

INTERACT-BIO DIALOGUE
DEMONSTRATION PROJECTS, DAR ES SALAAM



August 2023 | Tanzania

INTERACT-Bio
Integrated action on biodiversity



1. BACKGROUND

The INTERACT-Bio project includes the promotion and enablement of the mainstreaming of biodiversity management between national governments and city-regions. Historical decisions by Parties to the UN Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the global biodiversity targets, e.g. Aichi Biodiversity Targets 2011-2020, have created the mandate for these efforts. Sub-national government biodiversity action, however, now supports the aspirations and targets set out in the post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework and the Long-Term Approach to Mainstreaming biodiversity.

The INTERACT-Bio project is funded through the International Climate Initiative (IKI) implemented by the Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV) in close cooperation with Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK) and the Federal Foreign Office (AA).

2. FRAMING THE CONTEXT

Urbanisation has become a dominant and permanent feature in present and future global landscapes. In particular cities across Africa are rapidly growing. Dar es Salaam is no exception. It is one of the fastest growing cities on the continent and is the main economic center in Tanzania. The expansion of the city has been accompanied by major challenges such as informal land development, poverty and environmental degradation. The urban transformation has therefore resulted in the decline of biodiversity and reduction in the provision of ecosystem services, within the city, and to its residents. Research has shown that the decline of biodiversity and ecosystem services, can have a detrimental impact on the health and well-being of urban residents and the resilience of a city to withstand increasing environmental risks and threats such as urban heat islands, declining food stocks, e.g. freshwater and marine fish, declining freshwater supply, psychological depression and poor health, excessive air pollution, riverine flooding and coastal storms. These issues can all be mitigated through maintained and restored urban ecosystems. As a result of rapid urbanization and the extensive reliance on natural resources, even within the city, Dar es Salaam is at risk.

Urban ecosystems and the accompanying biodiversity need to be incorporated into land use planning in order for natural systems to continue to support human well-being in cities. Sustainable urban development implies an equitable, participatory and aligned approach to planning. In Dar es Salaam there is great opportunity to protect and enhance remaining natural and green open spaces, to improve health and wellbeing of its residents and reducing vulnerability to environmental risks.

Professionals and city officials who design, plan and build cities require mechanisms to integrate nature into urban design and development. Therefore, as part of the INTERACT-Bio project, to mainstream biodiversity at the local government level, three demonstration projects are being implemented in Tanzania. Of these, two are planned for implementation in Dar es Salaam, in the Ubungu and Ilala Municipal Councils, respectively. The demonstrations are practical, small landscape-scale changes to provide examples of the value of biodiversity. Each demonstration project in the city is unique in design, implementation and the beneficiaries which it aims to serve.

The demonstration project in the Ubungu Municipal Council area, is being implemented within the Sinza Ward. The Ubungu Municipal Council has earmarked several sites across the ward as green open spaces, of which many are not maintained, resulting in misuse and urban decay. The objective of the project in Sinza, at the Kwa-Kibadeni site is to upgrade one such area into an appealing green open space which the community can enjoy and utilize. In preparation of these demonstration projects various engagements and dialogues were held with all affected stakeholders, including local leadership and representatives of the community.



3. EMERGING THEMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Governance: Political processes and changes

In many countries across Africa, political and administrative reform (post colonisation) has resulted in governing powers being decentralised to local governments. Upon approval from national government authorities and departments, working closely with local governments throughout project implementation, requires understanding of existing governance structures, procedures, and legislations or regulations. It is important that these are used to guide the implementation of the project and are adhered to throughout the duration of the project implementation and beyond. A key component in the understanding of the governance landscape, requires dedicated stakeholder engagement to ensure the political will and the buy-in from the local leadership are in place as these directly impact the demonstration projects' success.

Governance structures in Dar es Salaam (and many parts of Africa) are a hierarchical. Permission to work with earmarked local governments or city councils, therefore, needs to be obtained from specific government divisions and departments at the national government level, before any further engagements with local governments and other relevant stakeholders can take place. In many instances, local governments will fulfil the mandates that are provided by the national government, which are part of a larger framework. It is therefore essential that this is taken into account when considering project implementation, impact and beneficiation.



Project time frames may also span across periods that are longer than political office periods or election cycles. The election of new representatives in positions or roles that hold significance to the progress of the project, can often result in project delays. These delays are a result of needing to brief new officials in office and bring them up to speed with the project and its progress. The political changes in office can also cause delays for approvals and other requests that may be required from the city council or local government.

Traditional leadership structures, in Africa, historically represented all authority before colonisation. However, many African countries have taken an inclusive and participatory governance approach post-colonisation. Traditional leadership positions are therefore also recognised as a formal component of governance and often wield significant power at the local level and amongst communities. In Dar es Salaam, the Mtaa leadership, is such a structure recognised at the local level. It is therefore important to ensure that relevant traditional leadership entities are consulted throughout the project lifespan to ensure successful implementation. Furthermore, the power and influence that these positions yield should not be underestimated and can often change the dynamic of a project if not navigated or managed appropriately.

Local Partnership: Importance during a pandemic

Partnerships are characterised by relationships of collaboration and coordination between parties founded on a common purpose, such as achieving a particular goal and with expectations and responsibilities clearly defined. The implementation of the Dar es Salaam demonstration projects has shown that partners are integral to the management and implementation of projects. The demonstration projects relied significantly on developing strong partnerships and relationships with both the installation service provider (Square One - landscapers), local government (Ubungu Local Municipality), and the community (Sinza Ward). These local partners proved to be invaluable, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic and thereafter, when ICLEI Africa project staff were unable to travel outside of South Africa.

In the context of project implementation for urban sustainability, it is often local partners that understand the landscape and stakeholder dynamics the best, which drives action on the ground for the full duration of the project.

3. EMERGING THEMES AND LESSONS LEARNED (CONTINUED)

Provided that information is shared regularly, effective channels of communication are maintained and all parties are kept well informed of progress, implementation can be efficient and effective. Partners not only bring local knowledge and language (kiSwahili in this case), but can also offer expertise that compliment other parties, to enable improved project implementation. The combination of expertise and common purpose between partners can provide a powerful and balanced force for change, as it enables partners to utilise their particular strengths.

Projects are seldom without challenges and obstacles which need to be handled as they occur to ensure continuation of effective implementation. Local partners typically understand the local nuances, and cultural norms and practices, which often help in addressing some of the challenges faced. This local knowledge provides project implementers with useful information and advice, saving time, deepening an appreciation of local norms and ensuring that local practices are respected.

Beneficiation: Managing community needs and expectations

One of the main objectives of the INTERACT-Bio project is to provide expanding urban communities in cities such as Dar es Salaam with nature-based solutions and the associated long-term benefits. The demonstration projects, in particular, aim to directly contribute towards this objective. Through the upgrading and greening of areas of Dar es Salaam, the potential of nature to provide essential services and new or enhanced economic opportunities, are unlocked for local communities. Furthermore, they protect and enhance the biodiversity and ecosystems on which these services and opportunities depend, making the local communities more resilient in the face of increasing environmental and climate threats. Balancing the project objectives and the needs and expectations of the local community, are however, critical to the success of the project.

The presence of community expectations is inevitable, strategic stakeholder engagement can help manage these expectations, especially if the community is engaged early on. As a widely accepted tool, stakeholder engagement for the demonstration project in Sinza, has played a significant role in managing expectations of the local communities. The Sinza local community was supportive of the project from the beginning and this has also enabled other development pressures on the same space where greening was planned, to be “turned-down” as the community’s preference was to have a green open space.

Stakeholder engagement could be considered a risk management tool, which allows project implementers to respond more tactfully, to community expectations which cannot be met. Although unrealistic community expectations may be unavoidable in projects, these can be managed and mitigated in a way that allows for constructive community engagement throughout the project duration. In Sinza, the community were engaged on several occasions and it is hoped that they will be stewards and custodians of the site, despite the fact that the land belongs to the Local Municipality.



Design for Ilala demonstration project

4. CONCLUSION

The planned implementation of the INTERACT-Bio demonstration projects in Dar es Salaam will underscore the critical importance of aligning biodiversity mainstreaming efforts with the complex realities of urban governance, local partnerships, and intentional community engagement. As cities across Africa, including Dar es Salaam, continue to urbanize at a rapid pace, integrating nature into urban planning is no longer optional, but essential for sustainable and resilient urban development.



A key lesson emerging from the project is the necessity of understanding and navigating the layered governance structures that influence project implementation. The nature of governance in Tanzania, involving national, local, and traditional authorities, demands a thoughtful and inclusive approach. Potential political changes and shifting mandates further highlight the need for adaptability and sustained engagement with all levels of leadership to ensure continuity and support for successful project implementation.

The role of strong local partnerships should not be undervalued. Local actors brought contextual knowledge, cultural understanding, and technical expertise that were critical for implementation, particularly when cross-border travel and direct oversight were restricted. These partnerships not only ensured the progress of the project under challenging circumstances but also demonstrated how local ownership enhances both the relevance and sustainability of outcomes.

Equally important was the need to manage community needs and expectations through proactive stakeholder engagement. The support and involvement of the Sinza community proved invaluable, not only in shaping a shared vision for the green space but also in resisting competing development pressures. Early and honest engagement fostered trust, clarified project boundaries, and positioned the community as future custodians of the space. Ultimately, the experience of the INTERACT-Bio project in Dar es Salaam affirms that biodiversity mainstreaming in urban settings is a collaborative process. Success depends on the integration of sound governance, strategic partnerships, and community agency and stewardship. These lessons serve as a foundation for scaling similar initiatives across African city-regions, reinforcing the global ambition to build cities that are equitable, resilient, and developed together with nature.



INTERACT-Bio project at a glance

Full title: Integrated subnational action for biodiversity: Supporting implementation of National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans through the mainstreaming of biodiversity objectives across city-regions

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