



# CITIES ALLIANCE

# ASSEMBLY REPORT

Naivasha, Kenya 9-11 May 2024

25  
YEARS

Cities Alliance  
Cities Without Slums

Hosted by  
UNOPS

# 25 YEARS OF INCLUSIVE CITY DEVELOPMENT: REFLECTING AND MOVING FORWARD

The 2024 Cities Alliance Assembly in Naivasha, Kenya, celebrated our organisation's 25th anniversary, highlighting the Partnership's lasting commitment to fostering inclusive cities since its inception in 1999 under Nelson Mandela's patronage. Over the past quarter-century, Cities Alliance has championed sustainable urban development, social inclusion, and effective governance, advocating for cities as engines of opportunity.

This Assembly provided a platform to reflect on past achievements and engage in discussions on how to collectively address today's most pressing issues, from climate change and complex migration dynamics to the growing challenge of working in fragile urban areas. It also underscored the importance of multi-stakeholder alliances like ours, in global efforts to shape a sustainable future for all.

Key governance milestones included the election of Ecuadorian politician and diplomat Maria Fernanda Espinosa as the new President, the European Commission

joining the membership, and the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) rejoining.

The reconvening of the Informality Task Force to drive the implementation of the Slum/Informal Settlement Upgrading Global Action Plan (GAP) demonstrated renewed commitment of Cities Alliance to improving the lives of slum dwellers worldwide.

This report highlights the insightful discussions and valuable contributions of our members and partners, and our shared determination to propel the agenda of inclusive, sustainable cities forward for the decades to come.

*The atmosphere throughout the Assembly reflected a spirit of cooperation and dedication, essential for advancing our collective goals.*





## 25 YEARS ANNIVERSARY

During the 25th anniversary reception, our Principal Urban Advisor, Julian Baskin, shared an inspiring reflection on the progress made and the challenges faced in urban development since the creation of the Cities Alliance in 1999. He acknowledged the significant strides taken in improving living conditions for slum dwellers, though he also recognized the persistent challenges, particularly the increasing number of informal settlements. Julian emphasized the crucial role of Cities Alliance in this journey, highlighting how the organization has been pivotal in leveraging the informal economy and engaging with secondary cities to drive inclusive planning. He stressed the importance of designing cities that cater to the needs of women, children and marginalized groups, advocating for collaboration between national and local actors. Moreover, Julian underscored the urgency of addressing climate change through sustainable infrastructure and comprehensive services, commending the collaborative efforts that have led to urban targets in global development agendas including the SDGs.

Four longstanding members and partners of the Cities Alliance also shared their insights.

*“To meet our 2030 targets, we must intensify efforts and secure more financing, with housing as a core element of social protection.”*

Rafael Tuts, UN Habitat

*“Cities Alliance unites people around complex ideas, fostering crucial partnerships between local governments and informal settlement communities.”*

Emilia Saiz, UCLG

*“Our journey with Cities Alliance has significantly enhanced HFHI’s growth through collective efforts and innovative partnerships.”*

Stephen Siedel, Habitat for humanity

*“Celebrating 25 years, South Africa has gained fresh perspectives and innovative solutions through our vital partnership with Cities Alliance.”*

Sindisiwe Nxgongo, Gov. of South Africa

Maria Fernanda Espinosa, the new President of Cities Alliance, concluded the evening with a toast. She expressed gratitude for the trust and dedication of the Alliance’s members and partners. Maria highlighted the importance of the community and ecosystem built by Cities Alliance and looked forward to continued success in the future.

*“Let’s toast to 25 years of Cities Alliance’s work towards dignified urban living and a brighter future for the next 100 years.”*

# CLIMATE ACTION: INFORMAL COMMUNITIES LEADING THE WAY

---

During the Assembly, participants witnessed the profound impact of community-driven climate adaptation and resilience initiatives through visits to two significant projects supported by Slum Dwellers International (SDI) and their Kenya affiliate, *Muongano wa Wanavijiji*. These projects focused on affordable housing and the circular economy.

The first visit was to the Nakuru West Network Green Housing Project, which began in 2002 with 612 members, primarily female traders from an informal market in Nakuru Town. Facing eviction threats, they organized into savings groups to pool resources, buy land, and build homes. Initially constructing 12 units, the project expanded to over 230 units on more than 10 acres of land. In 2021, rising waters from Lake Nakuru forced the community to [relocate](#).

The tour started at the original site, now [submerged](#), where participants saw the extensive damage caused by the lake's encroachment, including displaced families and disrupted livelihoods. They then visited the new site where the community, combining their resources, skills, and labour, bought land and built new homes. This collective effort not only resulted in new housing but also fostered a sense of unity and empowerment. By rallying together, the community turned a climate-induced crisis into an opportunity for growth and renewal, illustrating the power of local action.

The second visit was to a waste recycling site in Naivasha town to see the work of some of the 25 grassroots groups focused on urban farming, recycling, renewable energy, and solid waste value addition, part of the Naivasha Grassroots Action Waste Management (NAGAWAM).

This community-based organization was created in 2009 to tackle waste collection and clean-up efforts in Naivasha Sub-County.



Participants observed the transformation of organic waste into nutrient-rich compost, essential for permaculture-based organic farming. They also follow the full recycling process of inorganic materials, with glass bottles repurposed into drinking glasses and paving blocks, and plastic bottles turned into mats and decorative beads, among other products.



This project showcased innovative waste management practices and demonstrated the significant contributions community-driven initiatives can make to sustainable development and environmental stewardship.



# MIGRATION PATHWAYS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

This session, organised around two panels, focused on initiatives to integrate displaced people into urban planning and strategies for amplifying those practices on a larger scale.



## Panel 1: What have we learned? Key challenges and lessons

*“Data is essential in managing population flows and services; it supports migrant registration, education, and economic development for sustainable urban integration”.*

Gabriele Tardivo, AVSI Foundation

Key points of this first discussion included the necessity of co-financing integration programs, with grant recipients contributing significantly to foster collaboration and tangible benefits. Participants highlighted EU-funded initiatives, such as the [Inclusive Urban Development and Mobility Project](#), and the new [SUIDAC](#) programme targeting sustainable urban integration in African cities.

Speakers also stressed the critical role of municipalities in providing comprehensive services and support for displaced individuals, advocating for a holistic approach to displacement beyond refugee camps. Robust engagement with local stakeholders and authorities, as exemplified by projects in Uganda and Ethiopia, was highlighted as essential for effective integration outcomes.

*“Improved spatial planning tools are necessary to facilitate economic opportunities for displaced people and should be central to decision-making processes”.*

Tsigereda Tafesse, Cities Alliance





## Panel 2: How do we scale up the lessons learned?

The second discussion focused on people-centred integration, promoting initiatives such as the UCLG supported Marrakech Mayors Declaration and the Lampedusa Charter to integrate refugees and migrants into local services and communities. The importance of forging partnerships, enhancing capacity building, and mobilizing resources for integration efforts was also highlighted by the discussants. Local engagement in urban development planning was deemed crucial, with an emphasis on integrating displacement considerations into broader urban strategies. The panel also discussed mainstreaming the human mobility agenda into the global social agenda to strengthen support for integration efforts and ensuring collaboration between local and global actors to foster sustainable solutions.

*“Collaboration among various stakeholders is essential to create robust support systems that cater to the needs of displaced populations while fostering urban resilience”.*

Renate Bucher, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)

# GLOBAL/LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

## TO BUILD CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION FROM THE GROUND UP

The discussion centred around how partnerships with civil society organizations and urban poor communities play a crucial role in supporting climate adaptation in urban informal settlements. The event highlighted the need for multilevel collaborations to enhance urban resilience. Notable examples included the work of SDI's federations of the urban poor in partnership with Cities Alliance, supported by the Swedish Cooperation Agency (Sida), showcasing environmental and social outcomes of this type of grassroots initiatives.

*"Creating diverse and robust pathways between national and regional governments, academia, and technical institutions is essential for effectively addressing urban challenges."*

Joseph Kimani, Slum Dwellers International (SDI)

*"No solution is designed by one stakeholder; we need national and local governments, development agencies, and other partners to achieve impact and scale, including cooperation with civil society and communities."*

Cerin Kizhakkethottamm, UN-Habitat

The panel underscored the critical role of data-driven decision-making and the participation of diverse community segments, including youth and vulnerable populations, in planning and implementing adaptation strategies. The session also addressed the challenges and opportunities in securing funding for climate adaptation initiatives, advocating for innovative financial mechanisms and the integration of local efforts into broader frameworks.





**Key insights:**

- Working with partners like SDI, with organised urban constituencies in informal settlements at a large scale, offers significant value for money.
- Integrating environmental considerations into long-term urban plans enhances resilience against climate-induced challenges.
- Robust data collection is essential for informed decision-making and targeted interventions in climate adaptation efforts.
- Involving all segments of society, including women, youth, and persons with disabilities, is vital for comprehensive adaptation measures.
- Securing funding for adaptation initiatives poses challenges, but innovative funding mechanisms and collaborative partnerships offer opportunities for implementation.
- Investing in capacity building and knowledge sharing enhances communities' ability to implement effective adaptation strategies.

*“Young people play a pivotal role in tackling climate change through advocacy, innovation, education, and community engagement. It’s imperative that governments and local actors finance and support youth-led initiatives to address environmental challenges and scale them up for greater impact.”*

Eva Muchiri, Muungano Wa Wanavijiji, SDI Kenya



# ENVISIONING PARTNERSHIPS OR THE FUTURE

This session was organized around two panels, focusing on the Summit of the Future and the Global Action Plan. Cities Alliance's members and partners discussed the importance of partnerships in addressing urban challenges. The session stressed the role of local and regional governments in global governance, the necessity of localization, and the need for strategic partnerships and capacity building to bridge the gap between global agendas and local implementation.



## Panel 1: Summit of the Future

The Summit of the Future was highlighted as a crucial platform for shaping the global agenda, with calls for greater recognition of local and regional governments within the UN system. The discussion underscored the importance of adapting global agendas to local contexts to effectively address urbanisation, climate change, and sustainable development.

*"The Summit of the Future is about citizens, it's about grassroots organizations, it's about people. By ensuring social ownership and inclusive decision-making processes, we can guarantee that its outcomes are both effective and sustainable."*

Maria Fernanda Espinosa, Cities Alliance

The need for strategic partnerships among governments, communities, businesses, and NGOs was stressed to tackle complex urban issues. Financial constraints faced by local governments, especially post-COVID-19, were acknowledged, along with the importance of increased local investment.

*"It is our collective responsibility as the international urban community to shape the future we envision."*

Emilia Saiz, United Cities and Local Government

During the panel UN-Habitat also provided an overview of the upcoming Africa Urban Forum (Addis Ababa, 4-6 September) envisioned as a platform for African leaders to harness opportunities, address inequality, and tackle urbanization challenges, while fostering multistakeholder collaboration.





## Panel 2: Global Action Plan for Slum Upgrading and Informal Settlements

*“Addressing the challenges of slums requires profound structural changes in how we approach urban development. It’s not just about upgrading infrastructure but also about tackling unemployment and social issues”.*

Jane Weru, Akiba Mashinani Trust

This last discussion at the Assembly, focused on the implementation of the Global Action Plan (GAP), a key initiative supported by UN-Habitat, the government of South Africa, and Cities Alliance for the large-scale transformation of slums. The participants called for a collaborative implementation framework involving governments, the international community and civil society to ensure inclusive and effective solutions. The Informality Task Force, coordinated by Cities Alliance, was designated as a facilitating mechanism for collaboration among stakeholders. Government commitment was underscored, with South Africa’s endorsement of the plan.

*“To achieve SDG 11, we must significantly impact how we catalyse action on slum and informal settlement upgrading.”*

Julian Baskin, Cities Alliance





Maria Fernanda Espinosa, new Cities Alliance President with Thuli Madonsela, Chair of the Board and Greg Munro, Director.

## GOVERNANCE

The Assembly elected Maria Fernanda Espinosa of Ecuador as its new President. A distinguished academic, diplomat, and politician, Ms Espinosa previously served as the President of the United Nations General Assembly (2018-2019). She is currently the Executive Director of Global Women Leaders for Change and Inclusion. She also serves as a member of leading international organizations. She succeeds Anibal Gaviria Correa of Colombia, to whom the members bided farewell in Naivasha and extended its appreciation and gratitude for his dedication and commitment.

In Naivasha, two notable additions to the Partnership were also announced: The European Commission's Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) joined as a member, a strategic step in combating urban poverty, while the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) rejoined, to continue building on strong and fruitful previous collaboration.

---

## RESOURCES

- [UN-Habitat remarks on the occasion of the Cities Alliance Assembly](#)
- [PPT Presentations](#)
- [Minutes](#)
- [PPT Photos](#)