

African city leaders unite in Nairobi to drive green and resilient urban future

- *Open letter calls on national governments to unlock sustainable investment for cities*
- *Green & Resilient UrbanShift Africa Forum brings 250 representatives from some of the continent's biggest cities together in Nairobi*

Nairobi, Kenya (February 17, 2025) – More than 250 African city leaders - including mayors, city officials, national policymakers, investors, and business leaders - will gather in Nairobi today for the Green & Resilient UrbanShift Africa Forum, funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF), hosted by C4O Cities, and supported by UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the World Resources Institute (WRI), and ICLEI.

As Africa's cities expand at an unprecedented pace, and with 92% already classified as being at extreme climate risk, the UrbanShift Africa Forum marks a decisive moment for resilient urban planning, sustainable investment, and climate action.

Bringing together stakeholders from countries across Africa - including Gabon, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Morocco, Nigeria, Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Tanzania - the UrbanShift Africa Forum will allow national and local governments officials, investors and civil society organizations to exchange best practices, foster partnerships, and advance climate ambition. A delegation of youth climate leaders will also join discussions to ensure the voices and expertise of young Africans remain at the center of future climate action.

With Africa projected to drive the majority of global urban growth in the coming decades, the forum's sessions are set to focus on resilience, urban planning, and securing the financing required to build thriving, resilient cities for future generations.

During the UrbanShift Africa Forum's opening ceremony at the UNEP headquarters, leaders will issue an [open letter](#), signed by the mayors and governors of some of the continent's largest cities (full list in notes), urging African national governments to:

- Embed city's green investment priorities into national budgets and plans
- Strengthen municipal finance and make government funding for cities more predictable

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- Remove barriers to public-private partnerships to accelerate climate action projects

The mayors' letter aims to unlock much-needed funding for green infrastructure and sustainable urban growth.

The UrbanShift Africa Forum will also see the release of a new Roadmap on Sustainable Finance Action and Advocacy for Global South cities, which outlines the practical steps that mayors and their teams can take to start acting and advocating for climate action.

This new resource from C4O, UrbanShift and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM) will help mayors access affordable financing for important projects like clean energy and public transport. The [Roadmap](#) (link will go live 1700EAT Monday 17 February) also recommends giving cities more financial independence, creating national platforms to coordinate efforts, and grouping projects together to attract greater investment.

Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr, Mayor of Freetown and Co-chair of C4O Cities said:

"African cities are already at the vanguard of climate action and innovation. Our youth populations are already championing climate action and investing in their own futures.

"With approximately 70% of Africa's population under the age of 35, young people are leveraging technology, creativity, and entrepreneurship to drive the shift toward sustainability. It is time for the international finance community to invest in their energy and ideas.

"We know the next generation is ready to lead the charge for a greener, fairer future, it is now the duty of city leaders to access the resources they need to create a greener, fairer future for all of us."

Sakaja Johnson, Governor of Nairobi said: "I am really excited that C4O made the decision to host the Green & Resilient UrbanShift Africa Forum which will bring representatives from some of the continent's biggest and leading cities to Nairobi.

"Africa's young population means there is ample opportunity to transform the reality for many cities and many residents. We will continue leveraging technology and entrepreneurship to develop clean energy solutions which must be accompanied by the development of a greener, fairer economic model for all.

"Investing in climate solutions in Africa works: with a projected return of \$4 for every \$1 initially invested, this is a unique opportunity for global investors

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to deliver the much-needed impact on the ground and address these challenges.”

Martin Krause, Director, Climate Change Division, UNEP said: “African cities are increasingly vulnerable to extreme climate events, some facing devastating floods and others extreme drought.

“National climate action plans, co-developed with sub-national governments, can empower cities to facilitate resources and funding for more effective implementation, protection of urban residents and low-carbon, resilient development”

Mark Watts, Executive Director of C4O Cities said: “Many African cities are already on the frontline of the climate crisis, facing record-breaking temperatures, food insecurity and significant levels of climate migration. African mayors are showing considerable leadership, but they need the financial power to match their ambition.

“Mayors are ready, communities are mobilising, and the solutions exist - now it's time for governments and investors to step up. Unlocking finance for cities isn't just the right thing to do; it's the smartest possible investment in Africa's future. Every dollar invested in sustainable urban development today will pay back in resilient economies, thriving communities, and a healthier planet for generations to come.”

Pablo Lazo, Global Director, Urban Development, Cities Program, World Resources Institute: “African cities are rapidly building momentum in the fight against climate change.

“Forthcoming WRI research identified nearly 300 nature-based solutions (NBS) projects for climate resilience, including in urban areas and city watersheds, initiated between 2012 and 2023 in sub-Saharan Africa. Collectively, these efforts secured more than \$21 billion in funding.

“While this is encouraging, more than 80 percent of these projects relied on grants alone or in combination with other funding instruments to be fully implemented. African cities and leaders will need access to new NBS funding sources and financing instruments to mitigate the growing climate challenges in the region.

“The global climate finance sector must play a larger role in meeting the demand for green investment across the region by increasing the amount of available climate capital and offering innovative and nimble finance solutions.”

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Climate and Energy (GCoM) said: “While cities in the Global South have bold climate ambitions, transforming ideas into bankable, implementable projects remains a challenge. The urgency for urban transformation is undeniable.

“Yet, without significant financial reform and a shift in investment flows, cities will remain unable to finance the climate solutions their communities desperately need.

“The new Roadmap on Sustainable Finance Action and Advocacy for Global South cities comes as a decisive step towards equipping mayors with the tools to access funding, advocate for fiscal decentralization, and create viable pathways for green investments.”

Mohamed Bakarr, Manager of the Integration and Knowledge Division of the GEF Secretariat said: “Sustainable urban development in Africa relies on the vital collaboration between cities and national governments.

“This partnership is key to creating an enabling environment for directing finance where it can most impact climate, nature, and people in cities. Investing in sustainable cities enhances urban resilience, protects nature, and boosts national prosperity, securing a thriving future for all.”

Prof. Kevin Chika Urama, Chief Economist and Vice President for Economic Governance & Knowledge Management - African Development Bank Group said: “The economic case for unlocking climate finance for African cities is undeniable.

“Cities are the engines of our continent’s growth, and every dollar invested in resilient urban infrastructure yields multiple returns - lower costs from climate shocks, increased private sector confidence, and a more dynamic local economy.

“National governments are key to unlocking the fiscal barriers cities face and empowering cities to invest in climate resilience, setting the foundation for stronger, more competitive economies across Africa.”

END**NOTES TO EDITORS**

For more information, please contact:

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Signatories to the mayors' letter include:

Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire
Accra, Ghana
Bulawayo, Zimbabwe
Cape Town, South Africa
Chefchaouen, Morocco
Durban, South Africa
Embu County, Kenya
Freetown, Sierra Leone
Kajiado, Kenya
Keur Massar Kord, Senegal
Kisumu, Kenya
Kloto I, Togo
Lagos, Nigeria
Lusaka, Zambia
Nairobi, Kenya
Pikine, Senegal
Tshwane, South Africa
Quelimane, Mozambique

About C4O

C4O is a global network of nearly 100 mayors of the world's leading cities working to confront the climate crisis. Mayors of C4O cities employ inclusive, science-based and collaborative approaches to cut their fair share of emissions in half by 2030, help the world limit global heating to 1.5°C, and build healthy, equitable and resilient communities.

About the UN Environment Programme (UNEP)

UNEP is the leading global voice on the environment. It provides leadership and encourages partnership in caring for the environment by inspiring, informing and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations.

About UrbanShift

UrbanShift is funded by the Global Environment Facility, led by the UN Environment Programme and implemented in partnership with the World

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Resources Institute, C40 Cities, ICLEI - Local Governments for Sustainability, the UN Development Programme, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank. UrbanShift works to transform cities for people and the planet through sustainable, integrated, zero-carbon urban development.