

Youth Team Reflections Report

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Colophon

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Youth Team at the 2026 Innovate4Cities conference. The content has been based on personal reflections from Youth Team members who attended the conference both in person and online. Their reflections are centred around the Global Research and Action Agenda for Cities and Climate Change Science (GRAA).

The authors and editors of each chapter have based their contributions on their own experiences, reflections, recollections, and interpretations, and will not be liable for any ramifications incurred through the use of this report.

Chapter Editors: Favour Njeri Mwaura, Nicolatte Chelagat, Karina Higa, Collins Musafri, Sam Rholex Odhiambo, Sharon Mbola, Charles Oduor, Jedidah Syombua John, Blessing Jacobs, Sarah Mwaura, Jack Sedah Jr, Sanaa Mittal, Rhoda Maadakti Akumbomi, Fancy Cherotich, Doreen J. Kirui, Melfinda Nurulita Alfino

Authors: Eunice Silantoi, Fancy Cherotich, Diana Nkere, Doreen William, Mariam Gibson Bwire, Zipporah Nyokabi Mureithi, Ladislas Havugimana, Awan Emmanuel Ajith, Mercy Chaluma Muchonji, Sam Rholex Odhiambo, Sharon Mbola, Ibrahim Mohamed Abdulbari, Sophy Chebon Kimchong, Brian Emurenya Emojong, Brian Terer, Raymond James Ntabazi, Charles Oduor, David Mumo Kyalo, Elvis Githuka Mburu, Ivy Abigail Muriuki, Jedidah Syombua John, Wacera Thande, Elvis Maina, Jack Sedah Jr, Achan Chol, Bensiesa Onyari, Michael Usunobun Omoigiafo, Joash Simiyu, Muthoni Wanjiku, Sanaa Mittal, Wilschen Filipe Nascimento Nkutxi, Rhoda Maadakti Akumbomi, Collins Musafri, Karina Higa, Whitney Kibaara, Daniel Erot, Doreen J. Kirui, Mercy Nkirrimpa, Myra Wandeto, Mildren Juma, Melfinda Nurulita Alfino, Juliet Oluoch, Dave Mwita, Cathy Oke, Andrew Irvin, Marita Doak

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Preface - from the Youth Team Leads

Hosted by the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy (GCoM) and UN-Habitat, the Innovate4Cities Conference 2026 convened city leaders, researchers, innovators, policy makers and climate experts to exchange knowledge and explore the latest research, tools and approaches for urban climate action. From 21 to 24 June, the multidisciplinary conference welcomed over **1,200 in-person participants, almost 5,000 online registrants and 176+ speakers across 128 parallel sessions** and four plenaries, covering a variety of themes pertaining to cities and climate change science.

The Global Research and Action Agenda (GRAA) is the foundation of the Innovate4Cities initiative, serving as a strategic framework for international organizations to operationalize in their own work. By identifying research gaps and priority topics, it provides a foundation for city networks to align their efforts with the GRAA and provide local and subnational governments with information, tools, and policy recommendations to address climate challenges more effectively at their specific levels. Following the Montreal Innovate4Cities Conference 2024, Intergenerationality was added to the GRAA as a pillar of **Justice & Equity**, reflecting the requirement for research and action to consider past and future contexts alongside those stakeholders affected by current activities. Meaningful youth participation in decision-making remains broadly inadequate, even with the significant population of younger generations and the disproportionate burden they bear for today's unsustainable practices. There is a critical need for mechanisms that promote intergenerational equity rather than just symbolic representation. One such mechanism was the I4C26 Youth Team, delivered as a program designed in line with UN selection principles. The Nairobi conference responded by elevating the Youth Team, making them a **central structural element** in how the event was designed and recorded.

The Expression of Interest call for Youth Team members was circulated through the Ufanisi Research Network, whose reach across Nairobi, Kenya and the region was central to applicant interest. 241 applications arrived from more than 30 countries. Applications far outnumbered the roles available, a signal that the constraint on youth participation is access to these forums, not interest.

The final 94-person Team was split into 60 Knowledge Leads and 34 Creative Leads. 87% were from African nations, 70% Kenyan, with the remainder drawn from Nigeria, Ghana, India, Tanzania, Italy and the USA. Most came from academia and research, alongside NGOs, youth organisations and government.

The Team was present in every session across the three days, with two Knowledge Leads and one Creative Lead in every session. The model gave invaluable operational support to the organising committee and gave the YT direct access to leading academics, practitioners and policymakers. Over the three days, **163 reflections** were submitted, all tagged against the GRAA to produce a structured record of where youth attention landed and what cross-cutting messages emerged.

For the Youth Team Leads from the University of Melbourne and Ufanisi Research Network, the overall feedback was consistent: the Youth Team was central to the success of I4C26, not supplementary. They featured in many conference highlight videos, facilitated the first public demonstration of the Climate Action Knowledge Engine (CAKE), and produced this reflections report and a forthcoming zine, consolidating all written and creative work produced by the team.

On behalf of the Innovate4Cities Conference 2026 hosts and Knowledge Partner Melbourne Centre for Cities at the University of Melbourne, and Ufanisi Research Network, we thank the Youth Team for producing this important reflective contribution from the conference.

Associate Professor Cathy Oke
Director Melbourne Centre for Cities, Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne
Senior Advisor, Innovate4Cities, Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy

Marita Doak
Research Officer in Urban Innovation, Melbourne Centre for Cities, Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne

Andrew Irvin
Research Fellow in Urban Innovation, Melbourne Centre for Cities, Faculty of Architecture Building and Planning, University of Melbourne

Juliet Oluoch
Co Founder, Ufanisi Research Network

Dave Mwita
Co Founder, Ufanisi Research Network

Youth Roundtable: Urban Climate Leadership and Career Pathways

For young people entering urban climate work, access to a major conference does not always mean access to the people, conversations and guidance that can help them find their place in the field. The I4C26 Youth Roundtable on urban climate leadership and career pathways was designed to close some of that distance. It brought the Youth Team into direct conversation with experienced researchers and practitioners working across climate science, urban governance and implementation.

Juliet Oluoch of Ufanisi Research Network introduced the roundtable and its agenda, then moderated the discussion. The format was deliberately more personal than a conventional conference panel. Young participants and experts sat together in a circle. The discussion began with a framing presentation by Janet Wavinya of UN-Habitat and a youth volunteer. They set out the Team's interests, skills gaps and learning needs, providing a starting point rooted in what young participants wanted to explore. The invited experts responded to that framing with brief reflections from their respective fields. They included IPCC Vice-Chair Diana Ürge-Vorsatz; Marc Wolfram of the Leibniz Institute of Ecological Urban and Regional Development; IPCC Coordinating Lead Author Gian Carlo Delgado-Ramos; Sherine El-Wattar of the IPCC Working Group II Technical Support Unit; Cathy Oke of the Melbourne Centre for Cities; and Njenga Muchekehu of C40. UN-Habitat Executive Director Anacláudia Rossbach delivered closing remarks.

The roundtable addressed a practical question for many members of the Youth Team. That is, **how does someone build a meaningful career in urban climate action when the work spans research, policy, city government and communities?** The experts were invited to speak about the technical and interpersonal skills needed in the sector, ways to develop experience across disciplines and how to engage meaningfully early in a career. The agenda also made space for a harder question on how young professionals can navigate unequal access to global climate and urban development spaces while building careers that are connected to local priorities.

Those questions matter because career pathways in this field are rarely straightforward. Evidence may be produced by researchers, interpreted by policymakers, put into practice by city officials and tested against the realities of communities.

Young people need opportunities to understand how these parts connect, where their own skills can contribute and whom they can learn from. The roundtable offered the Youth Team a chance to ask established professionals about those choices directly, in a setting where their questions and lived experiences were part of the discussion.

The youth-led question-and-answer exchange was therefore the heart of the session. Instead of asking young participants only to absorb advice, the format invited them to bring their own perspectives on the challenges facing cities and on the barriers they encounter in the climate field. It also created the conditions for professional connections and possible mentorship beyond the hour itself. Whether a participant was interested in research, implementation, advocacy or policy, the session offered a clearer view of the range of roles involved in urban climate action and the skills that connect them.

Within I4C26, the roundtable gave the Youth Team something distinct from its important work documenting conference sessions: dedicated time to learn, question and engage with senior figures on its own terms. It was a practical expression of intergenerational participation. The Youth Team was treated as a group of emerging researchers, practitioners and innovators with ideas to contribute, as well as careers to build.

Juliet Oluoch
Co Founder, Ufanisi Research Network

Dave Mwita
Co Founder, Ufanisi Research Network





Contents

Preface – from the Youth Team Leads 3
Youth Roundtable 4
Introduction 5
Chapter 1: Climate Finance & Access 6
Chapter 2: Data, Digital Tools & AI 12
Chapter 3: Cities As They Are Lived 15
Chapter 4: Bridging Knowledge & Action 20
Chapter 5: Different Paths, Shared Futures 26
Beyond I4C26 31

Introduction

Over the three days, **163 reflections** were submitted, all tagged against the GRAA to produce a structured record of where the GRAA focus was, and what cross-cutting messages emerged.

Climate adaptation & mitigation, engagement & participation, and multilevel governance & partnerships were the most tagged GRAA themes. Infrastructure & housing and digitalisation & AI formed a second cluster, while finance, access, informality and mobility rounded out the top ten. Chapter structure for the reflections report emerged from these themes, with team members allocating themselves into author groups and editorial teams examining ***Climate Finance & Access; Data, Digital Tools & AI; Cities As They Are Lived; Bridging Knowledge & Action; and Different Paths, Shared Futures***.

An editor and author team of **44 Youth Team** members reflected on their experiences at I4C26, synthesising key insights from across the entire team's submitted reflections, and their own personal takeaways from the conference and days which followed.

Chapter 1: Climate Finance & Access

01

Chapter editors: Nicolatte Chelagat, Karina Higa, Collins Musafri

Climate finance is essential for enabling cities to respond to climate change, yet access to finance remains one of the greatest challenges facing urban communities around the world. This chapter explores a critical reality: while climate finance opportunities continue to expand, many cities, particularly those facing the greatest climate vulnerabilities, still experience significant barriers in accessing the resources needed to turn climate ambitions into action.

The reflections in this chapter examine the journey from **identifying climate challenges to developing solutions that can attract meaningful support.** Contributors highlight that successful climate action requires more than financial availability; it also depends on project preparation, institutional capacity, technical expertise, strong partnerships, and systems that recognise local priorities. The concept of **"bankability"** emerges as an important theme, reflecting the challenges cities face in transforming valuable ideas into projects that can successfully navigate financial processes.

Through diverse perspectives and experiences, this chapter highlights both the challenges and opportunities within climate finance systems. Contributors explore the importance of collaboration between governments, financial institutions, development organisations, communities, and young people in creating pathways that make climate finance more accessible and inclusive. The reflections also demonstrate how local experiences and innovative approaches can provide important lessons for improving urban climate investment.

Ultimately, this chapter presents climate finance as more than a question of funding. It is about ***equity, participation, capacity, and ensuring that cities have the ability to shape their own climate futures.***

Through youth perspectives, these reflections contribute to a broader conversation on how climate finance systems can become more responsive, locally grounded, and capable of supporting meaningful climate action.

What Cities Need to Access Climate Finance

Eunice Silantoi

The climate finance conversations at Innovate4Cities 2026 pushed me to look beyond the question of whether funding exists and toward a deeper one: **who can actually access it?** Before the discussions, it was easy to assume that having a good climate project was the main requirement for securing support. What became clear instead is that many cities, particularly smaller municipalities across Africa, face structural and technical barriers long before they ever reach the funding stage.

One idea that stayed with me was the notion of a "bankability" gap. Local governments often have urgent climate priorities and genuine project ideas, yet lack the technical capacity, financial guarantees, or institutional backing needed to turn those ideas into something investable. This creates a difficult paradox: the cities most exposed to climate risk are frequently the least equipped to navigate the systems meant to support them.

A model that shifted my thinking was one where financial intermediaries take on this gap directly. Municipalities can retain ownership and leadership of their own projects, while an intermediary provides the technical support, guarantees, and connections to development partners that make a project credible to funders. It reframed climate finance for me, not simply as money moving from one place to another, but as **capacity being built alongside it.**

I was also struck by how long it can take cities to move through international accreditation and approval processes, even when climate action is needed urgently. Encouragingly, emerging examples of direct sub-national financing suggest that alternative, faster pathways are beginning to take shape.

My key takeaway is that equitable climate finance is not only about increasing the money available. It is about redesigning the systems that determine who gets to access it. As a young person engaged in this space, I believe advocating for that redesign, greater local autonomy, stronger project preparation support, and financial systems built around local realities, is one of the most meaningful contributions youth can make to climate action.

Innovative Finance for Urban Climate Action

Diana Nkere

Cities are where the climate challenge is increasingly concentrated but they are also where innovative finance can turn climate ambition into ***visible action.***

The Innovative Finance for Urban Climate Action session highlighted a persistent disconnect between the scale of urban climate needs and the finance reaching cities. Discussions underscored that cities generate around 60% of global GDP and account for a substantial share of global energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, yet less than 10% of the finance required to align urban development with international climate objectives is currently being mobilized and spent by cities. Considering this, the reported USD 831 billion in urban climate finance in 2021/2022 demonstrates progress, but also reveals the scale of the financing gap that remains.

A key knowledge challenge emerging from the session was the need for actors across the urban climate ecosystem to better understand climate-finance mechanisms and importantly, connect available financing instruments to investable projects. Initiatives such as the Transformative Actions Program (TAP) were highlighted as opportunities for strengthening project preparation and reducing investment risks. Policy briefs were also identified as important tools for translating scientific evidence into practical financing and policy choices for cities.

One of the session's most compelling ideas was the potential to bundle smaller urban climate projects into investable portfolios. Individually, many city-level projects may be too small or perceived as too risky to attract private capital. Digital platforms and artificial intelligence could help aggregate such projects, standardize project information, match financing needs with suitable sources, and ultimately reduce investment risk.

For young people, this creates an important space for contribution. Youths can bring digital capabilities, innovative financing ideas, community-level knowledge and new approaches to project aggregation and communication. **Meaningful youth participation should therefore extend beyond consultation to involvement** in designing finance solutions, developing investable projects and translating climate knowledge into locally relevant action. Expanding climate finance access will ultimately require not only more capital, but stronger connections between ideas, evidence, projects, investors and the communities that urban climate investments are intended to serve.

Aligning Mandates with Urban Climate Finance

Doreen William

One of the key insights I took away from this discussion was that the climate finance challenge is not simply about a lack of money, but also about **how finance is mobilised, governed and translated into action.** The speakers highlighted that less than 10% of the finance necessary to align with climate objectives is currently mobilised and spent. This made me reflect on the gap between ambitious climate commitments and the financial systems required to implement them, particularly at the urban level.

I found a London School of Economics speaker's framing of innovative finance particularly useful in understanding this gap. Her categorisation of innovative finance around redistributing risk, aligning incentives and strengthening governance highlighted that mobilising finance requires more than creating new funding sources. It also requires creating conditions in which different actors are willing and able to invest in climate action.

Exploring ICLEI's work further reinforced this perspective. Its Sustainable Finance Centre notes that Africa received only about USD 30 billion of global climate finance in 2022, against an estimated annual need of USD 250 billion. ICLEI's work through initiatives such as the City Climate Finance Gap Fund and Transformative Actions Program demonstrates how technical assistance, project preparation and capacity building can help cities **move from climate ambitions towards investment-ready projects.**

Climate View's approach added another dimension to my understanding: **the importance of data in making climate action financeable.**

Its Climate Investment Plan uses emissions data, indicators, pathway modelling and impact assessment to help cities prioritise projects and build stronger investment cases.

Ultimately, I came away with a stronger appreciation that closing the urban climate finance gap requires aligning mandates, incentives and governance, while building the data, technical capacity and project pipelines needed to turn climate priorities into fundable action.

The key to unlocking access to global climate finance

Elvis Maina

Scaling climate action relies on stronger knowledge sharing and coordination across global and regional platforms using peer learning and South–South cooperation to build capacity and mobilize resources.

The challenge for African cities is not that we lack solutions, but that we don't actualise them. We need to invest and build on capacity to have our cities be able to strengthen their delivery and management systems. Multilevel governance is needed with sub-national sectors being supported by national dockets for functioning.

We need multilateral partnerships with organisations and agencies outside the UN to make the inputs and policies work and contribute better to society and address the issues raised. Costa Rica in partnership with the UN is constructing a Climate Adaptation Resilience Court that will provide climate resilience initiatives when it comes to infrastructure development.

Cities climate actions have to incorporate youth abilities and synergies in shaping and championing them. Young people coming to cities are not looking for jobs only, but seek inspiration, growth and development. Statistics done have shown women aged 15-49 poised to be extremely vulnerable to climate hazards. We need hands-on engagement and it's really important to take a look at governance structures to have the youth involved. We fail to put numbers into calamities or disasters, that's why effective climate action moves from just mapping places but getting to know the real affected people. It is important to have geo-spatial data in a built environment but rather it is not easy to produce them both fiscally and capacity wise.

It is important to translate scientific information to concrete policy reports that capture human systems with the existing data not providing such limiting how tailored solutions can be effectively put in place.

UNEP is producing a report with clear reflections on the meaningful strategic overview in creative and innovative solutions in cities that are fundamental in initial production limitations of carbon emissions. The goal of the report shapes the intention where developers around the world cannot lose focus when it comes to producing requisite facilities and protecting informal settlement so as not to overshoot.

From Research to Action & Advancing the Global Research and Action Agenda for Cities and Climate Change

Mariam Gibson Bwire

The Global Research and Action Agenda for Cities and Climate Change Science (GRAA) brings together the latest research, practical experiences and innovative approaches to urban climate action. It provides a shared roadmap for connecting research, policy and practice in addressing the complex climate challenges facing cities. The workshop highlighted the importance of strengthening the link between scientific evidence and the decisions that shape urban development, climate resilience and sustainability.

The GRAA also serves as the home base for informing the IPCC Special Report on Climate Change and Cities, identifying and collating peer-reviewed and grey literature to strengthen the science-policy-practice interface.

A central message was that **research must move beyond knowledge production towards action.** Cities require evidence that can inform practical decisions on housing, infrastructure, governance, finance, technology, resilience and climate adaptation. Closing the gap between researchers and decision makers is therefore essential for ensuring that scientific knowledge contributes to **real-world transformation.**

The discussion also highlighted the importance of addressing critical knowledge gaps and strengthening collaboration among researchers, policymakers, practitioners, businesses, civil society and communities. Such collaboration can support the development of solutions that are context-specific, inclusive and responsive to rapidly changing urban realities.

The GRAA therefore emphasises stronger pathways between research and action, enabling knowledge to inform policies, investments and practical interventions. This is particularly important as cities face increasing climate risks, rapid urbanisation, infrastructure pressures and competing development priorities.

The workshop further demonstrated that urban climate action cannot depend on a single sector or institution. Effective transformation requires coordinated approaches that connect governance, finance, infrastructure, digital innovation, justice and equity.

The session reinforced the importance of translating environmental knowledge into practical action. It also strengthened the motivation to contribute to this bridge through environmental advocacy, community engagement and climate action.

Local Governments as Agents of Climate Investments

Zipporah Nyokabi Mureithi

Global climate finance decisions and investments are, most of the time, centralized. This leaves local stakeholders such as local county governments, private investors and communities with limited influence over how climate resources are defined, allocated, utilized and implemented. As a result, this creates a huge disconnect between global climate finance mechanisms and the realities and priorities of local stakeholders especially county and district governments.

Local county governments and administrations are catalytic forces of climate investments. They are well positioned to identify immediate local needs, coordinate stakeholders, manage investments and deliver local climate action plans. The Governor of Kisumu County emphasised the need for a **shared framework of responsibilities among stakeholders while placing local governments at the centre of implementation.** This is particularly important for energy transitions.

Kisumu County's commitment to achieving a 100% renewable energy transition by 2050 shows how local governments can translate broader climate ambitions into context-specific priorities. The county's focus on decentralized energy systems and integration of solar energy into public spaces such as markets, parks and roads shows how local governments are directing climate investment opportunities towards solutions that meet community needs while enhancing resilience. Denmark has adopted most of its locally led climate action plans in response to climate vulnerabilities such as heat waves, floods and temperature rise. These examples show the role of local governments in bridging the gap between climate finance and responsive climate action. One stand-out quote was, 'Blended finance instruments should be leveraged upon to generate carbon credits and create additional opportunities to mobilize climate finance.'







Financing Resilient Cities: Advancing Bankable Investments, Accountability and Action on Loss and Damage

Fancy Cherotich

As Kenya faces an 87% climate financing gap, which is estimated to be 62 billion dollars annually to curb climate change, cities are a major sector of great impact from these climate changes. There is a direct loss impact of between 3-5% of Kenya's GDP from climate change effects. The country is calling for bankable green investments that actually translate to significant climate action and sustainability, promoting a rise in its GDP.

Innovate4Cities 2026 truly reflected the power of collective advocacy for climate action, from scientists, engineers, researchers, citizens, academia and policymakers, all gathered to provide wise decisions on city climate action. By 2050 Africa's and world population living in urban areas is expected to rise by 50% and my question is: are the governments ready to go all round to comfortably accommodate this population in their cities?

The additional pressure of rapid urbanization in different parts of the world including Nairobi, Mombasa, Eldoret and Kisumu, among other Kenyan towns, on limited resources also creates hazardous environmental effects directly or indirectly which translate into economic loss of the GDP.

While there is a significant climate finance gap, there is a call for closing the enforcement gap on accountability of available climate finance. The majority of the countries have a climate legislation in place and in specific, Kenya has but not limited to:
1. PFM Act – Ensures fiscal discipline, transparency and accountable public spending from all governments.
2. Climate Change Act, 2016 (2023) – put in place County climate requirements, County Climate Change Fund and ward participation.
3. County Governments Act – Requires devolved service delivery and organized public involvement in county decision making.
There is approximately 13% of available funding in Kenya for climate action, however, many of these funds were not translated into effective local-level urban climate action, as discussed at the conference. There could be multiple administrative and institutional barriers which often prevent climate finance from reaching its intended beneficiaries. Good governance and coordination of institutions are a priority, especially in the administration of the local government.

Awareness of the climate finance opportunities available seems to be very low, with a small fraction of the population aware of the funding opportunities and institutions that can provide them.

This lack of knowledge is a major constraint in urban communities' ability to access and utilize climate finance.

"Climate finance is available at the global level but it struggles to reach the urban vulnerable, where climate impacts are most severe. Climate finance is designed to reduce vulnerability, why does it struggle to reach the most vulnerable urban communities?" – a speaker from Precious Plastic.

Moving forward, I think more focus needs to be on more transparency, more ease of access to climate finance, and more public communication and capacity building. To achieve faster urban climate resilience and catalyze locally led climate action, it will be critical to ensure communities are aware of the funding opportunities available, the responsible actors for managing the fund and how the resources have been used.

Another area which is not getting the necessary attention in relation to climate action is the Loss and Damages suffered during the implementation of policies. In a session on climate finance & innovate-LD, a researcher from the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) extensively shared the various non-economic loss and damage (NELD) impacts that need better methodologies to be assessed. During climate action implementation, there is always loss and damage in the process which needs to be looked at, investigated and sustained.
There is a need for more research to be done on the need for integrating data from communities with formal government systems and on funding structures which reflect the local context and are equitable in terms of access for informal and marginalized urban communities.

At Innovate4Cities conference 2026, a tight discussion on the need for improved methodologies to assess and finance non-economic loss and damage (NELD) was done, particularly losses related to health, wellbeing, culture, social cohesion and human life, which are difficult to quantify. There is also a need for further research in the areas of integrating community-generated data with formal government systems and in creating funding mechanisms which respect the local context and provide equitable access for marginalized communities.

"Where we see mitigation and adaptation, we must see loss and damage as part of delivering climate action. Not including loss and damage is like removing a card from a house of cards and not expecting it to come tumbling down." – UNU-EHS researchers.

As the UNU-EHS researcher's case study and analysis would show, I noted that there is a lack of proper planning and adequate funding for the demand of the community. The data used in the process keep changing, with no consistency or accountability. The research showed from the case studies of the three informal settlements in Kenya, Brazil and Indonesia that there are substantial non-economic losses, such as losses in health, culture, social cohesion and wellbeing, due to the impacts of climate.

During the round table discussion on Climate funding and data, the UNU-EHS researcher queried participants about the availability of enough data to accelerate climate funding and climate action. Two of the participants disagreed about data being available, while the majority said that it was available. One participant highlighted the situation involving Lake Baringo and Lake Bogoria, noting that communities in the surrounding areas i.e. Marigat town settlement, may have limited access to timely and relevant information regarding the potential connection of the two lakes and its implications for local livelihoods and ecosystems. Another participant recognized that data is available at some levels but wanted to know who would be responsible for ensuring affected communities can access and stay up to date with information.

This conversation was important to me because it brought up the issue of climate data being available and being accessible, accounted for and relevant at the community level. It helped me deepen my appreciation of the need for sound data, reaching the communities at most risk of climate change and for resources to be available to meet their needs, to be effective in climate finance.

I think continued attention to transparency and accountability may further support the effective and equitable delivery of climate finance to vulnerable communities. Enhancing access to reliable and locally relevant climate data will contribute to strengthening inclusive, resilient and sustainable urban development.

> "Equitable climate finance is not only about increasing the money available. It is about redesigning the systems that determine who gets to access it."
> *Eunice Silantoi*







Chapter 2: Data, Digital Tools & AI

02

Chapter editors: Sam Rholex Odhiambo, Sharon Mbola

Introduction

With increasing technological advances, the use of data systems, digital tools, and artificial intelligence (AI) is beginning to be implemented to support urban climate action. However, it was found that there is a significant mismatch between the results of the digital system and the reality on the ground, despite the comprehensive technology. For example, the digital system was unable to capture vulnerable conditions inside informal settlement houses, creating the roof vs. interior dilemma. Additionally, data centres, as supporting infrastructure, require massive energy, land, water, and cooling systems, thus having a direct impact on urban planning and the environment. Overall, this chapter highlights the youth perspective in facing the challenges of technology adoption in the Global South, the issue of data sovereignty, and the importance of bankable climate action projects. Ultimately, technology cannot replace community knowledge and human leadership, thus the evaluation of climate action needs to focus on the role of technology in improving people's quality of life and integrating knowledge into society, not on the sophistication of the technology.

From Data to Action: Reflections on Digital Tools and AI

Ladislas Havugimana

The presentations and discussions at the I4C26 conference reinforced my belief that data, digital tools, and AI can play a crucial role in enhancing urban climate action, but **only when technology remains rooted in local realities**. A key takeaway was that digitalization should not be viewed as an end in itself. Research on digitalization for sustainable urban development highlighted exciting opportunities enabled by AI-driven data access, while also cautioning about potential downsides of automation, including increased stress, reduced human control, and inefficiencies.

One of the most striking insights for me was the disconnect between what digital systems can capture and what people actually experience in their daily lives. The satellite-based flood-risk initiative demonstrated the value of highly localized information, such as home-level alerts. However, its reliance on open-source data raised concerns about reliability and highlighted the need to complement it with trusted national databases. This illustrates the broader "roof versus interior" dilemma: a city may appear digitally clear from above, while important realities within homes and communities remain overlooked.

The discussions also stressed that data must be dynamic, contextual, and accessible. Relying on PDF documents for planning can lead to decisions based on outdated information, particularly since climate hazards do not respect administrative boundaries and require regional data sharing and collaboration. Similarly, digital cadastral systems can transform land governance, improve service delivery, and reduce disputes, although technological progress may also have social costs, including potential job losses.

> "Ultimately, the most important takeaway for me is the importance of digital inclusion and contextualization."
>
> *Ladislas Havugimana*

The Global South cannot simply adopt digital solutions developed elsewhere and expect them to function in the same way. Limited data availability, institutional capacity, local expertise, and policy readiness remain significant challenges. AI can greatly strengthen climate planning and coordination—as demonstrated by UN-Habitat's reported saving of 10,000 working hours—but **technological progress must go hand in hand with equitable access and local capacity building.** Ultimately, the value of AI is not measured by how advanced the technology is, but by whether it improves decision-making, empowers communities, and turns data into meaningful climate action that improves people's lives.

Smart Data, Missing Layers: Data & AI Strengths vs Africa's Informal Reality & Energy Poverty

Sam Rholex Odhiambo

The Innovate4Cities conference 2026 held in Nairobi was a great game changer and an eye opener to me. As a Nairobi-based urban and transport planner, I went to the conference hoping to see how digital tools could reshape mobility planning for our chaotic African cities. The first session that I attended, themed "From Climate Targets to Real Action: Agentic Planning in Minutes, Not Months" (I4C26, Nairobi, June 22, 2026) delivered exactly that provocation.

A virtual presentation by goNEON's co-founder described a platform that shifts scenario design from the status quo of manual planning that takes months to digitalization and assessing alternative scenarios within minutes! This agentic AI planning tool has mainly been put to practice in Zurich and shows great potential. The Dar es Salaam case was compelling, though hypothetical, and it is important to note that the platform does not yet account for the informal transport systems that define mobility across much of the continent. That gap felt familiar; our matatu networks, boda bodas, and para-transit corridors are what shape our cities and the digital tools, data systems, and AI may just be what we need to achieve sustainable mobility and cities, especially in this era of climate action. It is also great that I had a personal virtual meeting with the presenter after the conference and we discussed areas of collaboration and how the tool can be put into practice within the African continent.

My second session was themed - From Data to Implementation: Accelerating a Just Urban Energy Transition (I4C26, Nairobi, June 22, 2026). The presentation highlighted that 88% of GCoM-signatory cities have no engagement with the Energy Access and Poverty Pillar at all, despite Sub-Saharan African cities outperforming the global average on EAPP badges. Addis Ababa's bold move to shift to an all-electric public transport fleet was particularly important as it stood out as proof of what's possible when political will meets infrastructure investment.

Together, these sessions gave me a clear understanding that data, digital tools, and AI can accelerate climate action, but only if African informality and energy poverty are incorporated into the models from the beginning and not as an afterthought.

Grounding Digital Systems in Urban Equity: Moving from Pilots to Scale

Sharon Kavuu Mbola

Across discussions on data, digital tools, and urban climate action, a clear consensus emerged: **cities already possess many of the solutions needed, yet the primary challenge lies in scaling, financing, and effectively coordinating them.** Moving beyond isolated pilot projects toward system-wide implementation demands robust data systems and stronger cross-sector collaboration. However, the sessions revealed critical gaps in how digital and system-level innovations connect with the diverse, on-the-ground realities of different urban contexts.

A striking insight arose from comparing perspectives across regions. While representatives from Bogotá, Brazilian municipalities, and Sweden all identified common systemic barriers—namely fragmented governance, constrained financing, and limited data utilization—their core priorities reflected distinct urban needs. Swedish representatives emphasized institutional scaling, cross-sector coordination, and strengthening data-sharing and policy alignment between national and local levels. Conversely, Latin American dialogues centered firmly on equity, informal settlements, and underserved communities, prioritizing inclusive access to essential urban services and climate adaptation funding.

This contrast underscores a significant knowledge gap in how we design and deploy digital solutions. European frameworks often understate the complex dynamics of informal urban systems, while Latin American discussions tend to place less emphasis on institutional scaling mechanisms. Concepts like digital twins must be deeply integrated with urban boundary spanners to ensure high-level system modeling directly bridges this divide. Bridging is not about erasing local contexts; it requires actively connecting them. For data systems and digital tools to drive meaningful climate action, high-level technological design must be grounded in social equity, ensuring that the lived experiences of marginalized urban communities actively shape scalable, resilient city governance.

Learning and Engaging: The latest science on cities and climate

Mercy Chaluma Muchonji

One of my biggest takeaways from the Innovate4Cities conference 2026 was that data, AI and digital tools are becoming increasingly relevant and significant in how cities understand and respond to climate and development challenges. I noted as per the speakers that the conversation should not only be about having access to new technology but also how it is used and accessibility levels. **There is still a strategy gap in AI maximization especially in ensuring that it complements existing local knowledge and expertise instead of replacing it.** AI has the potential to reduce the workload of municipal officers by automating certain processes, but the question we choose to ask and the problems we prioritise as decision makers, policy analysts, climate governance leaders and experts will ultimately determine how useful these technologies become.

I was also intrigued by the discussion around the visibility of locally generated knowledge. Many cities and communities already produce valuable evidence, but this knowledge does not always make its way to international research and policy discussions credibly given it is handled by external recipients who often neglect some knowledge already availed or focus on the surface level bit of it.

This made me appreciate the importance of connecting global science, such as IPCC findings, with what is actually happening on the ground in different regions for which certain AI tools have made the process seamless.

Another important lesson was the **value of horizontal networks** between cities which has been implemented with the potential of scaling to different regions. Cities facing similar challenges can learn from one another, validate technical approaches and even collaborate on policy solutions. At the same time, challenges such as unreliable data on public spaces and urban greening show that technology alone cannot solve everything. Research needs to be translated into practical, bankable proposals that can attract financing. Ultimately, what stood out for me throughout the conference was the understanding that meaningful urban transformation requires a combination of good data discovery and use, responsible AI integration, local knowledge cognizance, collaborative engagement and action.

Data, tools and AI

Awan Emmanuel Ajith

This chapter on data, digital tools and AI is quite a complex area to explore in so far as climate change action is concerned. First, it must be acknowledged that there are starkly low levels of education in most African countries to understand the workings of the modern world and its attributes as compared to those deployed in the WEIRD world (Western Educated Industrialised Rich Democratic World). Tools like goNEON, CAKE, CPD adaptation and Action Explorer need an enabling environment to deploy expertise notwithstanding the question of inadequate, limited or scarce finances.

Unless a multilevel governance and partnership model is adopted, this discussion under this chapter remains a complex one that deserves a holistic approach that pays keen attention to more feasible ways to solicit finances and adoption of sophisticated AI tools backed with commensurate know-how. In so doing, a centralized and sustainable data centre can be established and can easily be fed with contributory basic information from other related climate action think tanks such as World Meteorological Organization and from other legal repositories such as the FFLoCA, IPCC special reports, Law and Climate Change Toolkit.

Personally speaking, all the aforementioned efforts are only realizable through a knowledgeable and experienced human resource who is well-grounded in the world of science notwithstanding its interconnectedness with global finances and domestic support through approvals and institutional face-lift whenever necessary.

The sum total of this discussion is that we are better built and suited to the fast changing world of science and technology to adapt to many phenomena including the climate change agenda and this needs a joint and multi-sectoral approach.

Beyond Smart Technologies: Putting People and Communities at the Centre of Climate Transformation

Sophy Chebon Kimchong

Participating in Innovate4Cities 2026 in Nairobi challenged me to rethink what it truly means to build smart, resilient and climate-responsive cities. As a practitioner working with communities in Bungoma, including informal settlements where climate and infrastructure challenges are experienced in very practical ways, I came to the conference with a strong appreciation of the realities that shape urban life. I left with an even stronger conviction that **the future of our cities cannot be built through technology alone; it must be built around people, knowledge, equity and meaningful participation.** One of my most significant takeaways was the importance of bridging scientific evidence with indigenous and community knowledge.

Through my role as Knowledge Lead for the Youth Team and our engagement around the Climate Action Knowledge Engine (CAKE), I experienced the value of creating spaces where young people and communities are not merely recipients of climate information, but active contributors to knowledge, innovation and decision making. Scientific and indigenous knowledge should not compete; together, they can create climate solutions that are locally relevant, trusted and sustainable. The conversations on AI and climate transformation further reinforced this perspective. **AI can strengthen forecasting, data analysis, communication and decision-making, but it cannot replace human leadership, lived experience, or behavioral change.** Climate transformation ultimately requires changing mindsets, institutions and everyday choices. This is especially important in resource-constrained communities, where solutions must respond to lived realities rather than simply replicate models developed elsewhere. I was equally inspired by the call for cities to become innovation partners and test beds for climate solutions. For me, this creates an opportunity to translate global knowledge into local action, strengthening waste management, drainage and climate resilience to advancing inclusive urban planning in our municipalities.

> "A smart city is not defined by how much technology it possesses, but by how intelligently it uses knowledge, innovation and technology to improve the lives of all its people."
>
> *Sophy Chebon Kimchong*



03

Chapter 3: Cities As They Are Lived

Chapter editors: Charles Oduor, Jedidah Syombua John, Blessing Jacobs, Sarah Mwaura

Introduction
Roughly one billion people live in informal settlements globally, and that is where the frontline of climate risk sits. Nairobi hosted this conference, with related reflections from Mombasa and Kisumu. This chapter draws directly on youth contributors' conference experiences to show what climate resilience looks like from settlements where formal systems often do not reach.

In South Africa, informality traces to apartheid-era land dispossession, not an absence of planning. In Nairobi, a three-layer tenure system – landowners, structure owners and tenants – leaves 90 to 95% of residents unable to modify the homes they live in, whatever retrofit might exist. Secure tenure is not a secondary condition of climate adaptation. Without it, better materials and better technology cannot easily become resident-led improvements.

As Brian Emojong writes, there is ***"a distance between the city we measure and the city people actually live in."*** Treated water fails not at the source but in delivery chains nobody monitors. Waste workers already function as infrastructure, sorting and redirecting material that would otherwise flood drains and waterways, yet remain unrecognised in municipal planning.

"***Just because it is informal does not mean it is simple,"*** as a speaker from Kounkuey Design Initiative put it. Another session reframed residents not as passive recipients of poor services but as active contributors building their own water and sanitation systems, a reminder that the word informal can expose exclusion or flatten complexity, depending on who's using it.

From the floor, contributors kept returning to who gets asked and who gets counted: are migrants considered when climate policy is written, or only citizens? Who pays for the solutions once the risk has already been mapped? These are versions of the same gap, between what gets planned and who that planning is actually for.
Climate resilience will not come from top-down planning alone. It requires institutions willing to treat grassroots adaptation as evidence, and the honesty to ask what people have already built before deciding what comes next. The reflections that follow are that evidence.

Informality Is Not the Absence of Urban Intelligence

Charles Oduor

"Do you think I can be able to place a green roof on top of a shack?" an urban researcher from Sol Plaatje University posed this question to the room, which eventually cracked a deeper problem of what happens in our informal communities. Most climate solutions are designed for buildings, ownership systems and infrastructure networks that do not resemble informal settlements.

The session challenged the idea that informality means an absence of planning. The researcher's account of South Africa traced how informal settlements are shaped by histories of land dispossession, apartheid spatial planning and unequal access to urban land. What appears as disorder is often structured exclusion. Residents may own or construct their own homes while remaining unable to secure the land beneath them, a poverty of land that limits long-term investment and deepens climate exposure.

A lecturer from the University of Nairobi extended the argument by emphasizing that climate technologies must match local materials, geologies and maintenance conditions. Technically, a standard green-roof system cannot simply be transferred onto corrugated iron housing. Structural capacity, roof type, waterproofing, plant selection, drainage and food safety all matter. The real unresolved question was not whether communities could innovate, but whether institutions are prepared to investigate forms of greening that are technically safe and socially useful in these contexts.

An urban geographer from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin redirected the discussion towards practices already emerging in Nairobi's informal settlements. In Mukuru Kwa Njenga, residents grow vegetables in constrained space and train climbers along an iron-sheet wall. These practices may not fit formal definitions of green infrastructure, but they represent locally developed responses to heat, food insecurity and limited space.

The Nairobi Urban Research Lead at the African Cities Research Consortium reinforced this shift. Mukuru's Special Planning Area shows what becomes possible when local knowledge informs infrastructure design rather than being treated as an obstacle. Simplified sewer systems and prepaid water dispensers have been adapted to the settlement's dense layout and economic realities. The debate on whether to retire the word "informality" stayed unresolved, and that felt right. The term can expose unequal histories and insecure tenure, but it can also flatten complex communities.

A Kounkuey Design Initiative speaker's observation captured the tension: "Just because it is informal does not mean it is simple." Planners must stop using the label as a substitute for understanding.

Climate resilience will not be achieved by formal planning alone. It requires institutions to treat grassroots adaptation as evidence, invest in community-led systems and create governance through which residents shape decisions affecting their homes. **The city is more than what appears in official plan records**. It is also what people build, maintain and improve when those plans do not reach them.

The Poverty of Land Under a Thermal Trap

Brian Emurenya Emojong

My experience at the conference made me rethink what it means to understand a city. With a background in geology, hydro-geology, GIS, and environmental assessment, I have been trained to see cities through maps, datasets, spatial patterns, and measurable environmental conditions. However, the discussions on cities as they are lived reminded me that a city is not only a physical or spatial system. **It is also experienced through the everyday lives, struggles, choices, and adaptations of the people who inhabit it.**

This insight is especially relevant when considering informal settlements in Nairobi. While climate data can indicate heat concentration, building locations, and population density, it does not capture the lived experience of residing in a small structure with a corrugated iron roof during extreme heat. Heat is more than a temperature reading; it influences sleep, comfort, productivity, health, and how residents use and adapt their homes. These daily experiences provide essential context to the climate conditions shown in datasets.

The conference challenged my assumption that better spatial data automatically leads to better understanding. **I began to see a distance between the city we measure and the city people actually live in.** Informal settlements can become statistical categories rather than places inhabited by people with knowledge, agency, and locally developed responses to difficult conditions.

What stayed with me most is that informality should be understood not only through what is absent: formal housing, infrastructure, planning, or services but also through what residents create in response to these gaps. People continuously negotiate space, modify their homes, share resources, and develop ways to cope with environmental pressures.

To me, "Cities as They Are Lived" means **looking beyond the map.** Technical knowledge is valuable, but it gains significance when linked to lived experience. A resilient city does more than measure vulnerabilities; it listens to those who encounter and address them daily.

Who Owns the Heat

Brian Terer

The SDI Kenya case study on Nairobi's informal settlements offers some of the sharpest figures available on the scale of the housing and heat problem. Over 60% of residents live in informal settlements at densities reaching 107,000 people per square kilometre, against a citywide average of 7,000. Within that density, 87% of housing structures are built from iron sheets acting as thermal traps, ranking extreme heat as the second most pressing climate challenge in these settlements, directly behind flooding.

Concrete construction, often assumed to be the upgrade, does not resolve the problem so much as change its shape. Concrete buildings trap heat throughout the day and release it back into interior spaces at night, forcing families out of their own homes during the hours they most need rest.

The real constraint here takes a structural shape. A three-layer land tenure system, spanning landowners, structure owners, and tenants, leaves 90 to 95% of residents as tenants with no legal standing to modify the homes they live in, whatever retrofit or cooling intervention might exist. That structure also carries a gendered dimension: absentee structure owners hold the legal authority to act, while women and girls disproportionately bear the daily and nightly burden of indoor heat exposure, with no pathway to act on the conditions they experience most directly.

Climate resilience in these settlements cannot be resolved by an algorithm or a single retrofit standard. It requires addressing who owns what, who holds the authority to change it, and who is left absorbing the consequences when nobody does.

Seeing the Infrastructure That Cities Often Overlook

Raymond James Ntabazi

A city is more than its roads, drainage systems, buildings, and formal institutions. It is also the networks of people, practices, and informal systems that allow urban life to continue when formal infrastructure does not reach everyone. This became particularly visible to me at Innovate4Cities 2026 in Nairobi, where discussions repeatedly returned to understanding cities through the experiences of the people who live and work in them.

The session challenged how we think about urban infrastructure. Waste workers, community organisations, and local actors are often treated as beneficiaries of urban programs, yet in practice they already provide critical infrastructure, collecting, sorting, recovering, and redirecting materials that would otherwise enter drains, waterways, and landfills. Their knowledge of neighbourhoods and material flows is often more immediate than what conventional urban datasets capture.

This matters directly for climate action in informal settlements. When drainage is inadequate, waste accumulates in waterways and flooding risk increases. When formal collection is inaccessible or unaffordable, residents build alternative systems. These systems are sometimes described as informal, but they might better be understood as urban infrastructure created from below.

I4C26 placed strong emphasis on housing, justice and equity, and community participation, recognising that informal and low-income settlements face disproportionate exposure to flooding, heat stress, and inadequate services. The conference demonstrated this beyond the conference rooms too: youth delegates visited Korogocho and worked with a local community centre on a road-safety initiative, showing how knowledge and action can emerge through direct collaboration.

From my own work in Uganda, I see the same reality in waste management. **The challenge is not simply that cities lack infrastructure, it is that existing infrastructure often fails to recognise the systems already operating within communities.** Waste pickers, small recycling enterprises, and local businesses collectively form parts of the urban resource-recovery system, yet frequently operate without secure spaces, predictable markets, or participation in municipal planning.

This raises a broader question for climate-resilient cities: what changes when we stop asking how communities can be integrated into existing systems, and instead ask **how existing community systems can shape the systems we build?** The lessons from the zero-waste discussions in Nairobi, Mumbai, and Kisumu suggest solutions do not need to begin with large infrastructure investment. They can begin with partnerships, local ownership, and recognition of what communities are already doing. The most resilient city may not be the one with the most infrastructure, but the one that understands, connects, and invests in the infrastructure, both formal and informal, that its people already depend on.

What Happens After the Tap

David Mumo Kyalo

In the "Cities as They Are Lived" sessions, we moved beyond the technicalities of water engineering to the precarious reality of what happens after the tap. While water may leave a formal treatment plant meeting every safety standard, the journey to a household in an informal settlement is a gauntlet of risk. We discussed a stark "monitoring gap": while vendors source from treated networks, only 10% of samples at distribution points meet WHO chlorine standards. This is where the city's formal systems end and a complex, unmonitored "shadow infrastructure" of storage, transport, and local vendors begins.

The true weight of climate resilience is felt in the 98% of households that must store water at home, often in containers that inadvertently invite contamination. For residents, water safety is not a passive service but a daily, active negotiation with risk. As rapid urban growth continues to outpace the reach of formal pipes, these decentralized delivery chains remain the lifeblood of settlements—yet they are also the primary sites of exposure. Living resilience here means more than just surviving a flood; it means the invisible, exhausting effort of securing a safe drink of water in a city that hasn't yet learned how to reach you.

Different Contexts, Different Solutions

Elvis Githuka Mburu

Community-based organisations often get defined by what a community lacks and not by what it does. Different regions require different strategies for finding and adapting solutions. South Africa's situation raises the question of how community policing and NGO partnerships with the national government compare with Brazil's approach through its sustainable favela networks.

The session highlighted engagement and participation as major themes. There is a need to recognise that different communities require different approaches to settlement, and that racial differences also play a role in how cities are mapped. Developing artificial intelligence systems for urban planning is considered a creative opportunity for green infrastructure planning.

The City You Already Have

Ivy Abigail Muriuki

"Why does planning for migrants matter?" I keep coming back to a question someone asked from the floor, mid-session, almost offhand: when we write climate policy, are we thinking of migrants at all, or only citizens? Nobody answered it clearly.

That question followed me through the rest of the session. I sat there thinking about Accra's waste workers, folded into city systems that used to ignore them. About women in Colombia pushing into an electric vehicle market that treats their presence there as almost taboo. About the fact that across Kenya, Burundi, Somalia, and South Sudan, barely half the people get warned before catastrophe hits them. Every case study in that room was, in its own way, someone the "standard citizen" in a policy document was never built to include.

Then came Healing Cities, and a researcher's paper on Nairobi's informal settlements undid something in me. He said residents don't reject affordable housing because it's inadequate, they reject it because it cannot replace what they have already built where they are, whether it be a community, a rhythm, or a home. I watched the room resist that idea. I felt myself resist it too, for a second, before realizing I was resisting the wrong thing.

What stayed with me from both rooms is this: **we keep drawing the city we wish existed, and forgetting to first look closely at the one already alive under our feet - informal, imperfect, inhabited.** Maybe the real planning work isn't imagining a better city from scratch. Maybe it's learning to actually see the one people have already made home, and building toward it instead of around it.

The City Nobody Put on the Slide Is the City We Go Home To

Jedidah Syombua John

Different rooms. Different cities. Bringing together some of the sharpest thinking on urban resilience I have encountered in one place. The frameworks were solid. The case studies were real. And still, for me, the most thought-provoking things said across three days of Innovate4Cities 2026 happened in the questions - raised by people of the cities, after each presentation.

In one room, Mombasa's port scored 25 out of 25 on every climate risk that mattered - flooding, sea level rise, livelihood disruption. Maximum across the board. Then someone from Mombasa City asked "who pays for the solutions?" The room offered pipelines, frameworks and partnerships. As a stakeholder from that same city, she was asking about reality. That gap – between a perfect risk score and an empty funding answer – was never closed.

In another room a researcher from Cape Town said something short that cut through everything - that when climate-displaced people arrive somewhere new, host communities are often hostile. Resentful. Scared. Competing for the same stretched resources.

We have entire policy vocabularies for the person moving. Almost nothing for what they arrive into. A Boston planner put the wider problem plainly: ***"Planning is essential, but a plan is only useful if the people implementing it can act on it, and the people living with it can see themselves in it."*** That execution gap is real. And we don't say it out loud because it is uncomfortable.

What about the people displaced by climate who may not even call themselves climate migrants? Every instrument, every policy built around that label is already missing the people it was designed for -before it even reaches them. That is not a communication problem. That is a design failure.

African cities appeared across almost every session – mostly as examples appended to frameworks authored elsewhere. Good research. But there is a difference between a city being studied and a city being heard. That difference matters more than any framework can capture.

Cities as they are lived are messier, more urgent and more honest than anything we put on a slide. The people who know that best go home to those cities every night. We were in that room too. That knowledge belongs there, not just on the slides.

Formality vs Informality - how can we use local knowledge in a multilateral setting?

Wacera Thande

In the urban academic world, there are many debates about formality and informality. Informality is used as a term to describe areas where planning is not traditional, linear, or non-existent according to formal structures of governance, research, and science. This session brought these ideas to the forefront as we witnessed the centering of informality and local knowledge in city planning, perceptions, and research. The three presenters were able to present to us the lived realities of South Africans and Kenyans respectively and demonstrated how local communities create systems of resilience to provide essential services for themselves such as water, sanitation and hygiene.

During the session, the speakers emphasized more research and knowledge is needed in understanding the role of community members in informal settlements to build, create, and influence their infrastructure. Conversations reframed residents of informal settlements from passive receptors of poor government (formal) services, to active contributors to the infrastructure of their neighborhoods and communities. As a result, conversations expressed that informality as a term can be limiting and can reduce the complexity of how communities in these areas engage in creating infrastructure such as water and sanitation in a simplified way that meets their needs.

The biggest win for me during the sessions was the young attendees, who were in university, got a space to engage with knowledge beyond the classroom. Here young people were able to unpack and reflect on the formality vs informality conversation. Guided by the presentations from the three women experts in their field, conversations were alive, engaged, and clear. The young people present got a glimpse of "on-the-ground knowledge", gathered by these experts. Day to day knowledge was brought to life in a multilateral setting where policy and governance decisions took place. This in itself demonstrated the power of lived knowledge or 'informal' knowledge as a tool to teach, engage, and advocate for better deliberation and learning with necessary stakeholders.

The basis of a city's fabric is how effectively people move and how comfortably they stay

Elvis Maina

If you plan a city's spine using public transit we can ensure there is hope in having absolutely zero emissions and not just minimal emissions, a clear push by the metropolitan government in Mumbai. The built environment can contribute up to 6 gigatonnes when it comes to mitigating emissions and the fire build up to meeting net negative from net zero emissions is kept alive by initiatives such as the housing agendas.

In making housing affordable we need to look into analysing how to make them accessible with the intention to have policies that make people able to own such. Housing is not an isolated structure it is an interconnected system that shapes land management so if we focus on raising housing the co benefits multiply. We need to plan forward looking with climate actions intentions protecting highly exposed infrastructure, vulnerability in social aspects.

Urban planning and greening help us adopt a landscape approach that reaches beyond city limits into rural areas - contributing to carbon credit goals and long-term preservation. But the thread running through every session at this conference was the same: **the city is not just infrastructure. It is the people who move through it, rest in it, and stake their lives on whether it works.** A city whose fabric holds is one where people can move effectively and stay comfortably - not just survive the conditions they were never meant to thrive in.



Chapter 4: Bridging Knowledge & Action

Chapter editors: Jack Sedah Jr, Sanaa Mittal, Rhoda Maadakti Akumbomi, Fancy Cherotich

Introduction

The reflections gathered in this chapter converge on a single, urgent insight: **climate knowledge does not become action on its own.** It must be translated, co-produced, and carried across boundaries by people and institutions willing to hold multiple truths at once. Contributors trace how insights move towards impact in urban climate governance, emphasizing that reading the territory must come before designing the solution.

Several pieces name the crisis of translation that emerges when technical frameworks fail to speak the language of everyday work, leaving citizens and decision-makers locked out of the process. Others show how moving from evidence to local impact depends on partnerships, people, and stories that connect science, communities, and climate action in ways that are legible and usable. City–university and city–business collaborations and multilevel governance arrangements appear repeatedly as sites where knowledge is either fragmented or fused into action.

What binds these reflections is a shared insistence that co-production is not optional. Whether through boundary spanners standing in the middle, grassroots voices shaping narratives, or pathways that make cities more inclusive, the authors argue that legitimacy and inclusivity arise when communities help define what counts as knowledge and how it is used. In doing so, they challenge the persistent fragmentation of effort and offer a roadmap for bridging the gap between knowing and doing in urban climate action.

Collaborative Approaches to Climate Action: Insights from 2026 Innovate4Cities Conference

Rhoda Maadakti Akumbomi

The 2026 Innovate4Cities Conference highlighted the importance of stakeholders working together to accelerate meaningful action on climate justice. One key lesson for me was the importance of giving young people a stronger voice in decisions that shape how we respond to climate change. Our ideas, creativity and understanding of local challenges can make a real difference. This was particularly evident during the AI Hackathon, where young participants demonstrated innovative ways of using technology to address climate-related challenges such as flooding.

The conference also provided useful perspectives on bridging the gap between knowledge and action. Discussions on how research can be translated into practical solutions showed that evidence is most valuable when it responds to the realities communities face. Examples from informal settlements in India, particularly the use of research to develop strategies for managing urban heat, demonstrated how locally relevant knowledge can support practical climate solutions.

Overall, the conference reinforced my view that addressing climate vulnerability requires more than isolated efforts. Governments, Development Partners, Civil Society Organisations, Faith-Based Organisations, traditional authorities and communities need to work together, align their priorities and use evidence from science and research to guide decisions. **Most importantly, climate action must remain connected to the people and communities most affected by its impacts.**

Reading the Territory Before Designing the Solution

Wilschen Filipe Nascimento Nkutxi

One idea I kept returning to while reflecting on Innovate4Cities 2026 was that bridging knowledge and action should begin with a simple question: do we really understand the territory where we want to act?

The discussions around the Favela Climate Memory Exhibition and Building Urban Resilience Through Co-Creation made me think about this from an African perspective. Climate knowledge is often presented through scientific data, models and technical assessments. These are important, but a territory also contains another type of knowledge: the knowledge of the people who live there. Communities know where flooding occurs, which spaces become inaccessible, how people move, and which solutions have already been tried.

This knowledge may not appear in a dataset, but it can be critical when deciding what should happen next.

This is something I have been thinking about through my own work in Angola, through the PIN-DEAP, where the territory is not approached simply as available land for development. The idea is to understand the relationships between population, infrastructure, mobility, economic activity, education and environment, then connect these within a longer-term territorial vision. This changes the meaning of planning. We should not always begin by asking, "What should we build here?" Perhaps we should first ask, **"What is already here, and how can we build from it?"**

This connects strongly with co-creation as discussed through the CLARE projects. If communities are involved only after a solution has been designed, participation becomes consultation. But when their knowledge helps define the problem itself, participation becomes part of the solution. This is particularly relevant for African cities experiencing rapid urbanisation. We cannot simply import models designed elsewhere and expect them to produce the same results.

Perhaps bridging knowledge and action is therefore not only about connecting science with policy. It is also about connecting what institutions know with what territories already know. For me, that is where planning becomes more than designing a project. It becomes an exercise in understanding a place before deciding its future.



From Crisis of Translation to Co-Production: A Youth Perspective on Boundary Spanning

Sanaa Mittal

The Innovate4Cities 2026 plenary on IPCC Dialogue - Science to Action crystallized a truth I had sensed but never heard named so plainly: **climate knowledge only creates change when it is co-produced with the people using it and simplified enough to act on.** Listening to one panellist describe a "crisis of translation" in communicating science to media and communities, I recognized the **invisible labor of boundary spanners**, those who hold two truths at once, fluent in both technical frameworks and everyday language.

This resonated deeply with the fragmentation I have observed in sustainability work: drivers, knowledge systems, and production processes operate in silos, while access to scientific resources remains uneven. The UK and USA's efforts to democratize data contrast sharply with contexts that another panellist described, where over 4,000 volunteers contributed as genuine co-producers rather than passive beneficiaries. This is not just about more data; it is about who gets to define what counts as knowledge and how it is made usable.

The emphasis on city–university and city–business partnerships (Kali Polis, Bayero, CBCA) and multilevel governance (Kenya's devolution, CHAMP) mirrors what I saw in the housing and infrastructure plenary: climate-resilient planning requires 3–4 generations of work, anchored in public transit and nature-based solutions woven into city systems. Yet without boundary spanners to translate between scientific evidence, policy logics, and community priorities, even the best frameworks risk remaining abstract.

My key takeaway is that co-production and translation are not optional add-ons; they are the work. They generate accuracy, legitimacy, and inclusivity, especially for indigenous and local communities often locked out of technical discourse. As a young researcher, **I now see my role not just as a consumer of science, but as a translator who must simplify without distorting, and connect without erasing differences.** The crisis of translation is also an opportunity: to build bridges where knowledge and action meet.

From Evidence to Local Impact: Partnerships, People and Stories

Michael Usunobun Omoigiafo

Before Innovate4Cities 2026, I understood the movement from climate knowledge to action largely as a question of having the right evidence, policies and resources. The discussions at the conference made the picture more complex. Evidence matters, but it only becomes impactful when partnerships, communication and local realities are connected.

The session "From Evidence to Scalable Impact: Building Effective Partnerships" particularly reinforced this for me. The example from Abuja Municipal Area Council was significant because it showed how climate action can be embedded in everyday urban decision-making. Abuja's Sustainable Energy and Climate Action Plan extends to 2030 and integrates renewable energy considerations across infrastructure, water, roads and waste management. At the same time, the discussion acknowledged the continuing need for stronger financing and better data. This highlighted an important reality: having a plan does not automatically create the capacity to implement or scale it.

I was also struck by the emphasis that the transition must be "just and inclusive." Cleaner transport systems cannot be designed only around technology. Informal transport operators and low-income communities have livelihoods and mobility needs that must be considered. Effective partnerships therefore need to bring together city governments, researchers, businesses, communities and other actors so that solutions are practical as well as technically sound.

The session on "Climate Storytelling at Scale: Mokko City's Creative Ecosystem Approach" added another dimension. People do not engage with climate issues through data alone. **Stories, culture and creative expression can make complex issues more accessible and meaningful, while creating space for communities to participate.** I found the discussion about avoiding narratives that portray Africa only through vulnerability particularly important. African cities also have stories of resilience, innovation and local leadership.

My key takeaway is that bridging knowledge and action requires more than producing evidence. It requires partnerships that can use evidence, communication that people can understand, and solutions shaped by the realities of communities. For me, this is what turns knowledge from information into impact.

From Insight to Impact in Urban Climate Governance

Joash Simiyu

When the Map Doesn't Match the Territory

Urban climate action has a knowledge problem — not a shortage of it, but a distribution failure. Two sessions at Innovate4Cities 2026 crystallised this tension in ways that stayed with me long after the room emptied.

The Missing Link: Planners, Policy, and the People Left Out

The session on Inclusive Cities laid bare a contradiction anyone working in urban informal settlements will recognise: the people most affected by climate decisions are consistently the last to shape them. Panellists flagged the missing connective tissue between city planners and policy drivers — a gap that produces well-designed frameworks that fail at implementation because communities were engaged too late, or not at all.

One line from an unknown speaker anchored the conversation: "Action reflects stakeholders' engagement and role assigning." Every flooded informal settlement, every unmanaged biodegradable waste stream left untouched because it lacks the commercial appeal of plastics or metals — each is a governance failure disguised as a technical one. The question of who sits at the table is not procedural. It is the intervention.

From Monitored to Anticipated: Technology as a Double-Edged Tool

The session on Digitisation and AI introduced a framing that sharpened my thinking. A speaker from the London School of Economics drew a line between digitally monitored cities and algorithmically anticipated cities — and that distance is where the next decade of urban governance will be contested.

Her equation was precise: Sustainability = Harm reduction. Technology = Conventional tool. Technology is not the answer. It is the medium. The answer depends on who holds the tool, what data feeds it, and whose harm we are actually trying to reduce.

The Bridge We Still Need

Both sessions pointed to the same gap: knowledge is being produced, but the architecture to move it into action — across planners, communities, and technologists — remains fractured. Boundary spanning is not a soft skill. It is work. Until governance systems make it structural rather than incidental, the distance between knowing and doing will continue to cost lives — quietly, and disproportionately, in the cities least equipped to absorb the loss.







Connecting Science, Communities, and Climate Action

Collins Musafri

Participating in Innovate4Cities 2026 reshaped my understanding of what it truly means to move from climate knowledge to climate action. Before the conference, I imagined this process as a straightforward pathway: scientists generate evidence, policymakers develop strategies, and communities experience the outcomes. The discussions revealed a more complex reality. The challenge is not simply producing more knowledge; it is **creating the connections that allow knowledge to travel, transform, and become meaningful in people's everyday lives.**

One of the most important lessons I carried from the conference was the power of the invisible relationships that hold climate action together. Behind every successful initiative are people who connect different worlds: researchers who communicate beyond academic spaces, policymakers who listen beyond institutional boundaries, practitioners who adapt ideas to local realities, and communities whose lived experiences shape better solutions. These connectors may not always be visible, but their role is essential in turning evidence into decisions and ambitions into implementation.

The conversations around science communication and co-production particularly challenged my thinking. Climate knowledge cannot create lasting change if it remains trapped within technical reports or specialised conversations. Evidence must be translated into forms that communities and local actors can understand and use. At the same time, local knowledge must be recognised as an equally valuable contribution to climate solutions. Communities are not simply recipients of interventions; they are partners with experience, creativity, and knowledge developed through their relationship with place.

As a young professional, I left Innovate4Cities with a stronger sense of responsibility. Youth should not only be considered future leaders of climate action; we are already part of the networks that connect ideas, generations, and institutions. **My greatest takeaway is that meaningful climate action is built through connection.** Science provides evidence, communities provide wisdom, and institutions provide pathways for implementation. When these elements work together, knowledge becomes more than information: it becomes a force for transformation.

Zero Waste

Achan Chol

This conference session offered valuable insight on the challenge of waste, exacerbated by rapid urbanization and consumption. However, an area needing more research is the financing models for the pathway from collection to controlled disposal. This was not clearly brought forth in the presentations. The session highlighted that most cities are within Development Bands 1-2 but didn't address how they finance moving up.

There was a discussion on Kisumu city in Kenya, a central case study. The Kisumu government allocated 0.9 acres for a Materials Recovery Facility and signed an MOU for it, marking a rare, real local government commitment in East Africa. A presenter from Purpose offered a quote that stood out: "Circular economy transitions are social processes before they become technical systems."

The session clearly brought to the surface the fact that waste is not primarily a technical problem, but a governance, behaviour, and social inclusion problem, which cities are currently trying to solve backwards by building infrastructure before communities are organised. The data presented on the 30 African cities demonstrate that the majority of them are failing on basic collection and circularity, with informal workers holding these systems together lacking proper legal or institutional recognition.

A participant from the floor raised a critical challenge: that the cycle of discussion, research and "community participation" has become its own kind of dialogue that doesn't translate into delivery. Commitments are made, frameworks are designed, communities are consulted, and yet nothing really ever changes, and no one is held accountable for the gap between what was promised and what has been delivered. This is a take I completely agree with. Bureaucracy often overshadows the delivery of actual progress, evidenced by endless meetings, reports, and research, leaving development perpetually discussed but rarely delivered.

When and How: Building the Ecosystems Knowledge Needs to Travel Through

Bensiesa Onyari

The theme Bridging Knowledge and Action made me reflect on a fundamental challenge in urban climate action: knowledge often exists, but the systems for translating it into collective action remain fragmented. Meaningful climate action depends not only on the quality of knowledge available but also on how it is translated into practice.

Across the sessions I attended, I was struck by the importance of creating stronger connections between institutions, communities, businesses and researchers who generate, interpret, and apply knowledge.

The session 'Turning Policy into Practice', run by the City Business Climate Alliance, highlighted the importance of ecosystems that enable businesses to contribute meaningfully to climate action. Businesses cannot scale climate solutions in isolation. They depend on governments, communities, financiers, and researchers. Their perspectives and constraints should inform the design of solutions from the beginning, which highlighted for me that bridging knowledge and action is also about changing the time and manner in which different actors are engaged, the "when" and the "how."

The presentation on Decentralizing and Monitoring Water Safety in Urban Informal Communities in Nairobi added another dimension. Research should not end with the production of findings or publication of results. Knowledge generated about communities should return to those communities in accessible and useful forms. Communities should not be treated as mere sources of data or beneficiaries of interventions. Treating them as partners creates a two-way exchange in which local and technical knowledge strengthen one another.

Altogether, these sessions gave me the understanding that bridging knowledge and action is about relationships. Effective boundary spanners have an important role in creating that space, translating between stakeholders and ensuring that solutions are technically sound, locally relevant, and institutionally feasible at scale. My key lesson from I4C26 was that successful urban climate solutions are not simply transferred from experts to communities or from policy to practice; they are built collectively through sustained engagement, co-design and shared ownership.

Standing in the Middle: Boundary Spanners, Grassroots Voices and the Future of Climate Resilience

Muthoni Wanjiku

The session drew together representatives from Lund, Cairo, Baku, Manila and beyond, a global dataset, clear policy ambition, and a room full of people who clearly care. What followed was a discussion that set up the very tension this chapter seeks to resolve.

We have more urban data than ever, yet participants kept circling back to the same question: **how do we get from high-quality data to meaningful action?** The answer, Debra Roberts suggested, is not more data. It is trust.

She urged participants to intentionally invest in boundary spanners, the people and networks that link disciplines, sectors, and communities. What struck me was her observation that most of these people have emerged out of necessity, not design. Nobody appointed or properly funded them.

I picked up a blind spot in the room. The conference was held in Nairobi, the first time Innovate4Cities landed on African soil, yet there was limited representation from city leaders in Sub-Saharan Africa in this conversation. The frameworks discussed were largely arriving from the outside, waiting to be applied locally. **Climate resilience models built without the leadership of the cities most at risk will always remain frameworks rather than transformations**.

Sophy Chebon, a youth delegate from Bungoma County, Kenya, asked how cities could ensure resilience is co-created with communities rather than delivered to them. It was a grounded question the session did not fully resolve. The knowledge gap is not only about what we know; it is about whose knowledge is treated as legitimate in these rooms.

Boundary spanning is not a neat professional category. It happens in the informal spaces: between a community health worker and a city planner, a researcher and a neighbourhood elder, a youth delegate and a policy framework not designed with her in mind. It is relational, slow, and often invisible, and yet it is precisely where the translation between ambition and implementation happens.

The people building trust in informal settlements, running community dialogues and translating policy into lived experience, need to be in the room when the frameworks are built. Not as beneficiaries. As architects.



Chapter 5: Different Paths, Shared Futures

Chapter editors: Doreen J. Kirui, Rhoda Maadakti Akumbomi, Melfinda Nurulita Alfino, Blessing Jacobs

Introduction

In a world of rapid urbanisation, countries are encouraged to realise sustainable development in the urban and infrastructure sectors. The majority of world cities, particularly in the Global South, are often considered slower in their progress compared to the Global North. However, evidence suggests that developing cities are not lagging behind; instead, they are moving towards the **same goal on a completely different path,** adopting context-specific approaches to addressing climate change and related vulnerabilities. This chapter emphasises that development and climate action must be tailored to regional characteristics and indigenous knowledge rooted in those regions, recognising that each region presents its own challenges and opportunities.

To ensure equitable development and climate action, it is crucial to build local capacity and integrate community knowledge into urban planning, while also engaging young people as infrastructure rather than as future beneficiaries. This chapter captures youth reflections on the future of urban areas, placing youth, marginalised communities, and local knowledge as the main drivers of change.

The Co-Authors of Africa's Climate Action

Doreen J. Kirui

Nairobi, Kenya hosted the Innovate4Cities 2026 Conference, where one of the central conversations concerned informality and the difficulties African cities face as they pursue ambitious climate action while working within the realities of informal urban systems. Interestingly, the term informality gained notoriety 54 years ago after the 1972 ILO Kenyan Mission, a first of its kind in Africa. Informality was used to define the realities of those described as unemployed and under-employed on city streets where their activities are rarely supported, largely ignored or actively discouraged by governments. As the term gained traction, decades later, informality became seen in a rather vilified and judgemental light. It is seen as an unpleasant passing phenomenon which has to be suffered through to attain 'formality'. This view therefore holds that informality is an illegitimate institution where formality is cited as the unquestioned social good and is engineered through modern infrastructural development and technologies, top-down planning promising to transform cities and entrench order, equity and fairness within communities.

Sadly, across Africa, climate action projects are too often designed around this same blueprint logic. The consequence of this is seen through stalled projects, conflict between communities and the state, evictions that have historically been done in a less than humane manner and proportions of informal sector earners becoming economically displaced. The irony is that many of the characteristics used to describe informality are a rational response to the very conditions the state and market have failed to address. Informality, therefore, continues to be produced through this failure.

The call for our leaders, policymakers and communities is to design climate action projects that account for the way we live, walk and work within the cities. These projects ought to recognize the capacities that already exist within communities, and build not just for them but with them. These capacities are evident in the creative potential, resourcefulness and resilience of the residents of Mukuru in Nairobi, the hustle of a hawker on the streets of Lagos, the reach of bodaboda riders in Kampala and through the networks of solidarity in local financing mechanisms popularly known as 'chama'.

Our reflection should be centered not only on how fast we can build the next BRT line or reclaim land for river regeneration projects, but how we recognize 'informal' institutions as sources of knowledge and livelihoods in their own right. Climate action will become more just and enduring when it works with the local chama or the bodaboda association, rather than treating them as obstacles to a predetermined vision of the 'modern' African City.

Indigenous solutions for shared urban challenges

Rhoda Maadakti Akumbomi

At the 2026 Innovate4Cities Conference, one message that stood out was the need to move beyond simply discussing climate change and towards practical solutions that can make a real difference in people's lives. The experiences shared by cities such as Kisumu, Lagos and Walvis Bay, among others, showed that although cities face different climate risks and vulnerabilities, there is **no one-size-fits-all approach** to addressing them. What works in one place may not automatically work in another. Successful climate action must therefore be **shaped by local realities, priorities and the needs of the people most affected.**

A particularly important takeaway for me was the idea that cities should not merely be recipients of solutions designed elsewhere. They should be actively involved in identifying their challenges and developing responses that work within their own contexts. This makes collaboration a key determinant in building climate resilient cities. Stronger connections between researchers, policymakers, city authorities and local communities can help turn ideas and research into practical interventions.

There is also much to gain from cities learning from one another. For example, lessons from the Accra Metropolitan Assembly's approaches to household informal waste collection and disposal could provide useful insights for other city authorities seeking to reduce environmental pollution and strengthen recycling efforts. Such experiences may not be copied exactly, but they can be adapted to suit different local conditions.

The important role young people play in climate action cannot be overemphasised. Through innovation, technology and collaboration across geographical boundaries, young people are demonstrating that they can contribute practical ideas and solutions to shared climate challenges. Involving young people is not simply about preparing them for the future; it is about recognising that they have a meaningful role to play in shaping it now, irrespective of their geographic location and identities. Urban planning should be intentional and inclusive at all levels to solve everyday climate risks and vulnerabilities.





Youth Involvement and Data Integration: Our Path to a Better Shared Future

Melfinda Nurulita Alfino

As someone living in the Global South, I am deeply interested in the challenges of just transition in sustainable development. It is ironic to me that the marginalised communities, who are often trapped by the system, are usually the ones who are forced to bear the burden of the transition processes. Yet, they are actually actors the transition depends on, while also determining the outcomes. For example, informal waste collectors in Accra gather nearly half of the city's total waste, which demonstrates that they are part of the transition system, not merely recipients of its outcomes.

This fact made me realise that there is still much work to do to realise a just transition for all levels of society. One of the strategies is to build community trust by opening a dialogue that actively involves every stakeholder, including marginalised communities. However, my previous experience in community engagement highlights that understanding and building trust among marginalised communities presents its own challenges. Due to the knowledge gap between planners and the community, sometimes it is challenging to establish effective communication. The role of youth is needed in this dynamic to explore various ways to bridge the communication gap, such as the use of social media as well as creative and inclusive approaches. Our main task is to strive to understand how they interpret the problems they have been facing, while also creating a sense of security to make them feel heard. This aligns with one of the standout quotes from one of the sessions: **"Planners need to learn the language of the community, not the other way around."**

Besides youth involvement, the role of comprehensive data is also crucial to form fair and evidence-based policies to ensure they reach those most in need. Ultimately, I believe that youth empowerment and data integration are two crucial foundations to realising a just transition for a better shared future, where every community is recognised in the transition.

From Extraction to Innovation: Territories and Young People as Sources of Knowledge, Creativity, Agency and Solutions

Karina Higa

One idea that stayed with me is that cities do not need to follow the same route to transformation. Majority-world cities are not simply catching up with the Global North because their histories, resources, governance, climates and social realities require different approaches. Solutions developed elsewhere can overlook the conditions and knowledge that determine what works locally.

This became clear when discussing climate finance and urban resilience. Projects are still often designed in fragmented and siloed ways, sometimes addressing one public target while overlooking others or failing to ask people what they actually need. In Brazil, the territory is increasingly seen as a space where local knowledge, relationships, institutions and lived realities come together to generate innovation and effective solutions to complex challenges such as climate change. Resilience therefore cannot simply be imported; it must emerge through participation, trust, capacity and local ownership. I also see enormous potential in Africa's predominantly young populations. **Young people are challenging extractive and colonial ways of thinking** and the assumption that developing countries should remain places from which resources and value are extracted. They can help reframe these contexts as laboratories of creativity and innovation, generating locally grounded responses to shared challenges such as climate change. This means moving beyond the colonial logic of the "helper" and the "helped": not treating vulnerable communities as recipients of aid, but empowering them as actors, innovators and leaders of change. With platforms, capacity building and practical tools, youth can turn this potential into more effective climate action and more just, resilient societies.

Ultimately, different paths do not mean different goals. Shared futures require different routes. The challenge is to move from downloading solutions towards co-creating them, placing territory, local knowledge, youth leadership, inclusive finance and place-based approaches at the centre of transformation.

Beyond the Satellite: Youth at the Forefront of Epistemic Autonomy and the New Architecture of Urban Resilience

Whitney Kibaara

The I4C26 was a historic milestone as the conference landed on the African continent for the first time. The gathering embodied how vast local contexts, diverse methodologies, and varied regional realities intersect under a unified global destiny of urban climate resilience. **Yet for a collective future, we must chart different paths across the seven continents and five oceans to strike balance in the new world we envision.**

For decades, satellites have been the standard measure of data, informing decisions made by world leaders, governments, scientists, researchers, scholars, and those with daily grassroots experiences across the globe. The epic transition into the 21st century has progressively culminated a deeper calling within the youth of today. Channeling our generational agency and recognizing that as certain as Benjamin Franklin was about death and taxes, the world would be intelligent to treat us – their nation's youth – not as passive future beneficiaries awaiting permission for policies-trickled down that follow the least inclusive or perhaps worse unconstitutional trajectories. **The youth make 70% of the peoples of Africa,** meaning this population is majority load-bearer as the working class and experience first-hand the impact of their governments regulations-choice implications. This brings my campaign advancements for the below third eyed-perspective framework on a global scale;

- Epistemic autonomy, which means citizens of the planet have the right and capacity to generate theories, metrics and urban models from their local lived realities. A real-life example is my research on a startup called 'GEOTRACE' whose work I follow closely in Kenya. The colleagues exploit drone technology and filmmaking skills to capture what the satellite misses. The work majorly focuses on data provenance to ensure a transparent and traceable food supply chain in accordance with global standards: green procurement sustainability. GEOTRACE is currently focusing on providing EUDR compliance to small-scale farmers to facilitate their access to global markets and ensure economic sustenance.
- Propelling subaltern urbanization to create resilient cities will actively require reformed land systems that were crushingly disoriented by the colonial and post-colonial era. Cities in the Global South will require infrastructural autochthony deeply rooted in local microclimates, indigenous materials, and regional labor ecologies. Rapidly we are moving into government-regulated affordable housing schemes where the designs of cooling, transport and water systems accompanying these growing developments must respond to local thermodynamic and social realities rather than borrowed blueprints on foreign soils notwithstanding cultural norms.

Lastly, an independent multi-stakeholder state agency focused on custodianship and archival initiatives contributing to the advancement of SDG 13 and its intersection with other goals, Vision 2030. Currently as a youth residing in Nairobi City, I lead a creatives' coalition 'VISION EXTRAORDINAIRE'; a united commitment using film as a tool to spotlight social and ecological cinema-accurate fabric the state fails to service. Our work design involves documenting decentralized water, waste and art networks to impact on awareness and auditing municipal systems/sub-systems through a film-slate docuseries following **'stories that move water in cities.'**

Equitable urban planning in a changing climate

Daniel Erot

"Your satellite tells you the temperature of your roof, but does it know the temperature inside the house when a mother is cooking on a paraffin stove under a corrugated iron sheet at noon?" This was a thought-provoking question asked during the session on equitable urban planning.

The crucial bridge in urban climate action is solely dependent on downscaling macro-level datasets into localized, open-access inventories that inform immediate policy decisions. By applying this precision data to high-density, low-infrastructure informal settlements - mitigating the extreme thermal trapping of corrugated iron housing in Nairobi - planners can turn from broad climate goals to targeted, life-saving architectural and structural interventions.

There appears to be a gap between top-down digital infrastructure and the lived reality of informality.

This caused a pause in the session and shifted the dialogue from a celebration of sophisticated macro-data downscaling to a grounded discussion on the urgent need for hyper-local community-led thermal tracking.

Urban Climate Action Beyond Templates: A Majority World Manifesto
Mercy Nkirrimpa

> "We are not behind on a path others have already walked, we are walking a different path entirely."

Cities across Africa, South Asia, and Latin America often face climate risks that have been shaped by colonial-era infrastructure legacies and informalities: Conditions that standard templates built for wealthier, formally planned cities do not account for. Climate resilience frameworks designed in and for the Global North cannot simply be scaled down or translated for the majority of world cities, they need to be rebuilt from local realities upward. This session highlighted access, reliability, indigenous knowledge and decoloniality as major themes.

Urban Climate Action Beyond Templates: A Majority World Manifesto
Myra Wandeto

Two major points in this session were justice and equity. The discussion focused on cities from a global perspective rather than specific cities individually. It was emphasized that many cities require stronger technical assistance, improved governance, reliable urban data, and partnerships to turn climate ambitions into investable and implementable projects. Priority was given to challenges faced by cities in a low resource context.

This session emphasized the need for the upcoming generation to be actively involved in decision-making platforms. It also explains why Indigenous knowledge and finance have an active role to play in how climate action is tackled on the international level.

Another important point discussed was that climate action requires shifting away from standardized global approaches toward locally grounded, equitable, and participatory systems. And indigenous and community knowledge should shape climate finance, planning and resilience frameworks.

IPCC Dialogue (Science Plenary): Housing and Infrastructure
Mildren Juma

As stated by the Mayor of Tswelopele, South Africa: **Every household decision is a climate decision.** Housing infrastructure can only be successful when connected with other infrastructural developments such as roads, to improve its renovation readiness.

She further stated that housing infrastructure should be made in a way that it should not only be for those who can afford. In addition, it was mentioned that, mayors ask for financial systems that make cities able to deliver. Informal settlements in a city are not a deception and should not be excluded as they are a prevalent form of existence within our cities. Governments need to work together with communities in order to build safe and more resilient communities. A key reflection here is that sustainable urban planning should take into account the needs of the growing population that dwell in informal areas within the city centres. Providing adequate housing and infrastructure alone is not enough, but engaging dwellers in housing infrastructure decisions is paramount to achieving sustainability of such initiatives.

> "Different paths do not mean different goals. Shared futures require different routes."
> *Karina Higa*

Beyond I4C26

Cited repeatedly was the energy the Youth Team brought, their perspectives, their readiness to take on both operational and intellectual work, and the underlying case that these voices need a seat at the discussion. Beyond this reflections report and the zine, the Youth Team surfaced a set of directions for where this work should go next for the Innovate4Cities initiative to keep **intergenerationality** alive in the conversation of the GRAA and I4C post Nairobi. These include **continued network engagement** with the volunteer cohort; a **shared opportunities channel** for careers, study and volunteering; a Youth Team podcast; **recommendations report written by youth for engaging young people** meaningfully in forums of this kind; and a **documentary of youth involvement** charting the Team's experiences. Where Montreal named intergenerationality as a new pillar, Nairobi built it into the structure. The opportunity for I4C now is to build youth voices and momentum between conferences as much as within them.



Youth Team Reflections Report

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