



Adaptation Story



Building Urban Climate Resilience in Southeastern Africa

OBJECTIVES

- Develop capacities and establish conditions to adapt to the adverse effects of climate change in four selected vulnerable cities.
- Promote intercountry experience sharing and cross-fertilization on adaptation and transboundary climate-related natural hazards



As the urban landscape in Africa undergoes unprecedented growth, the region faces a dual challenge - rapid urbanization and the escalating impacts of climate change. Southeastern Africa, in particular, is witnessing a surge in disasters such as cyclones, floods, and droughts, amplifying risks for its burgeoning urban population. The severity and unpredictability of climate change-induced events increase these risks and the most affected are often marginalized groups living on low incomes, including women, girls, youth, older persons, persons with disabilities and seasonal migrants.

In the wake of escalating climate challenges, a beacon of hope shines brightly in southeastern Africa. The “Building Urban Climate Resilience in Southeastern Africa” project, funded by the Adaptation Fund and implemented by UN-Habitat, in partnership with OXFAM, the Disaster Risk Management Sustainability and Urban Resilience technical centre (DiMSUR), and national governments of the affected countries, is a testament to the power of collaboration and innovation in addressing climate change. Spanning from 2020 to 2024, this ambitious initiative aimed to bolster urban climate resilience in four key cities: Morondava in Madagascar, Zomba in Malawi, Chokwe in Mozambique, and Moroni in Comoros. A layered strategy of building resilience has proven effective by addressing its complex and interconnected nature at regional, national and local levels. Through regional cross-fertilization, it strengthened national institutional frameworks and implemented local participatory planning processes alongside infrastructure development.



Community members in La Coulée, Moroni, help construct rainwater tanks, improving water access and reducing flood risks. (Photo by Oxfam)

Local Initiatives: Building Resilience on the Ground

At the heart of the project lies a commitment to addressing the unique climate challenges faced by each of the four target cities.

Harnessing the power of nature, the project has integrated Nature-based Solutions (NbS) into urban planning. In Zomba, reforestation projects are enhancing biodiversity while simultaneously providing natural buffers against extreme weather events. In Morondava, the project has championed the use of mangroves as an NbS to combat climate change and enhance urban resilience. Community members have taken the lead in planting and nurturing young mangroves, monitoring their growth, and ensuring their protection. This grassroots involvement has not only revitalized degraded areas and fostered a thriving ecosystem but also empowered the community, creating a sense of ownership and stewardship over their natural resources.

“Before each and every project begins, we must involve the community, brief them, enlighten them, share with them the information and then plan together, work together until the end.”
 – Ms. Munira Bakali, Vice Mayor of Zomba City

In Chokwé, recycling initiatives and community education programs are empowering residents to play an active role in maintaining a clean environment. Additionally, the region has established an Early Warning System (EWS) through the revitalization of a local radio station. This station now serves as a central hub, broadcasting timely alerts about potential disasters like cyclones and floods. A proactive approach enables residents to make informed decisions and take necessary steps to protect their lives and property.

PROJECT BY THE NUMBERS

23	SUB-PROJECTS ACROSS FOUR CITIES	4	EVACUATION CENTERS CONSTRUCTED	306,202	PEOPLE GAINED ACCESS TO RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE	2,189	COMMUNITY MEMBERS TRAINED TO MANAGE & MAINTAIN SUB-PROJECTS	50%	WOMEN ACTIVELY INVOLVED
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In Chokwe, Mozambique, the KHINDLIMUKA community radio provides essential early warnings for floods and climate shocks, operated by local residents. (Photo by Oxfam)



A new drainage channel in Sadzi Ward, Zomba, has significantly reduced flooding and damage from heavy rains. (Photo by Oxfam)

In Moroni, the EWS features the construction of six tanks (and revitalizing two others that are already established) to capture and store rainwater, and provide a reliable source of water for domestic use and agriculture – which is crucial in a region frequently plagued by water scarcity. The management of this vital resource is entrusted to a local committee, predominantly composed of women, who ensure its maintenance and equitable distribution. Additionally, the committee generates revenue by selling excess water, and creating a sustainable income stream that empowers women and supports community development initiatives. It not only enhances water security but promotes gender equality and economic resilience, exemplifying the project’s holistic approach to building urban climate resilience.

“This community radio enabled the communication of more effective warnings to our communities, which will facilitate appropriate actions.”
 – Mr. Domingos Mondlane,
 Community Representative of Chokwe

Beyond local initiatives, the project plays a pivotal role in aiding national governments to foster robust institutional resilience frameworks. This includes collaborating with government agencies to develop sustainable urban development and climate policies, providing training and resources to government officials and stakeholders, and promoting alignment and coordination among various government departments to ensure a cohesive approach to resilience strategies. These efforts aim to strengthen overall preparedness and response capabilities nationwide.

The project extends regionally, focusing on knowledge exchange

and raising awareness of climate resilience. Initiatives includes the ‘XIPEFO’ platform, managed by the DIMSUR, which serves as a hub for sharing best practices and research.

It also involves organizing climate resilience workshops and conferences to facilitate collaboration among stakeholders and foster partnerships across sectors.

Success Stories: Inspiring Change

Throughout its four-year journey, the project has achieved significant milestones. The participatory approach throughout the project empowered communities, fostering their participation through committees and collaborative capacity-building. This integration not only ensures ongoing project maintenance but enhances community ownership, making interventions more effective and sustainable. Actively involving local leadership in decision-making ensured effective implementation of the strategies. The emphasis on community-driven methodologies showcased the importance of aligning with local dynamics for sustainable impact.

The transformative changes brought about in Morondava, Zomba, Chokwe, and Moroni are a testament to the effectiveness of a holistic approach to urban resilience. By addressing local needs, strengthening national frameworks, and fostering regional cooperation, the project has laid a strong foundation for a resilient future. The journey of building urban climate resilience in southeastern Africa is far from over. The lessons learned and the partnerships forged through this project will continue to inspire and guide other efforts to create sustainable, resilient urban environments across the region and beyond.

To foster scaling up, the project team is working towards amplifying efforts towards building resilience in the southern African sub-region through strategic actions like sharing documented best practices, expanding funding sources, strengthening partnerships at all levels and most importantly, replicating a multi-level approach to strengthening resilience.



In Morondava, a community participates in a mangrove nursery project to safeguard coastal areas from natural hazards. (Photo by Oxfam)