ANNUAL
REPORT
2023

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

Hosted by
UNOPS

ACRONYMS

AFD	Agence Française de Développement
AVSI	Association of Volunteers in International Service
BMZ	German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development
COVID-19	Coronavirus Disease 2019
CRRF	Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework
CLGF	Commonwealth Local Government Forum
EU	European Union
EUTF	European Union Trust Fund
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the UK
GAP	Global Action Plan: Accelerating for Transforming Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030
GHG	Greenhouse gases
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit

HfHI	Habitat for Humanity International
IHS	Institute for Housing and Urban Development Studies, Erasmus University Rotterdam
IIED	International Institute for Environment and Development
LAC	Latin America and the Caribbean
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NGOs	Non-governmental Organisations
NUA	New Urban Agenda
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDC	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SDI	Slum Dwellers International
SECO	State Secretariat for Economic Affairs

SIDA	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
SWM	Solid Waste Management
UCLG	United Cities and Local Governments
UCLGA	United Cities and Local Governments Africa
UCLG-ASPAC	United Cities and Local Governments Asia-Pacific
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UN-Habitat	United Nations Human Settlements Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WIEGO	Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing
WWF	World Wildlife Fund

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Foreword

Since its inception, in 1999, Cities Alliance has remained committed to its core mission of addressing urban poverty. However, it has continually adapted and broadened its responses to the ever-increasing complexity of factors which impede sustainable urbanisation and compound urban poverty.

In 2023, the world faced unparalleled global challenges. As it grappled with the escalating impacts of climate change and record-breaking temperatures, it also witnessed an unprecedented surge in global migration. Yet, it was the conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East that cast long shadows, disrupting not only regional stability but also the international peace and security landscape, further destabilising the global economy and engendering political and social unrest on a global scale.

As is customary in crises, the most vulnerable citizens, particularly women and children, bore the brunt of the impact. In many cities, women continue to be excluded from social and economic opportunities, not only because they are poor but also because they are women. The scale of these crises strained development aid budgets, exacerbating humanitarian needs.

This made it difficult to decide where to allocate resources amid a myriad of challenges.

Amid this complex landscape, Cities Alliance remains committed to fostering inclusive cities and addressing urban poverty. With 'Cities Without Slums' at the heart of our activities, our focus on mitigating migration impacts, advancing gender equality, combating climate change, and advocating for sustainable infrastructure persists, guided by the principles of the Sustainable Development Goals. These aspects of Cities Alliance's responses and activities are highlighted in this Annual Report.

We recognize the importance of adapting to the evolving global context, including the increasing engagement in conflict-affected and fragile countries. Initiatives such as our new program in Haiti, underscore our commitment to addressing unique operational, financial, and security challenges in such environments. In conflict-affected regions, we prioritize conflict sensitivity, understanding local contexts, and recognising the complexity of the environment. Our approach is anchored in principles of building trust, ensuring accountability, and fostering institutional learning — values that resonate at the core of our mission.

As we celebrate our 25th anniversary, we are reminded of our enduring commitment to creating better and more inclusive cities. None of our achievements would be possible without the rich diversity, experience, and collaboration facilitated by the multi-sectoral partnership that Cities Alliance represents. Together, we continue to strive for inclusive urban development and create positive change where it is needed most.

Greg Munro
Director Cities Alliance

Highlights

Leveraging Migration Corridors to Empower Secondary Cities

The partnership between Cities Alliance and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) entered its second phase, focusing on empowering secondary cities across three regions – the Horn of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). This initiative aims to harness the potential of migration corridors to provide migrants, forcibly displaced people, and host communities with equal access to quality public services, labour market integration, and economic opportunities.

Supporting Refugee Integration in the Horn of Africa

The European Union (EU)-funded Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF): Inclusive Urban Development and Mobility Action, which concluded in 2023, created tangible improvements in the lives of refugees and fostering inclusive participation. It established a regional network for secondary cities in the Horn of Africa to share experiences, strengthen policy development, and replicate pilot approaches to refugee management and integration.

Building Cities for Women in Nepal

This new initiative, funded by the EU and USAID, aims to create climate-responsive and inclusive public spaces in five Nepalese municipalities over four years. It is being implemented in partnership with UNOPS Nepal, UN-Habitat, and the Ministry of Urban Development of Nepal.

Promoting Sustainable Construction in Informal Settlements

Cities Alliance initiated a working group with members and partners to drive transformative change in sustainable construction practices within informal settlements. Their efforts produced a groundbreaking position paper advocating for alternative, circular, and low-carbon construction methods. This initiative aims to make sustainable practices both attractive and affordable for the most vulnerable citizens while also engaging stakeholders across the building sector.

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Working Together for More Resilient Informal Settlements

Cities Alliance continues to partner with SDI to support informal settlements as they recover and rebuild from the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, with the goal of making them more resilient to future shocks. The programme's second phase, funded by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), is being implemented in 16 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. It focuses on strengthening community-based organisations of the urban poor, supporting community-led data collection, and promoting locally led adaptations to climate change.
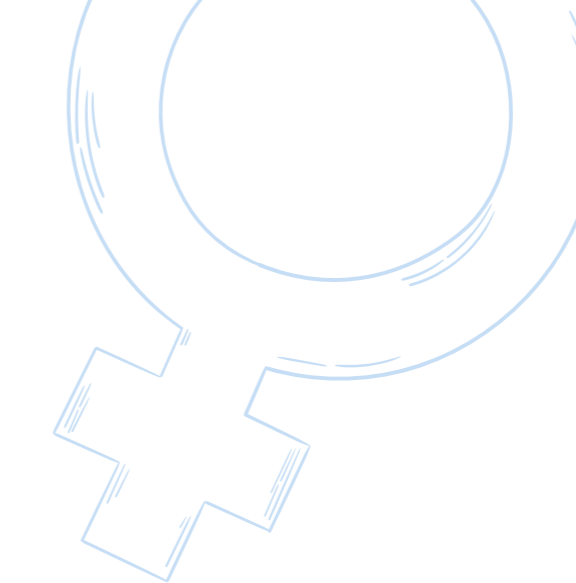
Placing Women at the Centre of Water Management in MENA

The new Women and Sustainable Cities programme aims to strengthen women's leadership in managing urban water resources in the MENA region. Supported by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs, it includes pilot projects in Figuig, Morocco; Kairouan, Tunisia; and Sebkha, Mauritania. The programme applies Cities Alliance's Her4Water toolkit to assess women's vulnerability to water scarcity and engagement in water governance.

Co-creating Inclusive Urban Spaces with Women

Femmedina Phase II was launched with the support of SDC. The programme aims to create inclusive urban areas for women in Tunisian cities, focusing on rethinking public spaces and introducing a gender-sensitive approach to urban planning. After a successful implementation in Tunis during the initial phase, Phase II focuses on the medinas of Kairouan, Mahdia, M'saken, and Sousse.

Catalysing Urban Transformation in Haiti

Cities Alliance launched a new multi-year urban programme in Haiti funded by USAID in December 2023. Ansanm Ann Chanje Lavil (Together Let's Change the City, or LAVIL) will work with the local governments of Cap-Haïtien and Les Cayes to support cities in improving basic municipal services and increasing own-source revenue.

Partnerships for Inclusive Urban Development

Partnerships are crucial to addressing urban challenges at the required scale, especially in secondary cities in emerging economies. Cities Alliance's diverse membership brings together institutions and organisations with different perspectives and areas of expertise to advance urban development for the benefit of citizens most in need. Building upon this collaborative approach, in 2023 we actively engaged in multiple events and initiatives, underscoring the significance of collective action in achieving sustainable urban development.

Urban Development Roundtable:
Pioneering a Sustainable Future in Cities

Brussels, 20–21 September 2023

Senior urban development experts and practitioners convened for the Urban Development Roundtable 2023, co-hosted by Cities Alliance and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).

The event addressed land administration and management for sustainable urban infrastructure development, and bridging theory with action. Key discussions focused on future-oriented planning, urban governance, land tenure security, affordable housing, and infrastructure investments. Case studies and insights highlighted the importance of community-led initiatives and collaborative efforts in addressing urban challenges, underlining a global commitment to creating resilient, equitable, and sustainable cities.

Launched in 2014 at SECO's initiative, the roundtable facilitates strategic exchange and collaboration between the World Bank, regional development banks, Cities Alliance, UN-Habitat, ETH Zurich, and SECO on thematic thrusts in urban development projects across different regions.

66

Planning alone isn't enough. It must be coupled with coalition building and co-creation, ensuring local stakeholders are prepared to own the plan because it ultimately reflects their vision from the beginning."

Alexander D'Hooghe,
Associate Professor of Architecture and Urbanism at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Founder and Chief Strategic Officer of ORG Permanent Modernity

UN High-level Political Forum (HLPF): Harnessing the Potential of Communities to Withstand Crises

New York City, 12 July 2023

Cities Alliance was selected to host one of the ten special side events organised by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA) and the UN Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR) at the HLPF23.

The learning session was held in partnership with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), Slum Dwellers International (SDI), SDC, and Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO). It featured the perspectives of donors, local authorities, and civil society on the potential of local marginalised communities to respond and adapt to crises in cities. During the Forum, Cities Alliance also moderated a high-level session on urban development and sustainable water management hosted by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), and contributed to the Local and Regional Governments' Day High Impact Partnerships Roundtable.

Brussels Urban Summit: Urban Answers to Global Challenges

Brussels, 12–15 June 2023

Cities Alliance participated in the Brussels Urban Summit, hosting events on SDG localisation in African cities in partnership with the South African Cities Network, and on addressing inequalities and informality, co-organised with UCLG.

During the Summit, UCLG and OnCities2030, in collaboration with Cities Alliance and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, also launched the Urban Journalism Academy series to empower journalists and media professionals in their coverage of urban development issues.

Supporting Innovative Financing for Gender-Inclusive Public Spaces

Brussels, 12 September 2023

Cities Alliance convened a high-level discussion at the UN House in Brussels, focusing on building and funding gender-friendly infrastructure in cities.

The event highlighted initiatives such as Femmedina in Tunisia and the new Cities4Women programme in Nepal. Partners including the Agence Française de Développement (AFD), the EU Directorate-General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA), UNOPS, and the UN Capital Development Fund (UNCDF) called for multilateral collaboration and innovative funding mechanisms to address the intertwined challenges of climate change, rapid urban development, and gender equality.

Partnership for the Global Action Plan on Informality and Slum Upgrading

During the 2nd Board Meeting of the year, Cities Alliance and UN-Habitat concluded a partnership to implement the framework for the Global Action Plan: Accelerating for Transforming Informal Settlements and Slums by 2030 (GAP).

Launched in October 2022, the GAP aims to enhance conditions in informal settlements with essential services such as water, sanitation, electricity, and transport, acknowledging them as human rights issues. The GAP was passed by the UN-Habitat Assembly in June, with Cities Alliance in attendance. The Assembly determined that the Informality Task Force initiated by Cities Alliance will play a key role in developing the plan and act as a secretariat for the global response.

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SUSTAINABLE CONSTRUCTION: FOSTERING URBAN RESILIENCE & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

PHOTO CREDIT_© UNOPS-RODSON PIERRE SAINT

VENUE:
UNOPS Pavilion - Expo City, Dubai, UAE
Registration for live streaming [tbc]

DATE:
Wednesday, 6 December 2023
16.00 - 17.00 (GMT+4)

"
We must think
about informal settlements
and how to (re)build
affordable housing – it's about
capacities and finance."

Carmen Vogt,
Head Cities Section, GIZ

COP28: Advocating for Climate-resilient and Inclusive Cities

Dubai, 30 November to 12 December 2023

Cities Alliance leveraged the COP28 platform to advocate for sustainable construction, gender and youth-led urban development, co-organising sessions with a focus on vulnerable groups and informal settlements.

In a session on Sustainable Construction, panellists from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), the French Ministry of Ecology, Energy and Territories, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), and the private sector discussed the challenges

and approaches to inclusive and sustainable construction. Emphasising the urban marginalised communities and featuring the Cities Alliance position paper *Can the Urban Poor Afford Sustainable Construction?*, the discussion centred on the social dimension of sustainable construction and the urgency of addressing and financing affordable housing in informal settlements.

Cities Alliance organised a session on the role of women building resilience in cities in the MENA region. Speakers shared insights from Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia, highlighting

the intersection of climate and gender. The discussion identified gains, gaps, and challenges of addressing gender in climate change policies and highlighted the need for increased women's leadership and participation in decision-making at the local level.

Cities Alliance co-hosted another event, Young People and the Informal Sector Leading the Change. It engaged youth advocates and urban practitioners, emphasising the role of youth and the informal sector in building inclusive governance and taking climate action in cities.

Global Refugee Forum (GRF): Reshaping Global Responses to Forced Displacement

Geneva, 13–15 December 2023

At the GRF, Cities Alliance provided a platform for partner cities to showcase refugee integration achievements and advocate for increased local investment to expand such cost-effective, sustainable efforts. At the event Cities Alliance co-organised two panels on the role of secondary cities in migration management and global agenda implementation. In collaboration with partners, it also co-published a guide for multistakeholder pledges on investing in climate-resilient,

sustainable human settlements to benefit refugees and host communities, which was one of the eight outcomes of the 2023 forum.

As part of the Cities Alliance delegation, Dr Sanya Wilson, Mayor of Koboko, Uganda, emphasised the importance of direct funding to cities and accurate data-gathering, regarding both refugees and host communities in cities.

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Advocating for Women's Leadership in Peace and Security: Insights from Ukraine and Beyond

In 2023, Cities Alliance, Streetnet International, and WIEGO organised a workshop in Brussels that convened representatives from the European Commission (EC), the European Investment Bank, UNOPS, NGOs, and other stakeholders engaged in Ukraine's recovery efforts.

Following this, an online exchange titled *'Women Leaders on the Frontline'* was hosted by Cities Alliance, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), and the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC). Both events aimed to emphasise women's crucial role in Ukraine's reconstruction efforts.

Discussions during these events were guided by insights from the publication *Rebuilding with Women: Amplifying Their Voices in Ukraine's Recovery*, which offers essential strategies applicable to various geographies, crisis contexts, and recovery situations. The publication underscores the importance of collaborating with NGOs and local women-led organisations, prioritising social infrastructure, addressing gender-based violence, promoting women's participation in peace negotiations, empowering women-owned businesses, and dedicating attention to issues such as gender-based violence throughout the recovery process.

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According to the UN, over

1 billion people
LIVE IN SLUMS, with
CHILDREN

comprising 35–50 per cent
of this population.

Supporting Cities4Children

Cities Alliance recently joined the steering committee of the Global Alliance – Cities4Children (C4C), a coalition of over 25 organisations that aims to embed child rights into the urban agenda and address challenges faced by marginalised children and youth in urban areas.

As a member since its inception in 2019, Cities Alliance has actively contributed to shaping C4C's advocacy strategy, supported outreach at major events such as COP28, and explored joint development opportunities, including a donor-focused value proposition.

Unlocking Urban Potential: Harnessing Migration for Poverty Reduction and Resilient Growth

Cities Alliance supports initiatives led by city stakeholders in developing countries to ensure equitable access to quality public services, labour market integration, and economic prospects for migrants, forcibly displaced people, and the communities hosting them. Largely supported by SDC and the EU, Cities Alliance has spearheaded projects in secondary cities across the Horn of Africa, LAC, and MENA regions since 2018.

City Corridors to Foster Economic Inclusion and Social Cohesion

A partnership initiative between Cities Alliance and SDC is empowering secondary cities to play a leading role in unlocking the development opportunities derived from migration and forced displacement.

Launched in 2023, the Resilient Systems of Secondary Cities and Migration Dynamics Programme builds upon city-centred strategy established in the previous phase, now extending its focus to networks of secondary cities to grasp the intricacies of migration corridors and foster collaboration among urban centres.

The programme prioritises adaptability, fostering collective projects, strategic peer-to-peer exchange, and technical capacity-building, while forging partnerships with renowned local research institutions. Moreover, the programme maintains a strong gender equality focus, aiming to uplift the well-being of girls and women both physically and economically.

In 2023, Phase II expanded its scope to Asia, designing the Urban Mekong Corridor Initiative.

Anticipated Results of Phase II

20 SECONDARY CITIES

in the Horn of Africa, North Africa, and Latin America with over

5 MILLION
new and residing residents
will be supported to leverage migration dynamics for social cohesion and development.

US$ 7 MILLION +
IN FUNDING
leveraged for locally-designed approaches to enhanced **migration management.**

Cities are providing
50% OF THE FUNDS.

60,000+
MIGRANTS,
FORCIBLY DISPLACED,
and vulnerable members of host communities will benefit from services to access new or better work opportunities.

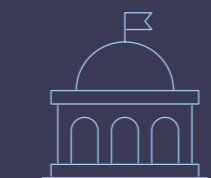**180,000**
will gain access to basic municipal services.

40+ DIFFERENT CITY STAKEHOLDERS
– from all constituencies
work jointly to achieve these targets.

Secondary cities and networks
gain a voice on global migration and urban processes
to advocate on their contribution to the SDGs and lobby for further support.

Gender-transformative partnerships
will enhance the impact of urban planning, safe labour programmes, and social inclusion.

At least **50%**
of all programme participants are female,
representing over

30,000
empowered women.

Through policy initiatives and dialogues, **government officials gain knowledge, exposure, and networks** to respond to migration dynamics.

Implementing Phase II Activities

In the latter part of 2023, the programme initiated the implementation of seven collaborative projects, aimed at benefiting migrants, displaced persons, and host communities. The initiatives will run until 2026.

Integrating Migrants into the Ethiopian Economic Corridor

Improve inclusion and opportunities for migrants and vulnerable host communities along the Ethiopian Economic Corridor, linking Addis Ababa to Djibouti port.

Partners

Adama Science and Technology University; Adama City Administration; Adama Model Clinic; Ethiopian Cities Association; Siinqee Bank.

- **210 migrants registered** *at migration resource centres* **offering job-matching services**
- **US$39,000 loan/guarantee** *agreement signed with Siinqee Bank to*
- Promote entrepreneurship and credit finance access for migrants and host communities
- Technical designs and requirements for upgrading Chakonou market and Adama local clinic completed
- MoU signed to expand **health service access**

Leveraging Migration for Improved Jobs and Services along Ethiopia's Berbera Corridor

Strengthen economic opportunities and public services through diaspora engagement and local government collaboration.

Partners

Jigjiga University (JJU); Jigjiga City Administration; Regional government departments; Hargeisa Cultural Institute; JJU Business Incubation Centre; Rays Microfinance; Hankaal Institute.

- **1,685 job** trainees selected
- **Five-day business training** programme developed
- **Public site selected** *for construction of* 10 wholesale market sheds
- Designs for wholesale market sheds completed

Financial and Economic Inclusion, Digital Waste Management in Greater Jinja, Uganda

Enhance **economic opportunities and municipal services** for rural-urban migrants and vulnerable host communities.

Partners

ACTogether; Jinja City Council Ensibuuko; EcoPlastile; Women Rights Initiative (WORI).

- **300 saving groups** formed or strengthened
- **80 groups** *initiated digitisation of* financial activities
- Completion of participatory design process for Namulesa market upgrading
- **262 waste agents trained** in efficient plastic waste collection
- **40 agents and 200 waste pickers** onboarded EcoPlastile's digital platform

Access to Medical and Financial Services in West Nile, Uganda

Enhance financial inclusion and healthcare access for refugees and host communities in cities in the West Nile region.

Partners

South Sudanese Refugee Association (SSURA); Arua City Council; Equity Bank; Youth for Inclusion, Participation and Empowerment (YIPE).

- **7,100 beneficiaries** exposed to financial literacy, **27 opened bank accounts**
- **1,092 pregnant women** *benefited from a* new ultrasound machine
- **220 health workers** *trained in* mental health support

Urban Expansion Planning for Inclusive, Green Growth in Ethiopia and Uganda

Embed Urban Expansion Planning in national policies and create local service providers to meet cities' demand for trained practitioners in this topic.

Partners

Uganda's Ministry of Lands, Housing, and Urban Development; Ethiopia's Ministry of Urban Development and Infrastructure; Partner cities in Uganda, Ethiopia and Somalia.

- A high-level exposure visit convened on urban expansion planning in Mekelle, Ethiopia, **involving 13 cities** and **central government representatives** from Ethiopia, Somaliland/Somalia, and Uganda.

2 key outcomes:

→ Cross-national declaration by cities for inclusive urban planning and

→ Needs and action plan by municipalities in Tigray

Economic Inclusion in Tunisian Migration Corridors

Promote economic inclusion for rural-urban migrants and impoverished host communities along migration corridors in Kairouan, Medenine, and Tataouine, with a focus on addressing gender-related service accessibility challenges for women.

Partners

National Union of Tunisian Women (Kairouan/Tataouine branches); Local Democracy; Agency Kairouan; Skills to Succeed Tunisia Ecotourism.

- **Regional employment action plans** *developed with the* Ministry of Employment and Vocational Education
- *Sites selected for* **3 new Citizen Spaces to enhance administrative service accessibility**
- Plans finalised for Tataouine's inaugural business incubation centre.

Leveraging Migration for Thriving Secondary Cities in Guatemala

Promote economic opportunities/financial inclusion for migrants and host communities with a focus on populations of Mayan descent.

Implement innovative waste management approaches in two municipalities.

Partners

Improve inclusion and opportunities for migrants and vulnerable host communities along the Ethiopian Economic Corridor, linking Addis Ababa to Djibouti port.

- **14,350 remittance recipients received financial education** *to improve savings and household finances*
- **800+ students** aged 12–17 participated in after-school programmes **across 4 schools,** *enhancing skills* in communication, environmental management, personal finance, and entrepreneurship.

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Addressing the Refugee Crisis in the Horn of Africa from an urban perspective

The Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework (CRRF): Inclusive Urban Development and Mobility Action concluded in 2023. Funded by the European trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), the programme addressed the Horn of Africa's refugee crisis by supporting secondary cities. It facilitated dialogues towards the integration of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs), urban planning, and service provision improvement in the cities of Arua, Koboko, Kakuma-Kalobeyei, Assosa, Jigjiga, Borama, and Gabiley.

At the city level, the initiative led to tangible improvements in refugees' lives, promoted inclusive participation, and facilitated additional funding opportunities. At the regional level, it established a regional network (implemented by Cities Alliance) that is fostering exchanges and lessons learned among cities. The initiative included two pilot projects in Koboko and Assosa, implemented by partner organisations the Associazione Centro Aiuti Volontari (ACAV) and the International Rescue Committee (IRC), respectively. Through peer-learning events, cities enhanced their capacities and committed to continuing collaboration.
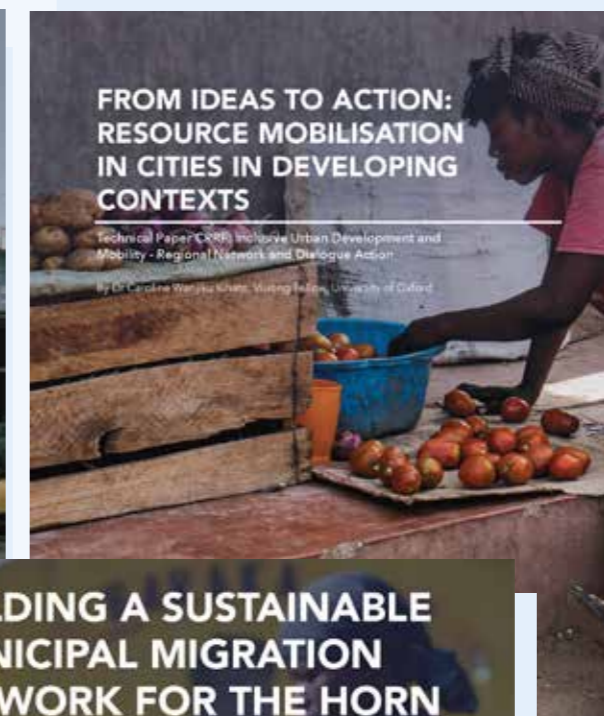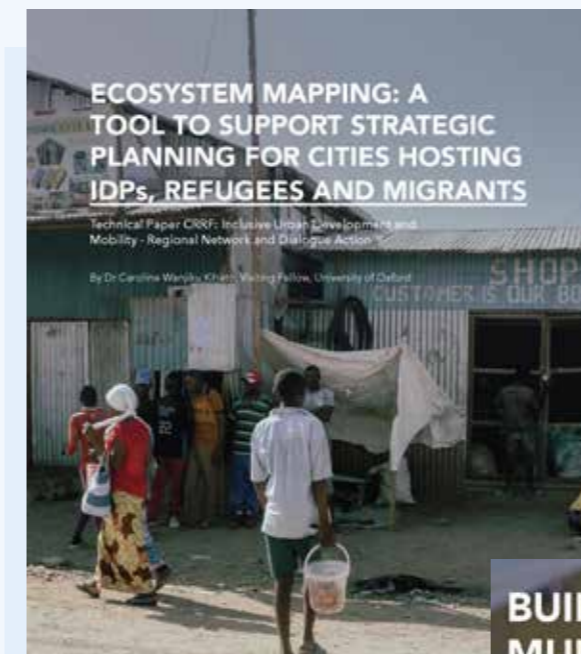
Internationally, the Action advanced the implementation of global agendas at the local level, highlighting the role of secondary cities in managing migration. Cities participated in key events such as the African Review of the Global Compact on Migration (GCM), the GRF, and the Call to Local Action, demonstrating commitment to refugee integration. Technical reports, workshop summaries, best practices, and a network strategy were disseminated.

The EU and Cities Alliance are collaborating on a future programme, the Sustainable Integration of Displacement Affected Communities (SUIDAC) initiative, which expands the approach to countries such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Somalia, and Sudan. Slated for launch in 2024, SUIDAC will build on the successes and lessons learned from the CRRF Action.

Cities Alliance Gains Observer Status on Ugandan CRRF Steering Group

A new partnership with the Ugandan CRRF Steering Group is enabling Cities Alliance to represent the interests of secondary cities from Uganda, advocate for greater inclusion of urban refugees and displaced persons, and report on the experiences of other cities in the Horn of Africa. The Ugandan government ratified Cities Alliance's new observer status in April 2023.

Koboko Recognised for Best Practices in Refugee Integration

The EUTF programme provided direct support to Koboko, enabling city authorities to address critical gaps in health, education, and physical planning, resulting in transformative changes. The NGO ACAV offered technical guidance on project implementation. The project ensured that both refugees and host communities participated in and benefited from the activities. Koboko's exemplary approach earned it the City and Mobility Award from other cities in the Action for its inclusive migration management and refugee integration strategy. As the first Ugandan city to receive direct donor funding, Koboko's achievements were significant. Collaboration with community-based organisations and refugees was another key success factor.

66 Koboko's ability to receive direct funding from the EU [through the Comprehensive Refugee Results Framework (CRRF)] was transformational and allowed my city to accomplish in two years what otherwise would have taken 40. It is really all about inclusiveness. It is very simple and can be replicated anywhere."

Dr Sanya Wilson,
Mayor of Koboko, Uganda

Towards Sustainable Futures: Gender Equality, Urban Planning, and Climate Change

Cities Alliance operates at the intersection of gender equality, urban planning, and urban resilience, recognising their interconnectedness for creating sustainable communities. We explore how these factors intertwine to tackle climate change and foster inclusivity. Gender equality forms the foundation, ensuring that urban planning and climate change adaptation efforts cater to diverse needs. Urban planning, when inclusive, addresses climate challenges by empowering marginalised groups and ensuring fair access to resources. By integrating these elements, communities enhance their capacity to withstand the shocks of climate change and create environments where all individuals thrive.

CLIMATE-PROOF CITIES, CITIES FOR PEOPLE

Cities Alliance Strategy for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region

Bridging Climate and Gender Equality in the MENA region

A New MENA Strategy

Cities Alliance has been active in the MENA region since 2000, addressing issues such as integrated slum upgrading, urban planning, migration, housing, inclusive heritage, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.

In 2023, Cities Alliance renewed its commitment to cities and communities in the MENA region with a new strategy that supports them as they respond and adapt to the impacts of climate change – an urgent issue for the most water-scarce region in the world.

The new strategy is also a call to action to recognise the interdependence of urban resilience and inclusivity. It underscores the importance of building local capacity and empowering cities and communities to take ownership of their adaptation journey, while recognising the need to integrate diverse perspectives and including all residents – especially women and marginalised communities – in the planning, implementation, and monitoring of climate adaptation initiatives.

The initiatives outlined in this section are shaped by the new strategy.

Women and Sustainable Cities,

Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia

The Women and Sustainable Cities programme, funded by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs under its Solidarity Fund for Innovative Projects (FSPI), seeks to bolster women's involvement in urban water resource management across the MENA region. With a budget of EUR 1 million over two years, the initiative focuses on three pilot cities: Figuig, Morocco; Kairouan, Tunisia; and Sebkha, Mauritania.

The programme, launched in May 2023, focuses on promoting women's leadership in water governance, facilitating data collection on gender-sensitive water management, and enhancing local authorities' capacity for gender-responsive urban water infrastructure.

It works closely with local NGOs in all three cities to ensure context-specific implementation and empower feminist civil society organisations.

Throughout 2023, workshops and citizen surveys were conducted using the Cities Alliance tool Her4Water. The process unveiled crucial insights into water access challenges amidst climate change, the imperative to empower women in decision-making, innovative water management strategies, the integration of water into public spaces, and the revival of traditional conservation methods. A synthesis report of key stakeholder workshops summarised the primary challenges and opportunities identified across the three cities.

The programme continues its efforts in 2024, co-designing and implementing pilot projects to advance women's empowerment and water resilience in urban communities across the three cities.

Women and Sustainable Cities has been recognised under the Support Fund for Feminist Organisations (Le Fonds de Soutien pour les Organisations Feministes) by the Ministry and AFD. This designation emphasises its role in empowering feminist civil society organisations to promote their vision of gender equality.

Her4Water: Empowering Women in Water Governance and Climate Resilience

The Women and Sustainable Cities programme introduced Her4Water, a new toolkit launched in 2023 to assess women's roles in water governance and climate resilience. Her4Water employs specific questions to gather qualitative and quantitative data, shedding light on women's vulnerability to water scarcity and their involvement in water resource management. Adapted in collaboration with partner NGOs, the tool was customised for the programme's partner cities (Figuig, Morocco; Kairouan, Tunisia; and Sebkha, Mauritania). Final profiles for the cities will be completed after data collection concludes.

Femmedina Inclusive City Programme Phase II,

Tunisia

Phase II of Femmedina launched in June 2023 with the backing of SDC, aiming to transform public spaces and foster inclusive urban environments for women across Tunisian medinas.

Operating from 2023 to 2025, the programme focuses on revitalising historic city centres in Kairouan, Mahdia, M'saken, and Sousse.

Through collaborative efforts with municipalities and CSOs, the initiative seeks to enhance women's economic empowerment, safety, and participation in local decision-making. In its initial phase, the programme prioritised data collection, stakeholder engagement, and administrative setup to facilitate project implementation.

Activities in Sousse adopted an experimental approach that focused on community involvement and close collaboration with local authorities in the Gabadgi Grandi neighbourhood. Insights gleaned from the Sousse experience were

instrumental in shaping strategies implemented in Kairouan and M'saken, while Mahdia's analysis is scheduled for 2024. Notably, in Kairouan, the analysis was undertaken in collaboration with (and received co-funding from) the Women and Sustainable Cities project, sponsored by the French Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs.

Employing a mixed-methods approach, the Femmedina programme engages women in various stages, integrating quantitative and qualitative tools to address barriers to participation and propose spatial interventions. This participatory design process ensures that community needs and aspirations guide implementation, ultimately fostering inclusive and gender-sensitive urban spaces across Tunisia's historical urban areas.

Enhancing Women's Opportunities in the Cultural Heritage Sector,

Jordan

Recognising the pivotal role of women in preserving cultural heritage, Cities Alliance organised a workshop in Madaba, Jordan, to address their underrepresentation in heritage preservation efforts and enhance women's agency in this key economic sector.

In collaboration with local stakeholders including the municipality, governorate, CSOs, the Department of Tourism and Antiquities, and other institutions, the workshop focused on empowering women in Madaba's tourism and heritage industry.

Through active engagement and qualitative data collection using the Cities Alliance's Women's Engagement in Cities (WEC) Framework, participants identified barriers and proposed strategies to enhance economic opportunities for women. Moving forward, Cities Alliance will work closely with the local partners to implement the workshop's recommendations, contributing to its broader engagement in the MENA region on women's socio-economic empowerment.

Strengthening Cities to Build Local Resilience

Creating Climate-responsive and Inclusive Public Spaces in Nepal

The Cities for Women Project in Nepal, launched in October, aims to create climate-responsive and inclusive public spaces in five Nepalese municipalities over four years by strengthening systems for planning and implementing municipal public infrastructure. The initiative is funded by the EU and USAID and implemented by Cities Alliance in partnership with UNOPS Nepal, UN-Habitat, and the Ministry of Urban Development of Nepal.

At the national level, the project develops gender-sensitive frameworks for the National Urban Development Strategy, while at the local level, it promotes women's leadership and participation in decision-making through technical assistance and pilot interventions focused on gender and climate change adaptation.

Additionally, the project facilitates knowledge exchanges on participatory processes, gender, and climate initiatives to bolster municipalities' capacity to address the impacts of climate change and foster inclusive urban planning and design.

In 2023, the Cities Alliance and UNOPS teams tailored the Her4Climate tool to the Nepalese context and used it to identify the gender-related implication of climate hazards in ten cities through focus groups discussions, interviews with administrators and city leaders, and spatial mapping. Based on this participatory analysis, six cities were identified for project implementation. This engagement serves as a basis for future expansion of the project to other cities in the country.

Supporting Youth-Led Climate Action in Informal Settlements

Environmental, social, and economic challenges have a significant impact on urban youth, particularly in the Global South. Despite their vulnerability, youth are often overlooked in climate action and urban planning processes. Cities Alliance recognises the potential of youth to be leaders in climate action within informal settlements.

To address this gap, Cities Alliance advocates for increased investment in youth engagement. Its recently released publication Youth and Climate Action in Informal Settlements showcases successful initiatives supported by the Partnership and offers valuable recommendations.

These include empowering youth as agents of climate action through education, supporting the leadership of women and girls within the youth demographic, and addressing barriers to youth engagement in participatory planning processes. Additionally, the publication highlights the importance of creating synergies between climate action and livelihood opportunities, promoting digital innovation for youth-led initiatives, and providing sustained funding for youth-led enterprises and solutions.

Advancing Sustainable Construction in Informal Settings

The coming decades will witness a surge in urban construction, particularly in the form of incremental upgrading and makeshift homes across the Global South.

Given the urgent need to reduce carbon emissions, the importance of sustainable building concepts is clear, especially those that are suitable and affordable for the informal sector. Sustainable construction is a thematic focus of Cities Alliance for 2023 and 2024, and the organisation explored and advocated for it over the course of the year, notably at COP28.

Cities Alliance invited key members and partners from the sustainable building sector to join forces on this topic, setting up a working group to discuss the challenges facing the sector and develop innovative solutions. To kick-start the process, Cities Alliance hosted a workshop on Advancing Sustainable Construction in Informal Settings to foster solutions to engage and empower communities in municipalities and low-income and informal settlements on 13 September 2023.

'As its first outcome, the working group produced the position paper Can the Urban Poor Afford Sustainable Construction? The paper highlights alternative, circular, and low-carbon construction methods while advocating for their simultaneous attractiveness and affordability. It underscores the importance of supporting sustainable construction through political frameworks and regulations, thereby fostering the creation of more resilient and environmentally friendly buildings and infrastructure in cities. These insights served as the basis for an op-ed on the topic published via the World Economic Forum.

Fostering Sustainable Urban Development in Informal Settlements

In 2023, Cities Alliance launched a new urban programme in Haiti aimed at boosting municipal service delivery and local development and continued its partnership with SDI to help build resilience in informal settlements in 16 countries.

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A New Urban Programme in Haiti

In December 2023, Cities Alliance launched a new multi-year urban programme in Haiti funded by USAID. *Ansanm Ann Chanje Lavil* (Together Let's Change the City, or LAVIL) will work with the local governments of Cap-Haïtien and Les Cayes to enhance basic municipal services and increase own-source revenue.

Initially, LAVIL will focus on enhancing local capacities for inclusive management of public markets. It will also explore strategies to reinforce solid waste management (SWM) systems within these spaces to curb ocean plastics pollution.

Implementation partners including AVSI, Habitat for Humanity, IHS, and the Institut de Formation et de Services (IFOS) will provide technical assistance to municipalities and support market traders and users in improving livelihoods and accessing essential services.

Prior to the launch, Cities Alliance developed a framework for inclusive and responsive implementation that took into consideration the political instability, social and economic vulnerability, and conflict rampant in Haiti. LAVIL adopts an adaptive management approach, continuously redesigning its strategies to address conflict, gender-sensitive planning, and environmental concerns.

Working together with USAID and the implementing partners, Cities Alliance has established the contours of the programme, forged new partnerships, and opened an office in Haiti.

Diagnostics were conducted in the two pilot markets, Pont Neuf in Cap-Haïtien and Rival in Les Cayes, engaging market stakeholders to better understand local challenges, conflicts, and opportunities. The results will shape the priority actions for 2024.

Despite the challenges inherent in setting up a new programme in a country prone to conflict and extreme poverty, Cities Alliance remains committed to combating urban poverty in Haiti, piloting methodologies tailored to conflict-affected municipalities to advance inclusive urban governance in the region.

Supporting Federations of the Urban Poor for Inclusive Recovery

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2019, Cities Alliance has partnered with SDI to support sustainable and inclusive recovery efforts in and for the communities impacted, with funding from Sida.

Throughout the pandemic, the challenges facing urban poor communities became increasingly urgent with multiplying and life-threatening spillover effects including food-security, inability to generate income, increased gender-based violence, and discontinuation of the most basic pre-pandemic basic services (such as health, school, water and sanitation).

Now in its second phase (2022–2024), the programme has transitioned from addressing the immediate social, economic, and health repercussions of the pandemic to undertaking recovery and rebuilding initiatives identified and prioritised by slum dweller federations aimed at increasing their ability to withstand future shocks and stresses of urban informal living.

Senegal
Sierra Leone
Liberia
Ghana
Uganda
Kenya
Tanzania
Zambia
Malawi
Zimbabwe
Botswana
Namibia
Brazil
India
Philippines

Implemented across **16 countries in Africa, Asia, and LAC**, the programme supports SDI affiliates in each country with three key components:

Federation building to mobilise and strengthen savings groups and livelihood initiatives at the settlement level, build federation capacity and leadership, and improve access to basic services.

Know Your City (KYC) to support mainstreaming local knowledge through community-led data collection and mapping capabilities in informal settlements, as well as youth-led advocacy through *Know Your City TV*.

Institutional strengthening to support the strategic, operational, and financial capacity of SDI affiliates to respond to local needs through staff training, peer-to-peer exchanges, strategic planning, and overhead support.

Key Achievements

749 SAVING GROUPS AND
16,905 SAVERS SUPPORTED

5,224 YOUTH MEMBERS mobilised and supported

1,267 HOUSEHOLDS with improved water and sanitation

151 HOUSEHOLDS with improved tenure

56 HOUSEHOLDS with improved housing

814 HOUSEHOLDS with improved energy attributed to federation processes through mobilisation, advocacy, and partnerships

648 PEOPLE SUPPORTED through networking and training for climate change or biodiversity conservation

369 PEOPLE SUPPORTED to better adapt to climate change effects

35 CITIES AND
667 informal settlements profiled

42 SETTLEMENT-LEVEL INFORMATION FORUMS OR CAMPAIGNS ORGANISED

41 CITY NATIONAL-LEVEL advocacy campaigns conducted

186 PEER-TO-PEER learning exchanges facilitated

137 REGIONAL OR NATIONAL-LEVEL federation leadership meetings held

Initial Results by Theme

Community Mobilisation and Livelihood Support:

Savings groups are the bedrock of SDI federations, enabling urban poor dwellers to organise, improve livelihoods, and engage city authorities in inclusive development. Federations conducted training sessions covering various skills such as livelihood development, business management, and vocational training. For instance, in **Sierra Leone**, the SDI affiliate supported the establishment of oyster and fish farms through member training, leading to production initiation and attracting interest from multiple businesses. In **Malawi**, a savings group of 43 members received training in brick making, and support for the acquisition of an environmentally friendly brick making machine with a daily production capacity of 3,000 bricks.

Data Collection and Research:

Activities focused on conducting surveys, assessments, and research studies to gather data on various aspects affecting informal settlements. For instance, baseline studies on air pollution were undertaken in **Ghana** and assessments of the impact of COVID-19 in **Tanzania**'s Mwanza City. Data collected from savings groups in **Botswana** contributed to COVID-19 research. In the **Philippines**, a comprehensive risk profile highlighted COVID-19 vulnerability. Climate change impact assessments and risk mapping were conducted in 12 settlements in **Sierra Leone**. In **Kenya**, a vulnerability mapping exercise identified groups along the Mathare and Gitathuru rivers, facilitating collaboration among 46 groups working to reclaim the Mathare River.

Federation Leadership and Capacity Building:

Training events such as workshops, peer-learning exchanges, and educational visits enhanced federation members' capacity and leadership. Topics covered gender mainstreaming, resource management, digital skills, and leadership development, while technical training included waste management and water innovations. For instance, in **Uganda**, audits of 25 savings groups identified capacity-building needs. In **Kenya and Namibia**, second-tier leadership was mentored, and in **Tanzania**, three exchange visits were organised for youth federation members.
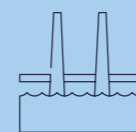
Basic Services and Infrastructure Improvement:

Activities focused on assessing and improving infrastructure in informal settlements. For example, an assessment of sanitation conditions in **India**'s cities led to plans for infrastructure improvement. In **Namibia**, meetings facilitated the production of technical drawings for water/sewage plans. Toilet facilities were rehabilitated in **Ghana**, water tanks for public spaces purchased in **Zambia**, and solar lights distributed across 12 regions in **Zimbabwe**. Engagement with local leaders in **Liberia** supported the maintenance of public toilets and water facilities.

Knowledge Sharing and Advocacy:

This category involved workshops, advocacy campaigns, and the production of educational materials to raise awareness and advocate for the rights of urban poor communities. Workshops in the **Philippines** focused on advocacy for urban poor housing rights, while booklets in **Brazil** highlighted the impact of climate change on urban poor communities. In **Uganda**, settlement-level and municipal forums were conducted nationwide. In **Liberia**, the affiliate produced, printed, and displayed educational materials and awareness campaigns for waste disposal to complement and improve community-level waste disposal activities. Youth KYC TV media teams across the SDI network participated in media training and developed advocacy campaigns shared on local TV, radio, and social media.

Partnership and Collaboration with City Authorities:

This entailed establishing and strengthening partnerships with local and national authorities, NGOs, and other stakeholders to support inclusive development initiatives. Partnerships across cities in **India** enhanced community development efforts, while in **Senegal**, collaborations were strengthened to support income-generating activities. In **Kenya**, collaboration with the government for the Mathare and Mukuru Special Planning Areas was expanded. In **Uganda**, MoUs were pursued with urban authorities in all 11 regions, while in **Malawi**, 61 households in Lilongwe were granted ownership titles as part of ongoing efforts to regularise informal settlements.

Climate Change Adaptation and Environmental Sustainability:

Efforts in this area aimed to address climate vulnerabilities and promote environmental sustainability. Climate-related community action plans were developed in **India** to mitigate climate risks. In **Zambia**, climate stewardship clubs were established in schools to educate students on environmental conservation practices. In **Sierra Leone**, a committee was formed to oversee mangrove protection, and 20 climate change action ambassadors were identified and trained. **Brazil** organised training and exchanges for federation leadership and youth in two cities on citizenship, climate, and environmental education.

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Financials

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2023 Income and Expenditure Statement*

(all amounts in thousand USD)	CORE	PROJECTS	TOTAL
A. INCOME			
Contributions	1,153	7,988	**9,141**
Interests	113	40	**153**
Miscellaneous Revenue	4	0	**3**
Inter-project Transfers	195	-195	**0**
Refunds	0	-16	**-16**
TOTAL	1,465	7,817	9,282
B. EXPENDITURE			
Programmes			
Country Programmes	-	1,532	**1,532**
Global Programmes	-	4,656	**4,656**
Secretariat			
Partnership & Programme Support	1,039	1,236	2,275
UNOPS Management Fee	83	380	463
Net Exchange Gain/Loss	1	4	5
TOTAL	1,123	7,808	8,931
C. INCOME OVER EXPENDITURE	342	9	351
D. CASH BALANCE BROUGHT FORWARD FROM 2022	6,526	9,469	**15,995**
E. INCREASE/(DECREASE) IN ADVANCES AND ASSETS	-2	1	**-1**
F. CASH BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD TO 2024	6,870	9,477	16,347
G. COMMITEMENTS *(including management fee)*	153	3,471	**3,624**
H. FUND BALANCE AS OF 31 DECEMBER 2023	6,717	6,006	12,723

* UNOPS financials for 2023 are currently being audited by UN Board of Auditors. Hence this statement is interim and not final.

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Cities Without Slums

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