



URBAN ACTION
FESTIVAL 2025
by RISE Africa

REALISING UNBOUND POSSIBILITIES

through policy • research • creativity • practice

2025 PROGRAMME

What to expect?

- Plenary sessions
- Creative provocations
- Action sessions
- Microtalks
- Workshops
- Poetry
- Photo exhibition
- Site visits
- Evening events

Discover the full lineup of RISE Africa 2025 sessions and side events! Get access to inspiring discussions, creative workshops, and networking opportunities by securing your ticket today.

[BUY TICKET](#)



Photograph by Joshua Babs

RISE AFRICA IN 2025

Urbanisation is an irreversible reality already shaping Africa's future; we must embrace and actively transform our cities or risk being overwhelmed by them.

We live in a state of catalytic tension. Steeped in a polycrisis that interlays access to resources, climate impacts, unemployment, limited mobility, human-nature conflict and deficits of leadership, it is easy for us to become paralysed, especially when many of the drivers of these crises seem beyond our control. As individuals and communities, we are impacted by the choices and actions made by others — by businesses, networks, organisations, leaders, neighbours — both within and beyond the African context. Despite the paralytic potential of this polycrisis, we ask, “How can we not act?!” Amidst acknowledging the already strained systems in our African cities, we are still drawn to them as sites of hope and innovation.

[Read the full curator statement](#)



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DAY 1 | MONDAY 26 MAY 2025

8:30 - 9:00 Arrivals and registrations

9:00 - 9:30 Creative provocations

9:30 - 12:00 **Plenary session: Cultivating imaginative capabilities and embracing uncertain futures**
What capabilities do we need to cultivate to better embrace the uncertainties and possibilities of Africa's urban future?

12:00 - 13:30 **Lunch**

Urban Central: Redefining intermediary cities through multilateral partnerships

Explore the role that urbanisation and intermediary cities play in reshaping the form and function of our societies.

Host: Surge Africa

Future of urban food environments

Join us to collaboratively vision more sustainable, nourishing, inclusive food environments through data, foresight, and strategy tools.

Host: ICLEI Africa; AfriFOODlinks Project

Futuring in practice: Exploring foresight in urban planning and placemaking

Unpack examples of dynamic urban futuring projects with urban practitioners.

Host: Wits School of Governance

Mini-masterclass: kickstarting cities' digital and data transformation journeys

Learn insights on actionable frameworks for digital transformation in urban governance.

Host: Open Cities Lab

Scaling localised solutions with global South cities

Participate in showcasing solutions and generating ideas to enable social equity and reduce economic barriers in global south cities.

Host: South x South supported by UMI Fund & Surge Africa

Rights, restoration and resilience: Lessons from the Urban Natural Assets programme

Exploring equitable and inclusive Nature-based Solutions practices in urban Africa through a reflective learning lens.

Host: ICLEI Africa; UNA Resilience Project

Evening event **Opening night exhibition**

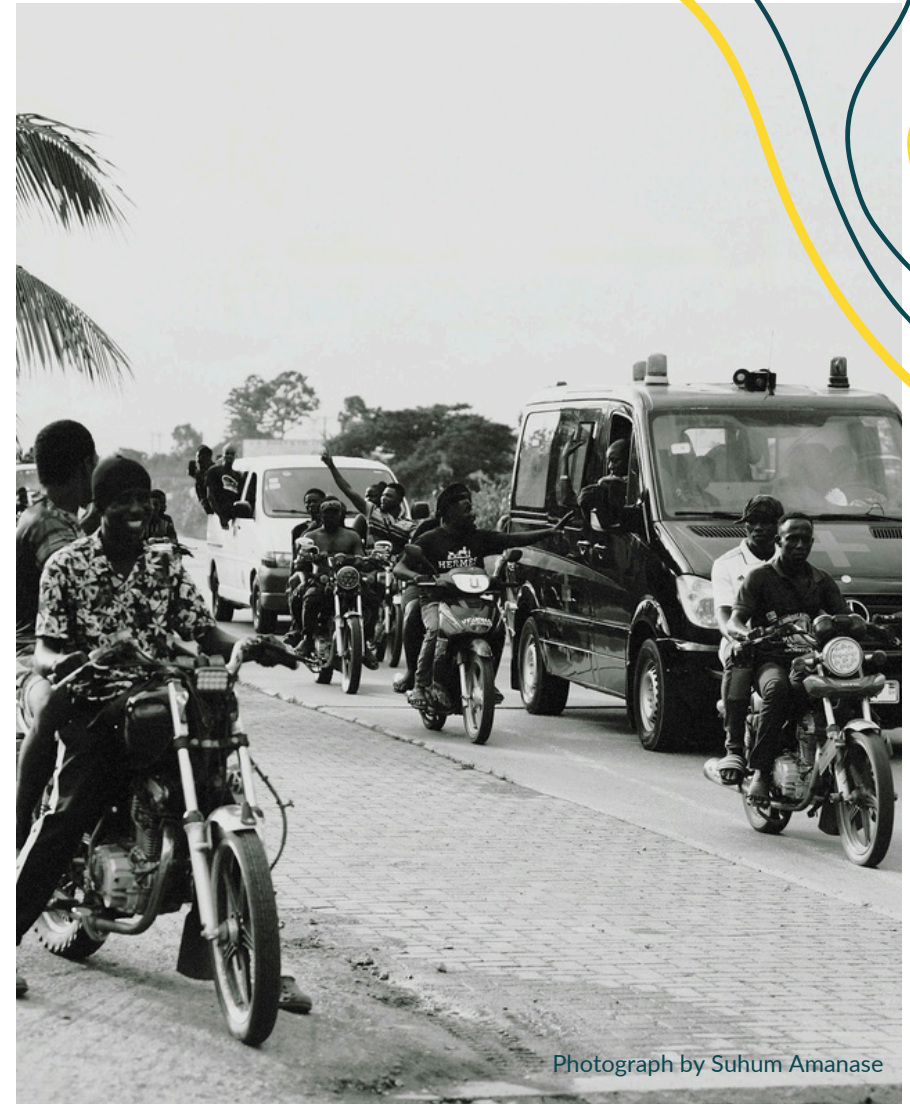
RETROSPECTIVE PHOTO EXHIBITION:

For over five years, RISE Africa has explored and amplified hundreds of stories that capture the essence of life in our continent's complex, ever-evolving, and, at times, never-sleeping cities. These narratives – framed through the lenses of our growing community of photographers – have been captured, refined, and shared through the annual RISE Africa Photo Competition.

Each year, our competition has invited photographers to interrogate and celebrate different facets of urban life. In 2020, we uncovered the *'Hidden Flows'*, illuminating the unseen currents of resources, infrastructure, and services shaping African cities. In 2021, we imagined bold urban futures through *'My Afro-Future City is...'*, prompting reflections on what our cities might look like in 2025, 2040, 2063, or even 2100. The following year, we tackled the tensions of our time through *'CREATIVITY / AGENCY / URGENCY - City Scenes'*, and in 2023, we asked photographers to envision *'The Cities We Want'*.

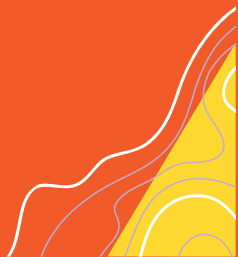
In 2024, the focus shifted inward, challenging photographers to unearth and celebrate the solutions already thriving in their cities through *'EVERYDAY POSSIBILITIES... [from neighbourhoods to cities]'*. Now, in 2025, marking our first in-person gathering, we turn our attention to the power of connection. Through this year's theme, 'Where We Gather', we invite photographers to showcase the spaces where joy, community, and belonging come to life in our cities.

To honour and reflect on this incredible visual archive of African urban storytelling, RISE Africa will present a retrospective exhibition, taking festival attendees on an evocative journey through the years of image-making that has shaped our collective vision of the cities we live in and aspire to build.



Photograph by Suhum Amanase

Explore the RISE photography showcase



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DAY 2 | TUESDAY 27 MAY 2025

8:30 - 9:00 Arrivals and registrations

9:00 - 9:30 Creative provocations

9:30 - 12:00 **Plenary session: Navigating the joys and anguish of African cities: setting the basis for action**

Step into the realities and possibilities of African cities where we identify areas of critical urgency, and hear from those already driving change.

12:00 - 13:30 **Lunch**

Harnessing nature in an urban context: Lessons from implementing nature-based solutions and collaboration for placemaking

Exploring how nature-based solutions and collaboration can transform urban spaces into thriving, sustainable places.

Host : ICLEI Africa; UNA Resilience Project

Time warp: A futures board game

Jump into this interactive session playing the time-warp game paired with a futuring storytelling exercise.

Host: Wits School of Governance & The Nature of Cities

Making partnership work - how cities can drive collective impact

Join a conversation about how cities can take active roles in building collaboration, brokering finance, and connecting projects to partner programmes.

Host: Technical Partnership Unit, City of Cape Town

15:00 - 16:30

Not just another learning lab: Challenging the concept, rethinking the practice

This session disrupts the usual approach to learning labs, questioning what makes them genuinely effective in driving change for African cities.

Host: ICLEI Climate team

Our futures, our stories: Ideas, imaginaries, and climate perspectives from youth in the global South

Advocating for creative youth engagement in discussions on climate justice in the global South: perspectives from Nigeria, Kenya, Brazil, India and South Africa.

Host: RISE Africa Young Storytellers & UMI Fund

Africa's Urbanisation Dynamics 2025: Planning for Urban Expansion

Hear the latest insights on African urbanisation, and key recommendations for policy, planning, governance and finance, emerging from the AUD2025 report.

Host: OECD

18:00- 20:00

Evening Event:
Food experience

PASSIVE ENGAGEMENT:

In the spirit of embracing diverse ways of knowing, creating, and sharing, the festival will feature a range of immersive, creatively driven engagements woven throughout the space. Attendees are invited to explore a dynamic photography exhibition, innovative design displays, thought-provoking poetry, and a series of compelling infographics curated by session hosts and leaders.

Beyond these passive engagements, we encourage active participation in our interactive co-creation spaces. Contribute to the evolving Idea tree, add your voice to collaborative installations, and take part in hands-on creative expressions that bring collective ideas to life. These elements are designed to inspire, provoke dialogue, and deepen the festival experience in unexpected and meaningful ways.



WHAT ARE MICROTALKS?

Microtalks are a series of one-slide, 2-minute presentations that provide an opportunity for a broader range of festival attendees, beyond session hosts and keynote speakers, to share their ideas, solutions, and projects. These Microtalks offer a snapshot of practical, positive, and inspiring actions being undertaken in African cities, demonstrating that solutions are being developed and implemented locally.

The microtalks aim to:

Hear from festival participants, including researchers, government officials, private sector representatives, entrepreneurs, community leaders, and innovators.

Provide a platform for attendees to present projects and ideas addressing urban challenges across RISE Africa's thematic areas.

Spark conversations and potential partnerships by exposing the audience to diverse, impactful solutions they can explore further during networking breaks. Emphasise the ingenuity and resilience within African cities, inspiring others with stories of locally-led solutions.

[Learn more about Microtalks](#)



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DAY 3 | WEDNESDAY 28 MAY 2025

8:30 -
9:00

Arrivals and registrations

9:00 -
10:30

Plenary session: Moving from ideas to action - So, what exactly is an action festival?

Articulate your own commitments to action, through engaging with enablers of knowledge systems, storytelling, leadership, multi-level governance, innovation systems, and financing models.

10:30 -
12:00

Hands-on creative storytelling workshop

Practicing simple storytelling tools for cross-disciplinary communication.

Host: The Nature of Cities

The role of AI in human-centred urban development

Unpacking novel and possible uses of AI in human-centered urban development.

Host: Sand Technologies

Site visit:

Circular economy in action - Walk and work the Potsdam circular farm, with a deep-dive on Black Soldier Fly organic waste treatment

Join the on opportunities through use of BSF followed by hands on interaction with the circular farm at the Potsdam Sustainability Campus.

Host: City of Cape Town, Africa Circulars, ICLEI Africa

Nuancing our climate justice narratives

Share insights on reshaping narratives about cities, and about centering discussions on transformative justice for local and indigenous people.

Host: South x South supported by UMI Fund & Surge Africa

12:00 -
13:30

Lunch

12:00-
16:30

Site visit:

Innovative construction and education: Exploring the Dome Classroom and experiential gardens at Green Point Park

Host: City of Cape Town

Learn how cities can better embrace biodiversity and create aspirational learning spaces at the Dome Education Classroom and site visit to the Experiential Education Garden and Biodiversity Showcase Garden in Green Point Park.

18:00- 20:00

Evening Event:
Food experience



Malika Ndlovu
Art Project Manager, Applied Arts Practitioner,
Writer, Performance Poet, RISE Africa poetry curator

RISE POETRY

Poets thrive on movement, the constancy of change. Where some project instability or amplify fear and loss, poets recognise the creative possibilities that change reveals and the inspiration it liberates for all of us. Poetry offers fresh pathways into and through well - weathered issues as it relies on rhythm and flow, on surprising or unpredictable shifts in perspective and depth, in feeling and knowing. This is the profound art of adaptation and poets thrive in navigating complexities while delighting in the craft of making them accessible, visible and visceral. This year's RISE Africa Action Festival once again weaves poetry into various encounters across the programme including sharing some of the work harvested from previous festivals. In these unprecedented times, where a great pendulum swings between extreme upheaval and extraordinary innovation, poetry honours our entanglement, dances in between, offers focus and anchorage, invokes the wisdom in storytelling, sparks imaginative connections and welcomes (you into) co-creation.

[Explore RISE Poetry](#)



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DAY 4 | THURSDAY 29 MAY 2025

RISE WORKSHOPS

Network and interact with novel ideas from partner-led workshops where you can contribute to ongoing projects, programs and campaigns

FULL DAY

Human rights-based approaches (HRBA): A global dialogue on their relevance for equitable and sustainable urban development

Explore the Human Rights-Based Approach with the UNA Resilience project.

Host : ICLEI Africa; UNA Resilience Project

FULL DAY

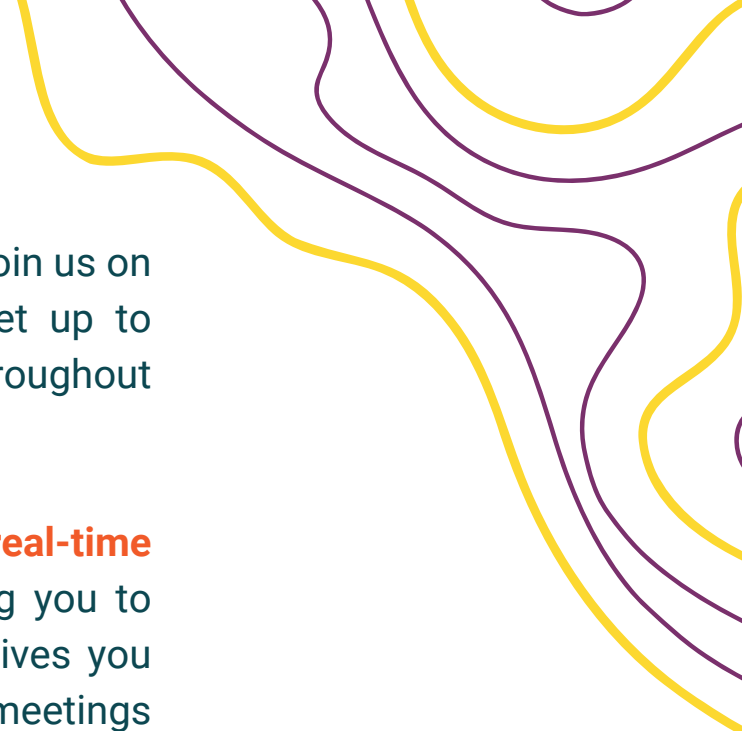
Igniting social action: Impact campaign with climate story lab

Hands on workshop to equip diverse multidisciplinary creative communicators to elevate their advocacy into powerful impact campaigns.

Host: South x South supported by UMI Fund & Surge Africa



Photograph by Joshua Babs



For the most immersive, dynamic, and customised festival experience, join us on **Whova**, our official digital event platform. The digital platform is set up to deepen engagement and keep you connected, informed, and inspired throughout the 2025 Urban Action Festival.

You'll gain access to **detailed session descriptions, speaker profiles, real-time updates, and exclusive documents shared by session hosts**, allowing you to **customise your program experience** and most importantly, the app gives you access to each other. Through the app, you can network and arrange meetings **before, during, and after** the festival.

The app goes live at the end of **March 2025** and will be made available to all festival ticket holders ensuring that no attendee misses out on the interactive elements, insider insights, and meaningful connections that make RISE Africa a truly transformative experience.

Don't just attend—**immerse yourself**. Get your ticket, download the app when it's live, and start engaging with the RISE Africa community!

[BUY TICKET](#)

RISE Africa, brought to you by Changing Cities, in partnership with ICLEI Africa, with support from our partners:

