

SOLUTIONS ONLY *[failures also]*

Show us and share only solutions so that we become solutions oriented. At the RISE Africa 2023 Action Festival Christiana Asala invited us to fundamentally change our world view and entry point for discourse on African cities. These places and spaces are so often vilified, often trapping us and transfixing us in layers of problems and challenges. However, we know that there is an abundance of innovative, boundary-pushing work driving change across all African cities. We find ideas and initiatives ranging from policy devices, community processes, new infrastructure formations and leaders who take robust, unapologetic stances to equity, sustainability and shared prosperity. Many of these solutions are found at the community or neighborhood level and they offer inspiration to spark broader societal, economic, cultural or infrastructural transformation. We need to internalise these solutions and possibilities and seek to develop, strengthen and accelerate them.

Oftentimes we think that we have to start from scratch, but if we merge theory and practice, we see that for any challenges that government, practitioners and academics face, people are already thinking about solutions. Until we change our worldview to seek solutions, we will have communities of deficits, and not spaces of abundance!

This provocation calls on us to seek new ways of doing and being, that use novel technologies and familiar practices, that pursue innovation in the everyday, that engage listening and learning as tools of implementation, and that defer to the specificities and assets found in different contexts. It calls us to look inwards and honour Kwame Nkrumah's call to '...find African solutions to African problems...'

We see this embraced in pockets of practices and solutions around the continent, noting just a few:

- Homa Bay, Kenya, is undertaking, not just a participatory planning and budgeting processes, but also participatory accountability processes.
- The Friendship Bench, understanding contextual taboos about mental health in Harare, has equipped grandmothers to offer support on public benches in parks across the city.
- Material scientists have found ways to use hemp in concrete to reduce the material burden of making our cities.
- Through their 'Potsdam Sustainability Campus,' the City of Cape Town has advocated for a programmatic approach to an experimentation and learning site that explicitly invites stakeholders to try and fail and learn.
- Cape Coast, Ghana and Bo, Sierra Leone have adopted new approaches to vernacularise human and gender rights to their own contexts. These cities have successfully applied human rights frameworks to address biodiversity and nature-related challenges, presenting a people centred and solutions-oriented approach for sustainable urban development.
- In Mbale, stakeholders from across this city have come together to establish the Good Food Parliament, driving collaborative reform of food system policies and practices across the city.
- Yvon Tsolefack, in Burkina Faso, has developed a prototype to recover mechanical and heat energy from roads to produce electricity for low-income communities.



- Giving life to discarded plastics that degrade urban ecosystems and undermine drainage, Uku'Hamba Prosthetics is creating light-weight, recyclable, and affordable prosthetics and orthotics to support amputees who might not be able to afford this life changing support.

We know that on the way to any inspiring story, sleek innovation or new societal formation, is a path riddled with failures and lessons. Harvesting and reflecting upon these failures is a vital practice for realising robust projects, processes and impact, but too often we are bashful or afraid to give these failures the spotlight. Or we are wary of centring these failures for fear that funders or partners do not share the world view of risk taking. Yet we know that risks and reflection lead to novelty and success.

Therefore, for the RISE Africa 2024 Action Festival, we invite you to present your ideas, solutions and successes in building equitable, sustainable and vibrant communities and cities. We also invite you to generously share how projects did not turn out as expected and what key lessons you have learnt and leveraged upon from these failures. How planned processes were usurped by contextual realities and how this provided an opportunity to pivot and build back better. How unexpected feedback loops rendered your solutions somewhat stale, yet provided an opportunity for deep reflection. More importantly we invite you to share what you learned from these experiences that could be invaluable for others walking similar or parallel paths.

Note: We are not inviting criticism of the failed state or the deficiencies in our cities. We are all acutely aware of the multi-layered, structural challenges that we tangle with on a daily basis. Instead, the RISE Africa 2024 Action Festival invites you to share the process lessons that are vital for powering more robust solutions. RISE Africa is a platform dedicated to reshaping the narrative around African urbanism, and in this transformative journey, we recognise that JOY is a radical act and a force that propels meaningful change.

Welcome to the RISE Africa 2024 Action Festival! Together, let's illuminate the varied, creative and unexpected paths towards prosperous, happy African cities. Let us walk these paths with shared wisdom and collective innovation. We invite you to bring SOLUTIONS ONLY [failures also].

