COMMUNITY-LED SOLUTIONS
for Building Resilience in Informal Settlements

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

BUILDING COMMUNITY-LED RESILIENCE TO ADDRESS THE SHOCKS AND STRESSES OF URBAN INFORMALITY

The COVID-19 pandemic that erupted in 2020 had a devastating effect on urban poor communities around the world. The challenges they face became increasingly urgent, exposing longstanding unresolved factors such as urbanisation and informality, global and local inequalities, and increasing climate change risks.

Scarce resources and, in some cases, conscious policy choices left residents without the basic infrastructure and services needed to prevent the spread of the disease. Enduring disruptions in livelihoods, food chains, and social systems fueled social and political unrest, leaving those who were already living in vulnerable conditions in even worse situations.

These impacts continued to be felt for years afterwards, with lingering food insecurity, loss of income, increased gender-based violence, and the disruption of essential services such as health care, education, and access to water and sanitation.

In the initial wake of the crisis and its ongoing consequences, Cities Alliance and Slum Dwellers International (SDI), with funding from the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), entered a partnership to support organised slum dweller organisations and communities in 16 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

The three-phase COVID-19 Response and Recovery initiative (2020–2024) invested in locally led solutions and partnerships that supported communities to build their resilience.

The initiative:
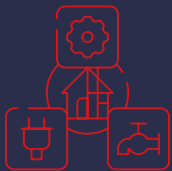
IMPROVED ACCESS TO
ESSENTIAL SERVICES
IN SLUM SETTLEMENTS

ENHANCED
ECONOMIC LIVELIHOODS
AMONG SLUM DWELLERS
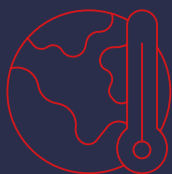
IMPROVED
CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION
IN SLUM SETTLEMENTS AND THE CITY

INCREASED THE STRATEGIC INFLUENCE AND AMPLIFICATION OF
SLUM DWELLERS' VOICES

STRENGTHENED COLLABORATION BETWEEN
SLUM DWELLERS AND GOVERNMENT
IN THE PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTATION OF CITYWIDE DEVELOPMENT

IMPROVED
SOCIAL COHESION
IN SLUM SETTLEMENTS

INCREASED
PRO-POOR AND CITYWIDE
DATA-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

ABOUT THE
PROGRAMME

@ PPHPZ Zambia

The first phase, **COVID-19 Response (2020–2021)**, supported civil society groups to respond to the immediate social, economic, and health impacts of the pandemic in informal settlements. It emphasised t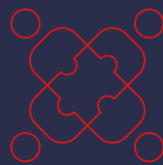he real and urgent needs of their communities and the development of more robust partnerships for inclusive city planning.

The second phase, **COVID-19 Recovery (2022-2024)**, promoted community-led urban development interventions in developing countries while supporting institutional and programmatic strengthening of slum dwellers organisations affiliated with SDI. Interventions focused on recovery and rebuilding initiatives identified and prioritised by slum dweller federations, with the goal of increasing their resilience to withstand future shocks and stresses of informal living.

The third phase, **Supporting Locally Led Climate Change Innovation (2024)**, focused on locally led climate adaptation. It supported SDI affiliates to strengthen their work with a focus on sustainability, especially regarding climate change adaptation and innovation led by women and youth.

This publication focuses primarily on the results achieved during the second and third phases.

SCOPE OF THE PROGRAMME

Cities Alliance awarded grants to national federations of urban poor and their local support NGOs within the SDI network in 16 countries across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Senegal
Sierra Leone
Liberia
Ghana

Brazil

Zambia
Namibia
Botswana
South Africa

Uganda
Kenya
Tanzania
Malawi
Zimbabwe

India

Philippines

FOCUS AREAS

The programme funded activities that were inclusive and created opportunities for engagement with communities, local governments, and other relevant stakeholders. They directly benefited the communities involved and demonstrated that organised civil society is central in responding to shocks and stresses of living in informal settlements. The projects were organised around three workstreams:

① Federation Building

This workstream provided resources to mobilise and support savings groups at the settlement level, which is essential to building federation capacity and leadership to ensure greater strategic influence of slum dwellers as partners in urban development. Activities included:

- City, regional, and national slum dweller convenings for consensus-building, agenda setting, monitoring, and movement building to bring slum dwellers into the urban planning process.

- Identifying and preparing populations for measures to decrease future risks and protect vulnerable populations, such as livelihood support.

- Identifying, planning, and preparing for settlement upgrading, improving infrastructure, and providing basic services to improve living conditions and build resilience to threats related to climate change, disease, and other disasters.

② Know Your City (KYC)

This workstream supported the collection and mainstreaming of local knowledge through community-led data collection and mapping capabilities in informal settlements – activities that are crucial for identifying, planning, and implementing structured and inclusive urban development. They included:

- Organising slum dwellers to gather and map critical data on the scale and nature of slum settlements and the priorities of those living in slums. By producing citywide data on slums, federations generate information unavailable to city authorities.

- Household surveys to understand the basic needs and main challenges faced by community members. These also help identify the structures within a settlement and how various stakeholders use them.

- Supporting slum dwellers and youth-led initiatives such as KYC TV to use their data to advocate for, communicate about, and ensure that their fundamental rights are central to resilient, sustainable city development.

③ Institutional Strengthening

This workstream injected resources into the SDI affiliates to support running costs. These activities were essential for the organisations' financial viability and capacity to respond to local needs while recovering from COVID-19 impacts and simultaneously improving long-term financial sustainability. They focused on matters of governance, risk and accountability as well as strengthening the overall strategic and operational framework to support project implementation, including building internal capacities.
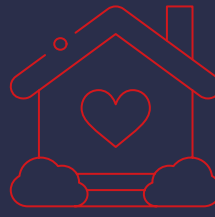
OVERALL **RESULTS**

@NHAG Namibia

Slum dweller federations across 16 countries achieved the following results during the second and third phases of the programme (September 2022 – October 2024):

1,768
SAVINGS GROUPS and
49,629
SAVERS SUPPORTED

975
HOUSEHOLDS
with **improved housing** and
673
with **improved tenure**

7,148
YOUTH MEMBERS
mobilised and supported

1,309
HOUSEHOLDS
with **better access to energy**

47 CITIES and
1,328
INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS
mapped and profiled
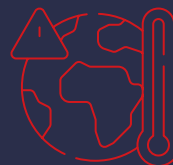
3,291
PEOPLE SUPPORTED
to better **adapt to the effects of climate change**

52
SETTLEMENTS
enumerated
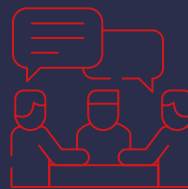
313
REGIONAL OR NATIONAL LEVEL
federation leadership meetings held

Improved **water and sanitation** expanded to
3,648
HOUSEHOLDS
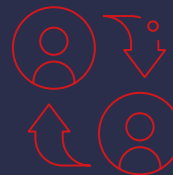
24,608
INDIVIDUALS participated in
1,348 peer-to-peer learning exchanges
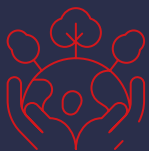
2,116 PEOPLE SUPPORTED
through **networking and training to address climate change or to conserve biodiversity**

213 SETTLEMENT-LEVEL
information **forums or campaigns** and
240 CITY- OR NATIONAL-LEVEL
advocacy campaigns conducted

369 CONTENT-CREATING INITIATIVES
involving **youth raised awareness** and amplified grassroots voices

IMPROVED ACCESS TO ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN SLUM SETTLEMENTS

The programme improved access to basic services with projects targeting waste management, water and sanitation improvements, renewable energy integration, and housing upgrades. These efforts involved community participation, training programmes, and partnerships with local authorities to build resilient, sustainable infrastructure.

Namibia and **Zambia** focused on improving water and housing infrastructure. In Namibia, technical drawings for housing and water systems were delivered, and 218 houses were completed across various communities. Sewer installations and urban planning studios further advanced sustainable development. Zambia upgraded three solar-powered water systems, rehabilitated boreholes, and enhanced sanitation facilities, benefiting thousands of people. Skills training in plumbing and bricklaying empowered youth and women, enabling them to actively participate in infrastructure projects.

South Africa prioritised infrastructure and settlement upgrading through targeted initiatives. Building materials were provided to complete six houses, with two additional houses constructed in subsequent phases. Informal settlement upgrading projects included completed re-blocking in Enkanini, ongoing projects in Langrug and Sondela, and planning phases for Mallaca in eThekwini and Vusi in Cape Town. Advisory and coordination support ensured effective implementation, contributing to improved living conditions and community resilience.

Malawi and **Liberia** prioritised hygiene and environmental management to enhance community well-being. In Malawi, private waste management businesses were formalised, supporting families through waste collection, composting, and recycling, alongside climate adaptation measures such as clearing stormwater drains. Liberia distributed handwashing buckets, disinfectants, and sanitizers to public facilities, benefiting thousands, while community volunteers cleaned and maintained shared facilities to improve hygiene and reduce disease transmission. These efforts fostered safer and more sustainable living environments in both countries.

Brazil and **Ghana** both advanced waste management and composting initiatives to improve community well-being. In Brazil, two composters were constructed and two community gardens created, enhancing access to basic services and promoting environmental sustainability. Ghana implemented household-level waste separation and composting by training 50 households and 25 informal waste collectors. Forty informal waste workers and 20 street cleaners were trained and engaged in maintaining clean and safe public spaces, further supporting environmental and community health. Ten poor households in Accra received biofil toilet facilities to enhance sanitation, while youth members initiated clean energy projects using waste oil for stoves.

Sierra Leone emphasised community resilience and improved access to basic services through various initiatives. Clean cooking solutions were provided to 60 women-headed households, while two pilot slum communities were re-blocked with plans for parliamentary approval to declare five areas as Special Planning Areas. Two water tanks were installed, benefiting approximately 500 households and significantly reducing the burden of water collection, particularly for young girls in the communities.

@SDI-Kenya

Change Stories

INDIA
Accessing Essential Services in Informal Settlements

Federations in Maharashtra, Odisha, and Gujarat are leveraging the increased attention on public health from the pandemic to advocate for improved services in urban poor communities. The Indian SDI affiliate (SPARC, Mahila Milan, NSDF) The Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), in collaboration with the National Slum Dwellers Federation (NSDF) and Mahila Milan is collecting and using data on public health access to help families benefit from government programmes and push for service improvements. These efforts enhance resilience by focusing on health as a core component of sustainable development.

Data collection on access to water, sanitation, and health care gathered during the project's first phase has driven further discussions with authorities. In multiple cities, residents submitted 17 formal requests to municipal authorities, addressing critical issues such as inadequate public toilets, choked drains, unsafe drinking water, and poor waste management before the monsoon season. In response to health and infrastructure challenges, federations in five cities (Ahmednagar, Bhubaneshwar, Mumbai, Pimpri, and Surat) established health camps to address environment-related health concerns. These initiatives have strengthened collaboration between communities and authorities, improving essential services and health outcomes in slum settlements.

MALAWI
Building Climate Resilience through Cooperative Housing

Over 70 per cent of informal settlement residents in Malawi are tenants living in substandard housing, and the rental market faces severe challenges due to inadequate regulation. Most housing units are vulnerable to extreme weather, contributing to poor living conditions and increased climate risks.

To address these challenges, the Centre for Community Organisation and Development (CCODE) and the Malawi Federation of the Rural and Urban Poor have launched a climate-resilient housing initiative targeting low-income urban populations. The programme organises residents into Community Housing Associations (CHA), which empower members to collectively plan, finance, and implement housing projects. By pooling resources, CHA members gain ownership of their homes, fostering long-term sustainability and resilience. This cooperative approach builds on lessons from a previous land and housing programme, shifting away from donor dependency to a member-funded model that has already improved loan repayment rates.

Currently, 253 members from Blantyre, Lilongwe, and Machinga are participating in the initiative, saving monthly towards land and housing. In just eight months, they collectively saved over MWK 15 million (approximately USD 8,650). Low-cost housing construction is underway in Blantyre and Machinga, while land acquisition is progressing in Lilongwe. The programme is planned to expand to Mzuzu and Kasungu, with the ultimate goal of providing climate-resilient, affordable housing across all urban areas in Malawi. By enabling communities to take control of their housing development, the initiative has improved living conditions and strengthened the climate resilience of informal settlements.

SENEGAL
Improved Solid Waste Management

In Ziguinchor, neighbourhoods such as Tilène, Kandialang, Belfort, Néma, and Lindiane face significant challenges due to poor waste management and environmental degradation. A rapid assessment revealed issues including uncontrolled waste dumping and incineration, driven by limited access to waste collection services.

In response, the project provided training on solid waste management to over 200 households, covering collection, sorting, and recycling techniques, while also supplying regulatory trash bins. This initiative reduced public waste dumping and empowered communities to implement sustainable waste practices. Collective efforts by savings groups further expanded bin distribution to an additional 75 households, demonstrating a community-driven approach to environmental health.

@urbaSEN Senegal

ENHANCED ECONOMIC LIVELIHOODS AMONG SLUM DWELLERS

These activities focused on mobilising and strengthening savings groups, capacity-building initiatives, and innovative livelihood interventions across multiple countries, with an emphasis on financial literacy, skill development, and promoting sustainable income-generating activities. Livelihood starter kits, tailored business training, and peer-to-peer exchanges helped communities build resilience against economic challenges, particularly in the post-COVID-19 era.

In **Malawi**, the federation trained 103 entrepreneurs in composting, liquid fertiliser production, and biogas generation. Youth received training in carpentry, welding, and multimedia, with some transitioning to certified cooperatives and achieving livelihoods. These efforts diversified income sources and promoted sustainable practices. A group in Lilongwe earned $8,500 from compost sales, and six waste entrepreneur groups transitioned into certified cooperatives, ensuring long-term economic and environmental sustainability.

In **Brazil**, women were instrumental in workshops on recycling, composting, and community gardening that focused on sustainable income generation and food security. Women participants, especially those from marginalised communities, utilised these trainings to enhance their livelihoods and address food safety challenges, promoting environmental responsibility and economic self-reliance. In **Namibia**, the project emphasised food security and income generation by training 150 members in backyard gardening, leading to the creation of 50 new gardens. Peer-to-peer learning extended these skills to an additional 150 community members. Savings group mobilisation resulted in the establishment of 20 new groups, while small business workshops empowered members to develop sustainable enterprises.

Zimbabwe achieved significant progress in financial literacy and skill-building, mobilising 10 new savings groups and providing financial training to 605 members. Skills training in entrepreneurship, horticulture, and trades like soap making and electronics empowered participants to diversify their income sources. Livelihood starter kits distributed across various regions strengthened the economic capacity of savings groups, fostering sustainable development and community resilience.

In **Sierra Leone**, the project advanced financial literacy, sustainable livelihoods, and environmental conservation. The federation mobilised 18 savings groups, including eight youth-focused groups, to strengthen community engagement. Financial literacy training emphasised mobile banking, while urban farming supported 300 households to enhance incomes and educational access. Sustainable oyster farming in Freetown protected mangroves, increased yields, and established market linkages. Additionally, fish farms in Makeni and Bo supported aquaculture; the Bo farm's first harvest generated $1,563, which was reinvested for expansion. **Zambia** promoted sustainable agricultural practices by establishing Azolla ponds and worm farming to recycle organic waste into fertilisers. Youth were also trained in sack gardening, plumbing, and bricklaying, enabling them to generate income and contribute to urban development projects like constructing sanitation facilities.

The **Philippines** developed a comprehensive Savings Policy Document to provide structure to community savings programmes. Communities received financial literacy training, and leaders were engaged in housing initiatives aimed at strengthening climate resilience through improved savings systems and resource management practices. Livelihood training, including agricultural production, supported community income generation and economic resilience.

In **Ghana** and **Tanzania**, initiatives centred on entrepreneurship and economic empowerment. In Ghana, 50 women received refresher training in liquid soap production, and 100 women were trained in entrepreneurship to enhance income generation. Similarly, in Tanzania, savings groups were supported with entrepreneurship training and startup kits, benefiting women and youth. Both countries emphasised fostering resilience, unity, and poverty reduction through skills development and income-generating activities.

Change Stories

GHANA
Enhanced Economic Livelihoods

The project demonstrated the importance of empowering vulnerable communities, particularly slum dwellers affected by demolitions in Greater Accra. Maame Yaa, a resident of the Agbogbloshie slum, exemplifies the project's impact. Through community-led initiatives focused on savings, livelihood training, and waste management, she transformed her small food stall into a successful business. With new skills in financial literacy and business management, Maame Yaa increased her income, improved her family's nutrition, and secured access to healthcare and education for her children. Her success has inspired others in the community to adopt similar sustainable practices, such as waste separation and zero-waste initiatives, contributing to a cleaner, more resilient environment. The federation played a critical role by mobilising residents, providing capacity-building training, and advocating for policies that support affordable housing and sustainable urban development. This achievement underscored the project's ability to break cycles of poverty, promote sustainability, and enhance economic resilience, offering hope and empowerment to slum communities in the face of climate challenges.

LIBERIA
Improved Livelihood and Income Generation through Vocational Training

Annie Nyan, a cluster leader in the Federation of Liberia Urban Poor Savers (FOLUPS), has greatly enhanced her livelihood through vocational training provided by the project. She actively participated in various community initiatives, including climate risk profiling and sanitary material distribution, and was selected as a peer educator. Her involvement included cleanup campaigns, awareness efforts, and promoting the reporting of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases. Annie later enrolled in vocational training at the YMCA Polytechnic College, choosing catering to advance her existing skills. The comprehensive programme covered pastry and food preparation, and upon completion, she received a certificate and a startup kit with essential catering supplies. Though she has yet to register a formal business, Annie now provides catering services to her community. The income she generates supports her family by covering essential expenses such as school fees, rent, and daily needs. Annie plans to expand her business by opening a pastry shop to further increase her earnings.

@YMCA Liberia

IMPROVED CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION

Practical mitigation strategies combined with community workshops, training sessions, and educational materials played a key role in building understanding of the causes and impacts of climate change. Initiatives such as reforestation, urban gardens, and waste recycling provided hands-on learning opportunities and highlighted how these activities could contribute to climate resilience and sustainable livelihoods.

Senegal and the **Philippines** prioritised climate adaptation and environmental management through community-driven initiatives. In the Philippines, workshops on disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation connected these strategies to urban greening efforts and critical housing challenges in informal settlements. Communities also developed disaster risk reduction and climate adaptation advocacy materials, such as hazard maps, which helped secure support from local governments. In Senegal, over 250 participants were mobilised for cleaning and drainage maintenance, while solar energy training for fish processors and the installation of solar lamps promoted sustainable practices. A climate impact evaluation in Senegal assessed partnerships between local authorities and community groups to address environmental challenges such as flooding and land degradation. Stakeholders from community groups, municipalities, and regional offices participated to strengthen collaboration on climate adaptation initiatives.

Malawi introduced cooperative structures through a revised federation constitution to enhance access to funds and housing for climate adaptation. Federation meetings and community exchanges emphasised collective action and savings schemes to build resilience. Additionally, collaboration between local leaders and authorities fostered climate planning, including implementing flood mitigation infrastructure in informal settlements.

In **South Africa**, national and regional leadership meetings focused on advancing climate adaptation strategies. Local and regional exchanges strengthened networks, enabling partnerships with authorities to address food security and water access as part of climate resilience initiatives. Liberia conducted peer-to-peer learning exchanges to share best practices in climate resilience. Waste management workshops in Monrovia and Paynesville focused on sustainability, while peer educators were trained to promote environmental awareness across multiple settlements.

Both **Brazil** and **Botswana** organised climate change training and leadership development sessions. In Brazil, six training sessions on environmental education and climate change were held, along with leadership workshops across multiple communities. Similarly, in Botswana, three gender mainstreaming workshops and a climate change capacity building session for savings scheme managers supported climate adaptation efforts.

In **Ghana**, three community campaigns highlighted the vulnerabilities of informal settlements to climate risks. These campaigns – held in Old Fadama, Chorkor, and Tema New Town – promoted awareness of climate resilience and community-led advocacy efforts. Additionally, two peer-to-peer learning exchanges were conducted among savings groups in coastal communities in the Greater Accra and Western Regions, which provided valuable opportunities for communities to share knowledge on climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction strategies.

In **Sierra Leone**, the establishment of the Alliance for Climate Change Action led to a large-scale mangrove restoration initiative that saw over 350,000 mangroves planted across multiple settlements, driven by community efforts and supported by climate adaptation plans. A city forum also focused on locally led climate adaptation involving urban planning stakeholders and community leaders. Key discussions included climate risk integration, public green space prioritisation, and geotechnical analysis. These efforts fostered collaboration between authorities and communities to support climate-resilient urban planning initiatives.

Change Stories

NAMIBIA
Improved Climate Change Adaptation and Youth-Led Awareness Campaigns

Youth in the community have taken a proactive role in raising awareness about climate change through educational videos and social media campaigns. Their efforts focus on spreading knowledge about climate-related challenges, such as heatwaves and floods, and promoting practical adaptation strategies. By leveraging platforms like WhatsApp, they have reached a broader audience, emphasising the importance of water conservation and environmental protection.

The federation played a crucial role in equipping the youth with the necessary training and tools to create impactful content and take leadership in climate action. This initiative demonstrates the power of youth engagement and social media in driving awareness and encouraging community-wide responses to climate change challenges.

BOTSWANA
Mindset Shift and Climate Change Adaptation

The project has significantly contributed to climate change mitigation and adaptation through a capacity-building workshop that shifted community perceptions of climate change. Many who previously doubted its impact and connection to extreme weather events now have a better understanding and acceptance of climate realities. This shift in mindset has encouraged stakeholders to collaborate on solutions rather than debating the existence of climate change, leading to greater support for climate initiatives.

The federation played a key role by sharing testimonies about the effects of heatwaves on homes, farms, and health, which influenced leaders to take action. Their stories highlighted the need for climate-resilient housing solutions, such as insulation and heat-resistant materials. Discussions on droughts caused by extreme heat also helped to reshape the beliefs of youth, many of whom previously viewed climate change as a narrative to hinder Africa's development. First-hand accounts of drought impact on crops and water sources reinforced the urgency for collective action, making the workshop a pivotal factor in promoting climate resilience.

@TCI Botswana

TANZANIA
Improved Climate Adaptation

Communities were mobilised to engage in activities such as mangrove restoration in Tanga, Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar, as well as urban farming, tree planting, and sanitation improvements. The federation's savings groups played a crucial role, using their funds to support climate disaster victims in Karakata, who purchased land for shelter after losing their homes.

These initiatives have fostered behaviour change, improved resilience, and positioned the federation and Centre for Community Initiatives (CCI) as key partners to the government in climate action. The government has recognised these efforts by initiating programmes like Green Samia and free clean cooking gas distribution, integrating urban poor priorities into city and national policies. Throughout both outcomes, the federation demonstrated strong leadership, mobilising teams across various sectors to plan, implement, and sustain these community-driven efforts.

ZIMBABWE
Worm Power for a Greener Future

The Jati Composter project in Tafara Fed Land, Harare, has transformed waste management, sanitation, and economic opportunities through an innovative vermi-composting system. In partnership with Zim Earth Worm Farm, Dialogue on Shelter Trust, and the Zimbabwe Homeless People's Federation, the project introduced the Jati Composter, which converts organic waste into high-quality fertiliser using earthworms. This initiative improves sanitation by diverting waste from landfills and reduces methane emissions, contributing to climate change mitigation and soil health.

The project has created employment opportunities, with residents generating income by selling worms and organic fertiliser to gardeners and farmers. Many community members also use the fertiliser in their backyard gardens, enhancing food security and self-sufficiency. The project has promoted gender equality; women have played a key role in managing composting facilities, gaining new skills and economic independence.

Beyond its environmental and economic benefits, the project has fostered community ownership and responsibility, encouraging residents to actively contribute to a cleaner, more sustainable future. The success of the Jati Composter project highlights the potential of community-driven solutions to tackle both environmental and socio-economic challenges, demonstrating how sustainable waste management can improve livelihoods, climate resilience, and local food systems.

@Dialogue on Shelter Zimbabwe

GREATER STRATEGIC INFLUENCE OF SLUM DWELLERS

Savings groups are the bedrock of SDI federations, enabling urban poor dwellers to organise, improve livelihoods, and engage city authorities in inclusive development. The programme supported the federations with training events like workshops, peer-learning exchanges, and educational visits that enhanced their capacity and leadership to implement impactful projects, foster collaboration, and ensure long-term sustainability.

Kenya developed community-driven leadership and environmental advocacy by organising advanced leadership through inter-settlement and inter-county exchanges, focusing on practical initiatives like waste management, ecosystem restoration, and land tenure advocacy. The project also established community committees to address water, sanitation, and youth employment, contributing to regional and national planning efforts. Additional activities targeted leadership development, peer learning, and monitoring with reflection meetings, peer-to-peer exchanges, and ripple-effect mapping, which improved community collaboration and monitoring processes.

Senegal emphasised sustainable urban development, community leadership, and strengthening organisational structures. Forty-five federation leaders and 25 women, including youth, received training on sustainable development practices. Environmental efforts involved planting trees, reforesting areas, and enhancing public

spaces with infrastructure-like benches. Partnerships with local authorities supported environmental and community initiatives, promoting collaboration for long-term impact. Senegal also advanced federation growth by organising exchanges with other West African federations, providing additional office space, and fostering collaboration and structuring initiatives to enhance regional partnerships.

Liberia and **Namibia** demonstrated strong efforts in strengthening organisational structures and fostering collaboration. Liberia facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges and leadership meetings to establish new savings groups, reactivate dormant ones, and promote strategic planning. Namibia focused on administrative and capacity-building activities such as regional and national meetings, team-building retreats, and reporting initiatives, ensuring organisational cohesion and enhanced planning.

Botswana and **India** implemented key initiatives to build institutional capacity and enhance operational efficiency. Botswana strengthened organisational structures through federation and board meetings, along with salary support for key staff, ensuring sustained capacity and effective management. India focused on professional development for accounting and administrative staff, emphasising financial accountability, regulatory compliance, and transitioning to digital systems, which improved overall institutional effectiveness.

@ SDI-Kenya

Change Stories

PHILIPPINES
Empowering Urban Poor through Federation Building

Urban poor communities in the Philippines, often excluded from formal city planning, have gained strategic influence through federation-building activities. These initiatives have helped communities mobilise, formally register as collective units, and strengthen their internal capacity. This organisational structure has enabled greater collaboration with local government units, providing access to resources and opportunities previously out of reach.

With legal recognition, communities can now advocate for infrastructure development, shelter planning, basic services, and improved health and livelihoods. In areas like Southville 3 and Poblacion in Muntinlupa, the federation's efforts have led to tangible improvements, including access to livelihood programmes and local market development, boosting economic stability and resilience against poverty and climate change.

These efforts mark a shift from passive reliance on aid to active participation in local governance. Through collaboration with government partners, urban poor communities are transforming their living conditions and becoming key stakeholders in shaping inclusive urban development.

GHANA
Strengthened Collaboration Between Slum Dwellers and Government

The project successfully strengthened collaboration between slum dwellers and city authorities, particularly the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), in planning and implementing citywide development. This partnership is crucial for communities like Old Fadama, Accra's largest slum settlement, which faces severe climate hazards such as flooding and inadequate infrastructure. As part of AMA's 2022–2025 Medium Term Development Plan (MTDP), informal settlement residents, including waste workers, were integrated into the city's sanitation and climate resilience strategies. A comprehensive waste management programme was implemented, with community members playing an active role in planning and execution. These initiatives featured waste collection, recycling programmes, and climate-resilient practices like composting that improved both sanitation and community well-being.

This partnership has transformed urban planning by fostering trust, inclusivity, and a sense of ownership among residents. The federation was pivotal in mobilising community leaders and facilitating skill-building workshops, enabling residents to participate in waste management and urban planning. Acting as a bridge between the community and government, the federation has ensured that residents' voices are represented in citywide discussions. This collaboration has positioned Old Fadama as a model for sustainable urban development, enhancing resilience to climate change and promoting a cleaner, healthier environment. The strengthened relationship between slum communities and local authorities marks a significant achievement in creating sustainable, community-driven solutions for urban development.

Amplifying the Voices of Slum Dwellers

These activities focused on raising awareness, fostering partnerships, and amplifying grassroots voices to strengthen community resilience and drive impactful change. They spanned content creation, media engagement, stakeholder collaboration, and community capacity building to address critical issues like climate change, public health, and urban resilience.

Botswana and **Ghana** undertook advocacy efforts to address community challenges and promote inclusion. Botswana concentrated on advocating for the needs of people with disabilities through stakeholder engagement and discussions, laying the groundwork for strategies to improve access to essential services. Ghana organised public health campaigns tackling COVID-19, air pollution, and evictions, while building capacity through media training and producing advocacy documentaries to amplify community voices and drive awareness.

Brazil conducted workshops and created innovative media, including booklets and videos, to raise awareness of climate change impacts and develop strategies for vulnerable communities. Despite delays in some activities, the initiatives laid a solid foundation for fostering climate resilience and advocacy.

Kenya strengthened community engagement through campaigns, forums, and media production to address issues such as El Niño preparedness, waste management, and eviction threats. Activities also involved producing documentaries and distributing advocacy materials to amplify grassroots voices and foster collaboration with government stakeholders.

Namibia and **Zimbabwe** focused on empowering youth through media and advocacy initiatives. In Namibia, youth were engaged in producing educational videos featuring testimonials and case studies, enhancing their role in advocacy and organisational outreach. Under the KYC TV initiative, Zimbabwe trained 29 young people in media skills such as recording and editing, strengthening their ability to advocate for their communities and document local challenges effectively.

The **Philippines** emphasised youth capacity building and risk assessment activities. Key initiatives included developing a detailed database that mapped community organisations by sector, age, gender, and location to assess risks and vulnerabilities, particularly during COVID-19. These efforts provided valuable insights to guide targeted interventions. The Philippines also engaged youth in advocacy and risk reduction through educational campaigns and community-based activities, fostering resilience and enhancing their role in addressing local challenges.

@urbaSEN Senegal

Change Stories

KENYA
From Mukuru to the Governor's Lens

Weche, a youth from Mukuru Viwandani, transformed his life from poverty to prominence as the official photographer for Governor Johnson Sakaja. His journey began in 2017, when he joined Muungano during the Mukuru Special Planning Area (SPA) process. He later became a member of KYC TV, where he developed photography and storytelling skills. Through persistence and dedication, Weche built trust within his community, documented impactful stories, and gained recognition as the Best Photographer in 2019.

His efforts to connect with Governor Sakaja led to opportunities to work on the governor's campaign team and eventually secure his current role. Today, Weche has travelled internationally, met global leaders, and inspires other youth from informal settlements to pursue their dreams. Committed to growth, he plans to further his education and aspires to become the official photographer for the president of Kenya, exemplifying the power of resilience, hard work, and community-driven platforms.

@ SDI-Kenya

IMPROVED SOCIAL COHESION IN SLUM SETTLEMENTS

Informal settlements are characterised by exclusion, overcrowding, poor or inadequate essential services and infrastructure, climate-vulnerable locations, competition for scarce resources and opportunities, weak or no governance, and the threat of eviction and land grabs. This creates vulnerable communities, whose fragility and grievances during shocks and crises can turn them into hot spots for social, economic and political tensions or struggles over resources. SDI affiliates work to build social cohesion before conflict happens. One way is by empowering youth as active leaders and agents of change, equipping them with the skills and opportunities to drive long-term community transformation.

In **South Africa**, dialogues on waste management strengthened social cohesion, helping residents understand municipal constraints and shift from conflict to partnership-driven solutions. In addition, youth were trained in video editing through the KYC initiative, enhancing their technical expertise and enabling them to document and share the federation's work.

In **Kenya**, youth acted as Trainers of Trainers, mobilisers, and leaders in savings schemes and advocacy forums. Youth-led committees presented community manifestos, influencing key priorities such as water and education access. In **Namibia**, mentorship and participation in policy and strategic dialogue strengthened youth leadership

capacity, enabling active contributions to community and federation activities.

Brazil and **Sierra Leone** both focused on engaging youth through art and climate change advocacy. In Brazil, youth engaged in climate change advocacy using art, theatre, and documentaries – including a mini-documentary on extreme weather events in Recife – that highlighted youth-driven storytelling. In Sierra Leone, young people produced advocacy content on urban farming, dignified housing, and climate change through videos and music, while leveraging tech platforms like incident-tracking apps to document and address social challenges.

In **Ghana**, youth participated in campaigns on public health, air pollution, and forced evictions, with media production training equipping them to amplify community issues effectively. In **Tanzania**, youth leaders contributed to risk assessments and participated in climate-focused community initiatives, fostering leadership through environmental action and advocacy.

In **Liberia**, young people took part in clean-up campaigns and awareness activities, promoting hygienic practices, climate adaptation, and community safety. These efforts showcased the critical role of youth in driving environmental sustainability and resilience.

@ Dialogue on Shelter, Zimbabwe

Change Story

BRAZIL
Enhanced Social Cohesion and Youth Engagement in Climate Action

The project has strengthened social cohesion in slum settlements by significantly increasing the engagement of young people from Ilha de Deus (Pernambuco) in climate change initiatives. Their involvement deepened after participating in both a national exchange programme in São Paulo and an international exchange in Namibia.

This shift is important because these youth are becoming key advocates for climate action, serving as role models not only on the island, but also across Pernambuco and São Paulo. They are now active participants in climate activism at various levels. The Brazilian federation has played a crucial role in this transformation by providing opportunities, support, and collaborative spaces that empower young people to engage in climate action, both independently and collectively.

@ INTERAÇÃO Brazil

Fostering Inclusive Development that Empowers All Community Members

The programme promoted inclusiveness by addressing the needs of marginalised groups, including People Living with Disabilities (PLWD) and LGBTQ+ individuals. In **Botswana**, a household enumeration in Francistown assessed the challenges and opportunities for PLWD, enhancing their inclusion in urban development efforts. In **Kenya**, inclusive participation was prioritised by actively engaging PLWD and other marginalised groups with a focus on savings schemes, leadership training, and advocacy activities, while promoting gender balance in participation. In **Sierra Leone**, PLWD and LGBTQ+ individuals were deliberately integrated into leadership roles, savings schemes, and vocational training programmes, ensuring representation, skills development, and active involvement in decision-making processes.

Integrating Gender Equality

Gender mainstreaming was a key focus throughout the programme, addressing gender inequalities and ensuring equitable participation for women, men, and marginalised groups. By implementing strategies such as capacity building, economic empowerment, and inclusive leadership, the project successfully amplified women's voices and contributions while laying the foundation for long-term social and economic transformation. Across multiple countries, women formed the majority of participants, leaders, and beneficiaries, demonstrating the project's commitment to empowering women economically, socially, and in decision-making roles.

In **India**, women's leadership was prioritised through the Mahila Milan women's collective, which took a central role in planning, execution, and monitoring activities. Gender-sensitive policies were institutionalised through Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) training and the formation of an internal complaints committee. In **Liberia**, gender mainstreaming was advanced through gender-focused data analysis, inclusive training sessions, and deliberate selection processes to ensure the equal participation of men and women in project activities.

In **Kenya**, the project encouraged young women to assume leadership roles while tracking gender participation data. Women-led committees initiated advocacy efforts, managed savings schemes, and facilitated community forums, amplifying women's voices and influence in decision-making processes. In **Senegal**, women-led savings groups strengthened economic resilience through urban gardening and income-generating activities. Training in renewable energy, such as solar lighting, further empowered women to lead sustainable solutions.

In **Ghana**, gender-sensitive urban planning emphasised women's roles in solid waste management and decision-making processes, complemented by the development of a Gender Action Plan (GAP) to guide inclusive practices. In **Tanzania**, the use of gender checklists and assessments ensured equitable participation in project activities and systematically documented gender-specific needs, enabling targeted and inclusive interventions.

STRENGTHENED COLLABORATION BETWEEN SLUM DWELLERS AND GOVERNMENT IN PLANNING AND IMPLEMENTING CITYWIDE DEVELOPMENT

Activities in this area involved establishing and strengthening partnerships with local and national authorities, NGOs, and other stakeholders to support inclusive development initiatives.

In **Uganda**, the SDI affiliate successfully signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) with urban authorities in Kampala, Arua, Kabale, and Mbarara, strengthening collaboration in urban development. The Kampala MoU represented all the municipality's five regions: Nakawa, Rubaga, Makindye, Kampala Central, and Kawempe. It was consolidated into a single document, streamlining the process. In Arua, Kabale, and Mbarara, the MoUs were finalised with active participation from ACTogether, the National Slum Dwellers Federation of Uganda (NSDFU), and city authorities, reinforcing partnerships and paving the way for impactful urban initiatives.

In **Malawi**, collaboration between community leaders and city authorities was strengthened through the review of city resilience plans in Lilongwe and Blantyre. A series of town hall meetings provided community members with education on waste management, sanitation, and environmental protection bylaws. Additionally, the development of flood-mitigation infrastructure, such as water culverts and drainage systems in Mtandire, improved living conditions, supported local employment, and enhanced resilience against flooding. Malawi also developed a draft Climate Resilient Slum Upgrading and Prevention Strategy tailored to informal settlements. This strategy was submitted to the Ministry of Local Government, and elements are already being piloted in the Mgona settlement. Awareness campaigns through radio broadcasts, videos, and distributed materials enhanced engagement on climate change as well as water and sanitation issues, promoting sustainable urban development.

In **Namibia**, informal settlement planning studios brought together communities, local government, and academic institutions to address environmental risks such as deforestation and flooding, resulting in climate-resilient spatial layouts.

Kenya organised two consortium meetings to address complex land tenure issues in Mathare, bringing together community members, government officials, and stakeholders to collaborate on resolving legal conflicts. Settlement-wide dialogues also prioritised key community projects, strengthening advocacy efforts and promoting unity in the face of climate challenges.

In the **Philippines**, local disaster risk reduction offices worked closely with communities to implement effective disaster mitigation strategies, particularly during the typhoon season, to enhance preparedness and resilience.

In **Liberia**, municipalities such as Monrovia and Paynesville collaborated with communities to formalise waste disposal systems, enhance communication with waste management services, and mitigate environmental health risks. In **Sierra Leone**, the city-led Freetown the Treetown campaign engaged communities in planting one million trees to safeguard mangroves and coastal areas. In **Senegal**, reforestation efforts around pergola structures were carried out through partnerships between local groups and authorities, enhancing urban greenery and strengthening resilience.

The government in **Zimbabwe** supported the installation of solar-powered boreholes to enhance water access in drought-affected areas and reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In **Zambia**, local governments promoted the establishment of sack gardens and solid waste recycling initiatives to improve access to clean water and reduce environmental pollution.

Change Stories

SOUTH AFRICA
Collaboration for Improved Service Delivery

The collaboration between slum dwellers and the municipality in eThekwini has led to 98 documented service delivery improvements (53 per cent increase from the previous year) in solid waste management, enhanced community trust, and better planning using community-driven waste data. The Cleansing and Solid Waste Unit now distributes refuse bags more effectively, collects waste more frequently, and is exploring employing community waste collectors through the Extended Public Works programme. The initiative has also introduced recycling opportunities, enabling residents to earn income while keeping their environment clean.

This improved municipal-community relationship has resulted in better sanitation, reduced health risks from waste-borne diseases, and mitigated the impact of natural disasters like flooding, which is worsened by blocked drainage. Additionally, dialogues on waste management have strengthened social cohesion, helping residents understand municipal constraints and shift from conflict to partnership-driven solutions.

The South African Federation of the Urban and Rural Poor (FEDUP) has played a crucial role in building relationships, facilitating training, and advocating for informal settlements. These efforts have empowered communities to actively participate in urban planning and service delivery, creating a cleaner, healthier, and more resilient environment.

SIERRA LEONE
Shifting from Evictions to Participatory Slum Upgrading

In Sierra Leone, a large portion of the urban population, particularly in Freetown, resides in informal settlements without formal land registration. Through sustained engagement by the Centre of Dialogue on Human Settlement and Poverty Alleviation (CODOHSAPA) and its community counterpart, Federation of Urban and Rural Poor (FEDURP), the government has shifted from forced evictions to a participatory approach for slum upgrading.

As a result, five informal settlements are on the verge of being declared Special Planning Areas, enabling the creation of Area Action Plans (AAPs). These AAPs are detailed land-use plans outlining both public and private land use, infrastructure development, and utility services within each settlement. They align with the city's Local and Structure Plans and provide guidelines for issuing development and building permits.

This collaborative approach enhances access to basic services, housing, and livelihoods for slum residents, while fostering better governance and social accountability. The participatory planning methodology ensures that any necessary relocation is handled according to international best practices, reducing vulnerabilities and promoting long-term community resilience.

INCREASED PRO-POOR AND CITYWIDE DATA-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

These activities focused on data collection and management, such as settlement profiling and mapping, household enumerations, and access to basic services. This data and information form the basis of advocacy and communication activities as well as developing constructive relationships with government authorities.

India focused on improving urban planning and living conditions in slum settlements and relocation colonies through extensive data collection and analysis. Slum profiling was conducted in 10 cities, covering 93 settlements, resulting in actionable city-level plans. Comprehensive slum registers were completed in two cities to better document and address settlement needs. Additionally, data collection in relocation colonies provided insights into post-relocation challenges, leading to improvement plans for two cities. These activities ensured a targeted and inclusive approach to addressing urban development and integration challenges.

Kenya engaged in community-based efforts, including riparian mapping, addressing water and sanitation challenges, conducting enumerations to advocate for housing and relief assistance, and a market survey covering 13 wards in Nairobi and Kisumu. Kenya also prioritised flood response efforts, documenting displaced families and redirecting resources to provide immediate support during heavy rains and flooding – further showcasing a commitment to resilience-building and community welfare. A solid waste management survey undertaken as part of the Naivasha initiative in Kenya's Nakuru County provided key baseline data to develop circular waste management systems. The activity strengthened community efforts to adopt sustainable waste practices and improve household-level environmental management. Kenya also developed a climate action database.

Zambia undertook settlement enumerations and developed a position paper titled "Building Resilience in Slum Communities" that outlined strategies to transform informal settlements into resilient communities. These efforts were complemented by stakeholder engagement through workshops and discussions, fostering collaboration to enhance urban planning and resilience strategies.

Uganda and **Sierra Leone** both prioritised climate change risk mapping and settlement profiling to support resilience-building. In Uganda, efforts focused on validating and updating settlement profiles while mapping climate risks, resulting in 11 profiles, corresponding maps, and actionable insights for planning. Sierra Leone conducted climate risk mapping and settlement profiling in collaboration with city authorities, generating critical data to guide disaster response and urban planning efforts.

Namibia and **Malawi** undertook similar activities, especially regarding evictions. Malawi resolved eviction threats in Area Mgona and mitigated the impacts of road expansion in Area 49. Collaboration between local communities and the Lilongwe City Council led to a review of urban profiles across 27 wards. Engagement meetings with city authorities emphasised nature-based solutions, empowering communities to co-develop climate change adaptation strategies through sustainable practices and partnerships. Namibia conducted profiling and enumeration activities in informal settlements, including feedback meetings that likely addressed community concerns and challenges such as eviction-related issues. These activities enhanced data-driven climate resilience efforts through community engagement in informal settlements. Data from mapping, enumeration, and feedback sessions with local authorities was compiled into a database to support future adaptation measures and collaborative planning.

In **Zimbabwe**, climate vulnerability assessments engaged 140 participants in settlements across Kariba and Bulawayo. These assessments helped co-produce data essential for locally led climate action plans, raising awareness of resilience strategies in these communities.

Change Stories

UGANDA
Using Data to Empower Communities and Influence Policy

The Ugandan Alliance has played a crucial role in pro-poor, data-driven development by training young community members to collect and validate data on climate hotspots and settlement profiles across urban slum areas, including Kabale, Wakiso, Mbarara, Mbale, Jinja, Arua, Kawempe, Nakawa, and Makindye. By addressing the longstanding gap in locally relevant data, this initiative has empowered communities, fostered trust between residents and local authorities, and enabled a bottom-up approach to development planning.

The collected data has directly influenced policy and service delivery, with city authorities now making informed decisions based on evidence rather than assumptions. The Kampala Capital City Authority and the Ministry of Lands in Mbarara have cited this grassroots-driven data in their official reports, showcasing its practical impact and credibility. Young people were also trained in modern data collection tools such as Kobo Collect, GPS, and Maps.me, enhancing their technical skills and sense of ownership.

This initiative has strengthened community participation in urban planning, ensuring that slum dwellers are actively involved in shaping development strategies and climate adaptation measures.

ZAMBIA
Fostering Inclusive and Participatory Urban Planning through Data

In Kitwe's Ipusukilo informal settlement, a community-led Local Area Plan (LAP) is driving transformation by addressing poor infrastructure, inadequate services, and unplanned development. The Kitwe City Council, using detailed enumeration data collected by the federation, developed a plan focused on upgrading roads, improving drainage, formalising land tenure, and enhancing access to essential services. The LAP has shifted the perception of informal settlements from neglected areas to integral parts of city planning. By integrating climate-resilient infrastructure and ensuring community participation, the plan fosters sustainable urban growth.

The Poor People's Federation of Zambia's role in data collection, advocacy, and community engagement has strengthened residents' voices in decision-making, setting a precedent for inclusive and participatory urban planning in Kitwe.

@NHAG Namibia

CONCLUSION

@ CCODE, Malawi

The examples in this publication demonstrate how organised slum dwellers can be active partners in the development of inclusive, resilient cities. Informal communities best understand their needs and can drive sustainable local solutions, especially during times of crisis and shock. Yet, slum dwellers are often marginalised in the city, with their voices and needs going unheard.

In this programme, SDI federations led projects that were inclusive and created opportunities for engagement with communities, local governments, and other relevant stakeholders. They directly benefited the communities involved. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the federations were critical players in building community resilience, ensuring that information and services reached the most vulnerable. At the same time, they developed longer-term strategies to address the community's needs, such as social safety nets, livelihood opportunities, and provision of basic services.

For resilient cities, organised urban poor communities must be central to any long-term sustainable development initiatives. A mobilised, empowered urban poor community can participate in city development, facilitate collective action, and become less vulnerable to shocks. Federations of the urban poor help communities take on that role and succeed, and they are a key part of making city development more inclusive.

@ PPHPZ, Zambia

March 2025

Cities Alliance
Cities Without Slums

Hosted by
UNOPS

sdi.

Sida

𝕏 | CitiesAlliance
🌐 | citiesalliance.org
in | cities-alliance
✉ | info@citiesalliance.org