduction centre in Belhaven, Durban to creative interventions such as art, lighting and design. Placemakers are challenged to create spaces that both have a use-value and a sense of meaning and community ownership. In ‘Develop your Playground’, Alexandra Papadaki noted that, “Ownership is very important. If you feel like you are part of it [public space] and it is yours, you may feel like you want to use it and look after it.”
Some sessions chose to highlight the need to have urban design proposals that are sensitive to children as key users of public spaces. Both the Designing Playful Cities and Develop Your Playground sessions were useful platforms to promote more child-friendly public space design, as well as to encourage a greater incorporation of children into the design process through engagement and participatory methods. Franka van Marrewijk from African Architecture Matters noted that “There is an inherent responsibility in designing good playgrounds.” This responsibility is derived from the important role that ‘play’ offers in early childhood development. As Zviko Kanyoka, project coordinator of Designing Playful Cities, puts it, “play is a way of learning and acquiring knowledge and making sense of the world around us....Play is a process that plants seeds for children to reconsider the way they do things and how they can make change with their contribution.”

INTERCONNECTEDNESS OF CLIMATE CHANGE, AFRICAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, & RESILIENCE-BUILDING

In many situations it is difficult to separate one issue from another. Many sessions dealt with the question of how to begin creating resilient, sustainable cities when the challenges are not isolated but interconnected. There is a need to build better connections and understanding across science, society and policy. These connections can likely be facilitated by accurate and appropriate local data capturing and use within empirical research studies. “To address the causes and effects of crises we need to create positive synergies between frameworks such as helping people cope with adversities, increasing the resilience for social protection and access to basic services, etc...” Jahal Rabesahal de Meritens (Advancing Humanitarian-development-peace nexus).

Following from the words of Jahal, it is necessary to understand climate change as a magnifier of risk for cities. “Cities must be at the forefront of tackling climate change,” says Robin Oraklet of the Urban Movement Innovation Fund. The session ‘Forecast based financing for disaster prone cities’ illustrated the need for anticipation rather than reaction in disaster management and the increased accuracy of scientific data in making reliable predictions. Forecast-based financing is identified and discussed as a tool for strategic preparation and crisis diversion in cities. The Urban Action Karaoke session shared their Urban Action Kit which is a quick-start, low-cost DIY guide for responding to natural disasters (which occur with increasing frequency as a result of climate change) in African cities. The kit hopes to “inspire local level resilience action,” says Roop Singh, Red Cross Crescent Climate Centre.
The sessions on circular economies examined how we can make full use of products and materials through every stage of their lifecycle, while a photographic dialogue invited audiences to a virtual photographic exhibition and examined #hiddenflows, that is, the flow of resources such as food, water, waste and people through the city, that often go unnoticed. Consideration of both can help aid with a city’s resilience to the effects of climate change. For Joanna Bingham, CEO of Footprints Africa, “the circular economy [has opportunities] to make a huge difference on the African continent.”

Another two sessions that speak to climate change mitigation are ‘Advancing the Humanitarian-Development-Peace Nexus’ and ‘Building healthy relationships between civil society and local governments.’ All of these related sessions reveal the need for an integrated approach to combat climate change and the importance of strategic planning and collaboration between communities and local governments in key decision-making processes. We also learned that the notion of 100% Renewable Energy Cities and achieving Net Zero cities are possible given the right kinds of leadership from both local governments and local private businesses working in the energy sector and promoting green and clean (renewable) energy sources.
The RISE Africa action festival 2021 gave participants a mere glimpse into the depth, creativity, and energy that exists across African cities. RISE Africa 2021 assembled a truly marvellous mix of actors from different sectors, fields and professions and revealed the multitude of connections that exist between them. This incredible mix of perspectives included established and emerging urban champions, mentors for the next generation of urban champions and trailblazers defining what it will mean to be an urban champion in the future. RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival provided a platform for their actions and progress to inspire change across the African landscape – something that is sorely needed.

Many sessions and actors spoke about the challenges facing the continent such as inequality, the pandemic, the threat of climate change, data gaps, limitations in capabilities and good governance. These problems often seem insurmountable. However, what ultimately emerged was not a sense of despondency but a sense of optimism. There is hope in the fact that so many people had chosen to gather, in the midst of all these challenges, to talk, share and listen with a view to creating more sustainable African cities. There is hope in the act of gathering and hope in the stories of success and progress that we share together.
Potential outcomes of RISE Africa

As part of building the RISE Africa platform, it has been important to the curatorial team to test the assumptions that events and meetings lead to meaningful and appropriate action on the ground. We asked RISE Africa participants to let us know if they had been inspired to commit to a specific action due to the festival. We received 97 responses, a few of which are noted here:

“I am keen to write about Bellhaven as a placemaking ‘installation/institution’. I would be keen to do this with a writing collaborator from the Rise Africa network.”

“A commitment for me, Celebrate Africa everyday and be genuine about it. Not to let anyone define how African I am.”

“For now its an ongoing personal action, to use the resources I have to learn more and where I can, to help others do the same. Creating awareness of the problems in the built environment and generating potential solutions is key. I am also trying to get the Alumni Association of my former school of architecture, to engage in activity that promotes the creation of sustainable built environments and influence the public to become more aware of their built environment and its potential.”

“Definitely, to keep on pushing to give younger fellow residents greater voice on ALL aspects of what impacts their and our lives, which is to be activating at every level and aspect of our shared worlds and realms and spheres. The time of the greybeards is decidedly done!”

“I have been inspired by the simple innovations presented to find more practical solutions to achieve better water and sanitation delivery/use.”

“The session was very informative about how one can go about getting funding for sustainable projects. One day I hope to start an organisation to address issues of inequality as well as creating sustainable solutions and this session provided me with the information needed to do so.”

“To celebrate Africa everyday by being bold, authentic and sharing what I am. I am African and do not need any one to confirm that or not.”

“To link with a number of attendees and attend follow up Rise Africa webinars this week.”

“I have committed to develop community gardens and training centres.”

“Yes, in some countries, especially underdeveloped countries, people tend to downplay the actions of women and women also do not really know their potential as intelligent and far-sighted beings. My goal is to organize training sessions. training that will make them aware of their capacities.”

“Trying to commit to better ‘imagination’ in my life and work, inspired by Tuesday’s core session.”

“I feel inspired to be more involved in South Africa’s transition to a greener economy. I had previously been discouraged as I had thought the youth did not have as much influence as the older generations. Being a part of South Africa’s youth population, the presentation highlighted the importance of youth in creating greener cities.”

“I am working on a research in Freetown and this session has benefited me really well.”

“Inspired to build a data and information system to support circular economy.”
The RISE Africa team is committed to following up with those who voiced actions to ascertain the degree to which participants have taken the ideas from RISE Africa forward. We organised the 97 inspirations / commitments to action into several categories:

- **two**
  were thematic reflections that they would celebrate Africa and their role in driving change within.

- **three**
  were propositions to improve personal sustainability actions, such as saving water or taking on sustainable lifestyle activities.

- **five**
  people noted that the ideas of RISE Africa sessions have reshaped their ongoing research or inspired them to begin a new research inquiry.

- **seven**
  people noted that they had renewed energy, or had experienced validation, to continue their work. This is a valuable reflection in an industry in which change is slow, or difficult to see. To be part of an event which reinforces a current path or type of work is important for people to retain their enthusiasm and energy.

- **seven**
  participants identified new collaborators or partnerships through RISE Africa.

- **eight**
  people committed to expanding their work to include new groups of people, or to create platforms for youth, women, elderly and people with disabilities to express their perspectives on urban development. This act of supporting others’ to have larger voice in decision making or community development is encouraging.

- **nine**
  people expressed a desire to learn more about a theme presented at RISE Africa.

- **ten**
  people committed to taking the ideas and resources discovered or learned at RISE Africa to further communities.

- **eleven**
  people expressed and interest in beginning entirely new projects.

- **thirteen**
  participants indicated that RISE Africa was inspiring, but did not elaborate.

- **twenty two**
  participants expressed that they would incorporate ideas and resources from RISE Africa into their ongoing work. This is positive reinforcement that being exposed to [new] ideas can encourage people to reflect on their own work and adapt it in many ways.

Each of these committed actions represents a validation of the value of RISE Africa as a platform and forum for providing new ideas, reinforcing current activities, and encouraging participants to push the boundaries of their thinking and their work.
If each of these 97 participants hold true to their committed actions, RISE Africa will have inspired 11 new projects, enriched 22 existing processes with new ideas and resources, built 7 new partnerships, shaped 7 pieces of urban research, reinvigorated 7 CHAMPIONS* to keep working towards their goals, invited further communities to make use of RISE Africa ideas, and supported their voice in shaping sustainable African cities. **We hope that these types of actions may have manifested in similar proportions for the 1400 overall participants of RISE Africa.** We are sure that many large and small actions inspired by the Festival have not been documented.
REFLECTING ON THE OUTCOMES OF RISE AFRICA 20201 AND CHARTING THE ROUTE FOR THE NEXT EVENTS

The RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival weaved together many stories of hope, triumph, tenacity, collaboration and commitment across various African cities and urban contexts. Reflecting on the overall impact of the festival, I am reminded of the power of sharing and celebrating best practices and projects in the multi-faceted field of urban and regional planning and development.

The festival provided a sneak-peak and a window into urban action. From our personal space, we got to see how and where urban action took place - the good and the challenging. The digital space allowed us to see urban action from the comfort of our own homes and working spaces. The dialogues commented on the status quo and sought to craft a more sustainable resilient vision for our future cities. From memory I recall visuals of skylights, cityscapes, parks, public spaces and so much more. The conference provided a platform to see so much in such a short space of time, and engage with each session's content on a much deeper level.

The enthusiasm and energy were real, which is what makes the African continent and the people who have been part of the festival so amazing! When we thought the COVID-19 pandemic presented a challenge, we saw curiosity and persistence in urbanists and environmental activists in a range of different ways from a range of different disciplines. The RISE Africa conference provided a space for co-learning on what actions to take to map a pathway to more sustainable cities. Of course, the digital space presents its challenges, but the inaugural edition of the action festival overcame that challenge through the great connections that were fostered. This was visible in the lively panel discussions, workshops, exhibitions and many other platforms incorporated into the sessions. Connections were formed, and barriers and challenges became learning-curves and solutions or even toolkits for others.

A lot more must be done for the conversation to continue, but that is the strength of RISE Africa. It is not a once off platform for dialogue, but a platform that supports impactful actions through a consistent series of dialogues.

Through the conference, we uncovered the new urban champions or perhaps even a newer definition of what this means. They were recognised by many different names and roles, but that now also means that the definition of the “urban champion” can now be expanded to those newer groups and collectives that were thought of as outliers and were never fully considered. We always speak about silos, and the barriers we encounter in planning for and managing our cities - what we could call the ‘boxes’ of people, ideas and working techniques and spaces. We need to understand better how we create our own boxes, and we need to break down our own boxes by moving out of our comfort zones. As we heard from Nabeel Peterson, from Pivot Collective in Cape Town, we can break down those imaginary boxes. Science, art, politics, and business can overlap and converge and find new ways of engaging and fostering new urban actions. The festival allowed participants from different disciplines to merge ideas and open and break down the perceived silos and reach out to others. There was a big emphasis on language and storytelling, and the conference provided new ideas and methods to use in storytelling and putting information out there. For example, the use of podcasts was mentioned as a new way of storytelling to inspire action around climate change, identity, and many other urban issues.
Despite different contexts, places of work, fields of learning, languages and themes, there was a commonality, which would be important for the next conference. The aspirations and goals shared across the week had a similar energy and ethos across all members who facilitated and participated. It was the aspiration of engaging, accessible, resilient, and sustainable cities where people have freedom to move and engage where they are safe.

I am looking forward to future engagements, both virtually and in person, to continue connecting with African changemakers and urban champions. We have learned so much from the RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival. I hope we can all build on the knowledge base and strengthen the connections forged between individuals and organisations that are fighting for common goals and objectives. To see more inclusive, responsive, robust, and efficient African cities. RISE Africa, Rise!

Paul Currie
RISE Africa 2021 Chair

The RISE Africa 2021 Action Festival surpassed all of our expectations. We were surprised by the sharing of so many session proposals, each engaging the core ideas of RISE Africa of AFRICA – CITIES – ACTION and FUTURES, each tangling with how to enact change in complex contexts across so many contexts. We knew that by making it a virtual festival we may gain the participation of people who would not be able to afford, nor wish, to travel to one location, and here again we were floored by the breadth of participation from so many people across different African countries and cities, as well as from colleagues interested in learning about, and from African projects and processes, as well as sharing their experiences from around the world.

We designed the RISE Africa Action Festival to be a space in which different societal actors would feel excited to speak across boundaries and share their insights in the spirit of learning and supporting others to improve or adapt their practice. It was unclear how successful this was going to be, again, due to the challenges of not being able to hold and guide people on a collective journey in the same space, but rather based on the gifts of people’s attention despite many background distractions. Yet, for me, this is what RISE Africa represents at its core – embracing emergence and the unexpected. This is one of the systems concepts that is often elusive but potentially the most exciting and important for us, as urban practitioners, to engage: the idea of an emergent reality or experience that exists only through the many relationships that exist in a system. In this way, the RISE Africa Action Festival was an emergent property of the 1400 people who participated in some way, and were interested in pushing the needle of how we understand, engage with and change African cities for the better.

While we, as curators, were uncertain of what the potential outcomes of RISE Africa might be, trusting in the processes that we had set in place and the people who had offered their attention and insights ended up producing something wondrous, inspiring and unforeseen.

What was so notable to me is that, through the 43 sessions and in wrapping up the whole festival, it was clear that the one theme, among many, on everyone’s mind was ‘just transitions, equity, liveability and dignity for all in African cities’. While in our work, we have always emphasized the need to see sustainability efforts in Africa primarily through the social or equity lens, I feel that the Festival offered...
an important resounding echo of this point. For anyone interested in African cities, the festival reinforced that you cannot attempt to understand, improve, change, influence, control or guide African cities towards sustainability without considering first how those actions contribute to the equal participation in that process and the equitable realisation of its intended outcomes. We have all heard and used the adage “African Solutions to African Problems,” and as communicators and advocates, we may sometimes become despondent that we are repeating the same messages to rooms full of people who already agree. RISE Africa demonstrated to me viscerally what ‘African solutions to African problems’ looks and feels like, beyond a refrain. And to borrow a comment someone made to me in 2015: “Yes, sometimes we are tired of preaching to the choir, but sometimes we just need to hear our choir sing.” There was much collective singing during RISE Africa – and I hope we can continue this energy into our further work.
What next?

The RISE Africa roadmap continues with monthly **HAPPENINGS** that seek to take the themes of RISE Africa forward in the form of webinars and workshops, gaining further conceptual depth and broadening the participating constituencies, with a discussion series of **THOUGHT PIECES** that provide horizontal perspective on the continent or focussed city insights by African thought leaders who are challenging themselves to collaborate across knowledges to test their ideas and methodologies, with annual **PHOTO COMPETITIONS** that invite photographers to showcase the realities of their cities and to visualise urban alternatives with a new **MAYORAL** platform that seeks to support political dialogue between cities on the continent and profiling of flagship projects

These can all be explored on the RISE Africa **WEBSITE**

We look forward to the next RISE Africa event in 2022, which will continue to experiment with virtual engagement with broad continental reach, while supporting focussed events in several African cities under the theme of **CREATIVITY / AGENCY / URGENCY**

Stay updated by subscribing to the monthly mailer [here](mailto:riseafrica@iclei.org) Email [riseafrica@iclei.org](mailto:riseafrica@iclei.org) to explore partnering and sponsorship options
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ICLEI Africa, Our Future Cities, African Centre for Cities

Organising Team:
Paul Currie, ICLEI Africa – RISE Africa Chair
Rashiq Fataar, Our Future Cities – RISE Africa Curator

Alma Viviers, African Centre for Cities
Brooke Leaf-Wright, Our Future Cities
Ciske Smit, Our Future Cities
Daniel Adeniyi, ICLEI Africa
Jehan Bhikoo, ICLEI Africa
Jessica Kavonic, ICLEI Africa
Jokudu Guya, ICLEI Africa
Kathryn Byrnes, Our Future Cities
Lauren Arendse, ICLEI Africa
Ruby Schalit, ICLEI Africa
Ryan Fisher, ICLEI Africa
Solophina Nekesa, ICLEI Africa
Thea Lamarque, ICLEI Africa
Vanessa Tshite, ICLEI Africa

RISE Africa Advisory Board
Kobie Brand, ICLEI Africa
Andrew Tucker, African Centre for Cities
David Dodman, IIED
Debra Roberts, eThekwini Metropolitan Municipality
Geci Karuri-Sebina, South African Cities Network

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Bettina Koelle, Red Cross Red Crescent Climate Centre
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Michelle Preen, ICLEI Africa

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