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Climate mobility in African intermediary cities: Strengthening local government responses through multi-stakeholder partnerships

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I am counting on meeting with fellow mayors ... on the global stage so we can highlight the things that matter to us: building resilient and adaptable cities, bridging the gap on international funding and financing for city-led inclusion of migrants in the green transition, and showcasing the work we are already doing to assist migrants affected by climate change.

Mayor of Accra, Ghana¹

BACKGROUND

African local governments could prove the missing link for localised, cross-sectorial policy responses to shape human mobility as a safe and proactive climate change adaptation strategy, and to protect people's right to remain in their place of residence.

The African continent is and will remain among the world's regions most impacted by climate change. Sudden and slow onset disasters and environmental changes force people to move within countries and, to a lesser extent, across borders.² Research by the African Climate Mobility Initiative (ACMI) shows that African cities frequently find themselves at the centre of climate mobility,³ with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) highlighting that this trend will accelerate in the years to come, as 'Africa's rapidly growing cities will be hotspots of risks from climate change and climate-induced in-migration'.⁴ In parallel, climate change will also make certain areas, including cities, much less habitable, leading to out-migration. In this context, timely adaptation measures are key to ensuring people's right to remain in their place of residence.

Contemporary political and academic discussions on African urbanisation, migration and climate change focus predominantly on capital cities and metropolitan areas. This is surprising given that African intermediary, or secondary, cities – defined as those with between 50,000 and 1 million inhabitants – already represent the highest relative share of African urban areas,⁵ and cities with fewer than 300,000 inhabitants are forecasted to host over 70% of new city inhabitants in the coming decades.⁶ Furthermore, African intermediary cities are often first destinations for people moving in the context of climate change, due to both their proximity to international borders and camps for forcibly displaced people, as well as the fact that people on the move may consider these urban areas more accessible in social, economic and cultural terms than capital cities. On the other hand, intermediary cities often have limited capacity and resources to adequately address climate mobility, and research

¹ Robert Bosch Stiftung (2022), 'Africa is a unified force to tackle climate change' (2022).

² V. Clement et al, *Groundswell Part 2: Acting on Internal Climate Migration* World Bank (2021).

³ K. Amakrane et al, *African Shifts: The Africa Climate Mobility Report. Addressing Climate-Forced Migration & Displacement* (2023).

⁴ IPCC, *Climate Change 2022: Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability. Contribution of Working Group II to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change* (2022) 1292.

⁵ UN Habitat, 'Global State of Metropolis' (2020).

⁶ M. Awumbila, 'Drivers of Migration and Urbanization in Africa: Key Trends and Issues' (2017); African Development Bank, 'Particularly exposed to climate shocks, African cities are turning to adaptation and resilience' (2022).

shows that people moving in the context of climate change often end up in marginalized and hazard-prone urban areas.⁷

In intermediary cities, as in larger cities, heat waves and droughts will strain existing electricity grids and lead to urban water shortages, while low crop productivity may continue to increase urban food insecurity. Informal settlements – where poorer and marginalised residents, including climate-displaced people, often live – will experience some of the most pronounced climate-related challenges. These settlements are generally extremely under-serviced, with inadequate housing conditions, low health and wellbeing outcomes, and higher exposure to climate and other risks. As the Mayor of Freetown, Sierra Leone, explains: ‘At the end of the day, climate change is happening at the local level, it’s happening in your neighborhood and my neighborhood.’⁸

African national governments have begun to recognise the importance of including urban dimensions in their nationally determined contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement – in 2022, 49 out of 53 African NDCs featured urban issues.⁹ However, African local governments, particularly those at the city, or municipal, level, are rarely considered as partners in action on climate mobility by national governments, international organisations or civil society.

In this policy brief, we argue that locally centered, multi-stakeholder partnerships that include local, national and international actors can strengthen policy responses to climate change and improve urban action regarding climate mobility, including by ensuring people’s right to remain in their place of residence. Local governments and civil society organisations have context-specific knowledge and access to communities affected by climate change, while national governments, philanthropic actors, city networks, research institutions and international organisations can strengthen collaborative action through funding, capacity building and networking relationships. In the following sections, we outline some of the priority areas for such partnerships in African cities, and present concrete recommendations for collaborative policy action to address climate mobility.

Intermediary (or secondary) cities host between 50,000 and 1 million inhabitants. They are intermediary in the sense that they link capital cities with smaller towns and rural areas through flows of goods, ideas, funds and people. At the same time, these cities are secondary regarding economic status, municipal capacities and resources, as national development strategies and (inter)national investment have for a long time prioritized capital cities.

⁷ B. Ramin, ‘Slums, climate change and human health in sub-Saharan Africa’ (2009) 87 *Bulletin of the World Health Organization* 886; B. Tietjen, K. Jacobsen & J. Hollander, ‘Climate change and urban migration in sub-saharan African cities: impacts and governance challenges’ (2023) 1 *Journal of Climate Resilience and Climate Justice* 20.

⁸ H. Murphy, ‘Devex Newswire: A new localization frontier – cities take climate lead’ (2022).

⁹ African Development Bank, ‘Urban Development and the African NDCs: From national commitments to City Climate Action’ (2022).

CHALLENGES FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENTS IN ADDRESSING CLIMATE MOBILITY

While there are a variety of legal frameworks in Africa that could be used to support action on climate mobility – including regional free movement protocols and agreements relating to the protection of displaced persons – these frameworks are concerned primarily with the role of African national governments. They are largely silent on the role of local governments, including those at the city or municipal level. This may be unsurprising, given that most African local governments lack the legal mandate and – consequently – adequate resources to address migration and displacement, including in the context of climate change. However, the lack of mandate and resources also means that international and regional organisations, as well as national governments, rarely consider local governments as potential partners for addressing climate mobility. Local governments striving to integrate action on climate mobility into their urban planning need a wide range of cooperation partners to jointly focus on overcoming the following challenges:

Lack of data

African local governments lack the data required to develop local policies in line with national and regional frameworks relating to climate mobility, and to assess the need for funding and resources. Typically, only very limited data is available at the local level regarding migration and displacement in the context of climate change, including with respect to the reception and wellbeing of those who move within urban areas. These data gaps arise in part due to the difficulty of distinguishing between persons for whom climate change was the main cause of movement, those for whom climate change was just one factor among others, and those who have moved for reasons unrelated to climate change. However, even where relevant data does exist, local governments may not have access to it unless they have collected it themselves. This adds an additional barrier to local, evidence-based policy making.

Lack of registration opportunities

A lack of climate mobility data is exacerbated in African intermediary cities by limited opportunities for people on the move to register – whether as migrants, refugees or internally displaced persons.¹⁰ In several African countries, options for official registration are limited to designated camps and capital cities. This impedes urban planning for basic service provision and housing that would factor in consequences of in- and out-migration, including in context of climate change. Lack of registration also means that those on the move are often excluded from early warning communication in advance of extreme weather events, and from post-disaster relief efforts.

Lack of legal capacity

Despite the increasing number of people arriving in Africa's intermediary cities and towns, in many countries, decentralisation laws and processes have not yet provided them with the legal mandates, including decision-making power and resources, to effectively host new arrivals. As a consequence, local governments are often constrained both financially and practically in addressing human mobility,

¹⁰ For refugees, this is further exacerbated by the fact that many refugee-hosting countries do not legally allow refugees to reside in urban areas.

including in the context of climate change. The lack of legal mandate undermines necessary infrastructure development and urban planning, and the ability to provide decent reception conditions with respect to housing, access to healthcare and access to basic services.

Lack of funding

As frontline actors, local governments often address the consequences of climate change and climate mobility without adequate access to national or international resources. The Mayors Migration Council highlights that only 3-5% of adaptation finance and 1.2% of humanitarian funding reaches local authorities.¹¹ To date, finance mechanisms addressing cities and climate change are limited.¹² As they progress in size and reach, it is imperative that populations in intermediary cities, including migrants and displaced persons, are supported through direct funding for local climate change adaptation and mitigation plans and projects. As the Conference of the Parties (COP) continues discussing the implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund, it is essential that it includes provisions for local governments affected by climate change to directly access funds.

Lack of multi-stakeholder partnerships

The limited mandates, capacities and resources of African local governments to address climate mobility creates a vicious cycle of non-cooperation, whereby national governments, development agencies and international organisations rarely consider local governments to be relevant cooperation partners. This status quo overlooks essential municipal assets such as local knowledge and access to affected communities and local civil society actors. In turn, the lack of multi-level partnerships reproduces municipalities' limited scope for action and deepens cooperation gaps.

CASE STUDIES: CO-CREATING LOCAL SOLUTIONS VIA MULTI-STAKEHOLDER PARTNERSHIPS

Despite the challenges faced by intermediary cities, there are opportunities to improve cooperation between local governments and national, regional and international organisations, particularly as such organisations grow increasingly aware of the important urban dimensions of climate mobility on the African continent. Cooperation between a diverse group of actors could address some of the limitations identified above and enhance context- and community-specific bottom-up approaches based on multi-level planning and programming. Multi-stakeholder partnerships are key instruments to enable such cooperation as the following examples from intermediary cities in West and East Africa demonstrate.

Baidoa, Somalia: Connecting international investments and local action

Somalia is one of the world's most climate vulnerable countries, with the national temperature projected to increase by up to an extraordinary 4.3°C by 2100.¹³ Somalia has already experienced severe droughts and rises in temperature, which have impacted significantly on rural and nomadic pastoralists in the country, often making migration the only viable coping mechanism. Nearly three-quarters of Somalia's 2.6 million internally displaced people have moved to urban centres 'in disconnected pockets outside city limits, constraining their access to services and creating poverty

¹¹ MMC, 'MMC Readout: Cities join national governments at the 14th GFMD Summit' (2024).

¹² The City Climate Finance Gap Fund is one such new mechanism established by the World Bank and European Investment Bank. Displacement is not currently mentioned in information about it. See more at: www.citygapfund.org.

¹³ IDMC, 'Drought Displacement in Ethiopia, Iraq, Somalia and Niger' (2020).

traps'.¹⁴

Baidoa is one of Somalia's key intermediary cities, and was a site for the planned relocation of drought-displaced internally displaced persons (IDPs), particularly during the 2016-2017 drought.¹⁵ Since that time, however, people displaced internally due to both climate change and conflict have continued to arrive in Baidoa outside of formal relocation processes. As of 2023, Baidoa hosts an estimated 600,000 IDPs.¹⁶ This has overstretched municipal resources, with many informal settlements lacking any sort of formal infrastructure such as water or waste treatment.

In recent years, the local government in Baidoa has been actively working to respond to the challenges it faces due to climate change, and to find ways of assisting populations in need. This work includes activities to strengthen effective and efficient institutions and increase resilience within the city. A key priority for Baidoa's local government has been to improve water access for IDPs and locals alike, as the city often experiences widespread water shortages during dry seasons.

Efforts by the local government to address water shortages in the city have been supported by partnerships with a range of national and international actors, demonstrating how multi-stakeholder partnerships can effectively respond to local-level issues. For example, international NGOs and donors, including the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), Danish Refugee Council (DRC) and the Somalia Stability Fund (SSF), have supported the local government with a variety of water projects, while the South West State of Somalia's Ministry of Water and the Somali federal government have sought financial and technical support from the African Development Bank (AfDB) to create sustainable water infrastructure for Baidoa.¹⁷ Though there is room for improvement in coordination of these efforts, they already provide a useful example of cooperation between local, regional and international actors, demonstrating the value of multi-stakeholder partnerships to address needs arising in cities affected by climate change and population movement.

Lere, Nigeria: Building partnerships and sharing experiences

Among African countries, Nigeria is recognised as a hotspot of climate change. Kaduna state in the northern part of the country is affected by the increasing occurrence of flooding and rising temperatures.¹⁸ In this context, intermediary cities such as Lere, which has an estimated population of 500,000, are actively working to advance the urban green transition. In doing so, a key priority for the local government in Lere is to ensure the right of young people to remain in their place of residence despite the threat of climate change.

To support this work, a technical partnership has been set up between the Lere local government and Kaduna State University to develop a strategy for youth engagement, provide young people with practical knowledge and connect them with (self-)employment opportunities in the green economy, including in the areas of sustainable agriculture, horticulture and the digital economy. Via this

¹⁴ S. Hall, 'Identifying Climate Adaptive Solutions to Displacement in Somalia: Assessment Report – Somalia' *ReliefWeb* (2021) 5.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ UN Human Settlements Programme, 'Baidoa City Strategy' (2023).

¹⁷ REF (Research and Evidence Facility), 'Baidoa Municipality Initiatives on Population Displacement and Urbanisation: Key Lessons Learned and the Way Forward' (2020) 11.

¹⁸ K.H. Mande, 'Assessing the impact of climate change on the built environment in Kaduna metropolis and environs' (2020) 15(3) *Science World Journal* 78.

partnership, the city of Lere is working to both improve its ecological footprint, and to ensure that migration is a free choice for young persons.

In addition, the city also engages in multi-stakeholder dialogues at the regional level to drive pan-African conversations and inspire proactive action on climate change, climate mobility, and the right to remain.¹⁹ In 2023, the Mayor of Lere shared the city's experiences and lessons learned with other African cities and youth representatives during a joint event organized by UCLG Africa's Network of Young Elected Officials (YELO), the Migration Youth and Children Platform (MYCP), and the migration working group of the Major Group for Children and Youth (MGCY). Such peer-learning is key to promoting multi-stakeholder action at local and cross-local levels.

These examples illustrate that, in many regions of sub-Saharan Africa, the impacts of climate change are already only too apparent – and are projected to increase. While climate mobility often takes place from rural to urban areas, intermediary cities and towns will also experience more incidences and increased severity of natural hazards. This reality necessitates proactive leadership and multi-sector collaboration between local governments and national, regional and international actors. As the examples show, urban-centred multi-stakeholder partnerships have a key role to play in strengthening urban resilience in climate change contexts, supporting people who move due to climate change, and ensuring people's right to remain. More examples of such partnerships can be found among the city grantees of the Mayors Migration Council's Global Cities Fund.²⁰

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Develop multi-stakeholder partnerships

National and international actors planning climate mobility interventions should develop their programming in close cooperation with African local governments, as well as affected local communities. Actors aiming to strengthen engagement on climate mobility in Africa should ensure sufficient time and resources for joint planning and implementation with local governments, local civil society and affected communities. In particular, African national governments developing and/or evaluating nationally determined contributions (NDC) and national adaptation plans and development agencies should strengthen their cooperation with local actors at both planning and implementation stages.

2. Mainstream climate mobility and immobility into local policy making

African local governments should include climate mobility and immobility considerations into local urban planning and policy making. National governments could support their local counterparts by providing funding for required positions. Development agencies, research institutions and civil society could support institutional learning and capacity-building, and city networks could promote peer-learning between local authorities.

3. Improve the hosting capacity of intermediary cities and towns

Dialogues between local and national governments can form the basis for expanding local

¹⁹ UCLG Africa, 'Young leaders' contribution in connecting green and digital transformation agendas in African Cities and Territories' (2023).

²⁰ MMC 'Global Cities Fund for Migrants and Refugees' (2024) at: <https://mayorsmigrationcouncil.org/gcf/>.

governments' legal mandates regarding climate mobility and access to national funding. This could increase intermediary cities' hosting capacity, and enable local governments to develop partnerships with local civil society, national agencies, and international actors to address the needs of communities impacted by climate mobility.

4. Enhance registration opportunities and capacities

African local and national governments should work together to improve opportunities and capacities for the registration of urban migrants and displaced people. Enhanced registration opportunities and capacities would not only improve urban population data to support evidence-based policy making, but could also help to ensure respect for the rights of migrants and displaced persons to access basic services and education. It would furthermore be a foundation to support local governments to include migrants and displaced persons in government-led early warning systems and early action initiatives in advance of extreme weather events. The aggregation of such foundational data on urban migrants and displaced people would, in turn, create the basis for further data collection on the numbers and needs of climate-induced displaced people.

5. Enable local governments to access international climate funding including loss and damage funding

International and national funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation needs to be localised. Furthermore, national governments and international funding institutions need to open channels for local authorities to access international financing and funding, including the newly established Climate Loss and Damage Fund for developing countries. This is all the more imperative given the scale of migration and displacement into urban areas due to conflict and climate hazards.