

Second African Forum on Urban Forests - 2025

20 March 2025

The Johannesburg Declaration (2025)

We, the participants of the 2nd African Forum on Urban Forests, gathered in Johannesburg from the 18th to 21st March 2025, under the theme “Greening Horizons - Shaping the future resilience of African cities through urban forests” reaffirm the critical role of urban forests and green spaces in strengthening African cities against global climate challenges and in creating healthier, more inclusive, equitable and resilient communities.

Our commitment

Building on the momentum of the **2018 Call for Action** from the First World Forum on Urban Forests, the **Washington Declaration (2023)** from the Second World Forum on Urban Forests, the **United Nations Agenda 2030**, particularly **Sustainable Development Goals 11, 13, 15, and 17** and Agenda 2063 Africa we want of the African Union, **aspirations 1 and 3**, we recognise the urgent need to expand the urban canopy and create climate-resilient cities and communities. Additionally, we align with **Global Biodiversity Framework Target 12**, and the **Paris Agreement** which calls for expanding access to green and blue spaces in urban and peri-urban areas.

Why urban forests matter

Despite the unprecedented scale of urbanisation, growth of informal settlements, climate change effects, and land degradation and deforestation in Africa, we are certain that carefully designed, implemented and maintained green spaces such as urban forests can: strengthen social cohesion, heritage and sense of belonging; promote spatial equity to improve public health and well-being; create employment, entrepreneurship, and local development for all; generate ecosystem goods and services; provide quality space for tourism and recreation; support biodiversity; build capacity to adapt to climate change while mitigating extreme heat, flooding, biodiversity loss, and pollution; and serve as places for environmental education and traditional learning.

While the benefits of urban green spaces are increasingly recognised, their distribution, quality, and access remain unequal. Bridging this gap is essential for creating more sustainable, resilient, and inclusive urban environments across Africa.

Our call to action

We urge decisions makers, urban planners, foresters, ecologists, botanists, architects and landscape architects, engineers, the health sector including traditional healers, civil society, and all community members as well as development financiers and partners and the private sector to work together to ensure that green spaces including urban forests are:

- **Inclusive:** Designed for diverse physical, social, and cultural needs, safe, well-maintained and equipped with necessary facilities, and developed with local residents in the planning and maintenance to ensure they meet community needs.
- **Well-managed:** Aiming for optimal outcomes and overcoming legislative, political, financial, institutional, land-use planning, cultural, social, and psychological barriers, minimising trade-offs and ecosystem disservices.



- **Equitably distributed:** All communities regardless of income, race, gender or locality have access to quality green spaces, enhancing environmental and support health and well-being.
- **Multifunctional, resilient and sustainable:** Supporting recreation, livelihoods, education, biodiversity and habitat connectivity.

Our specific recommendations

Particularly, we recommend collaborative implementation of urban greening and forests across multiple sectors that:

- **Mobilises diverse funding,** such as municipal budgets, carbon markets, public-private partnerships and insurance, and positions urban forests as economic assets linked to local employment and ecotourism.
- **Addresses governance,** taking decisive steps to develop inclusive policies, leverage indigenous systems, enforce regulations, land tenure, and build long-term political commitment that reimagines urbanism.
- **Focuses on environmental and climate challenges,** selecting diverse native species, restoring water catchments and healthy reservoirs, investing in waste management, and addressing historic inequalities and environmental injustice, urban agriculture and climate-proof green infrastructure.
- **Prioritises research and monitoring,** strengthening standardised metrics, establishing tree inventories, coordinating feedback, facilitating data sharing, and increasing funding for research and development.
- **Engages communities,** centring local voices in planning and management, improving participatory decision-making, working with traditional authorities to protect sacred sites, and facilitating knowledge exchange across cities,
- **Builds capacity** of cities, creating green spaces as learning labs, and providing training for elected officials, local technicians, community leaders, women and youth.

The road ahead

We strongly **believe in the power of collaboration** and meaningful partnerships to conserve, preserve, restore, and expand urban forests, green spaces and nature-based solutions, ensuring they benefit all.

To support our future work, today we launch the **Afrika Mazingira Collective**, an African nature-based solution community of practice within the **Centre on African Public Spaces (CAPS)**. This collective will connect urban stakeholders across Africa and beyond to promote, implement, and scale up nature-based solutions for city climate resilience, biodiversity, and liveability. This Community of Practice will contribute to the FAO Green Cities Initiative.

Together, we can create cities where **the built environment, people, and nature thrive**.

