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REPORT

Evaluating Community Engagement in the SEA Project through Locally Led Adaptation Principles

ADAPTATION FUND

UN HABITAT FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE | OXFAM | DiMSUR Disaster Risk Management, Sustainability and Urban Resilience

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Executive Summary

This report evaluates the **alignment of the Building Urban Climate Resilience in South Eastern-Africa project with the eight principles of Locally Led Adaptation (LLA).** The assessment focuses on the 4 target countries of the project: Madagascar, Mozambique, Malawi, and Comoros, analyzing how effectively locally led adaptation approaches has been integrated to enhance urban climate resilience.

The report aims to:

1. **Identify best practices and challenges in implementing locally led adaptation** within the SEA project, examining how communities and local stakeholders have been engaged in decision-making, resource allocation, and adaptation planning.
2. **Provide recommendations for scaling and replicating successful strategies** in future urban climate resilience initiatives, ensuring that lessons learned from the SEA project contribute to broader adaptation efforts.
3. **Highlight the role of local leadership and community-driven action** in achieving sustainable climate adaptation outcomes, emphasizing the importance of empowering local institutions, knowledge systems, and governance structures.

The findings indicate that while the SEA project has made significant progress in fostering locally led adaptation—through **inclusive decision-making, participatory planning, and local capacity-strengthening**—challenges remain. These include financial sustainability, institutional coordination, and scaling successful approaches. Addressing these gaps will require strengthened policy integration, long-term and flexible funding mechanisms, and enhanced collaboration between local and national stakeholders.

The report concludes with key recommendations to improve the effectiveness of future urban climate resilience projects by reinforcing local ownership, accountability, and adaptive learning, ensuring that adaptation efforts are equitable, sustainable, and community-driven.

Figure 1 - Community in La Coulée neighborhood, Moroni Comoros, November 2024 - ph. Jessica Valerani

Introduction

Climate change presents critical challenges to urban areas in South-Eastern Africa that undoubtedly need to be addressed. The "**Building Urban Climate Resilience in South-Eastern Africa (SEA)**" project, funded by the *Adaptation Fund*, was implemented from 2020 to 2024 to enhance climate resilience in four cities: **Zomba (Malawi), Chókwè (Mozambique), Morondava (Madagascar), and Moroni (Union of Comoros).**

The SEA project had already undertaken extensive learning efforts, which highlighted its success in fostering meaningful **local community engagement** and effectively implementing a **bottom-up approach**. Building on this foundation, the decision was made to conduct a deeper analysis, particularly in relation to the **Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) principles—**a structured framework now widely recognized as a global standard for effective and equitable adaptation, endorsed by over 100 organizations, including Oxfam, to promote locally led decision-making and strengthen resilience in climate-vulnerable regions.[1]

The **LLA principles** provide a framework to shift decision-making power, financial resources, and long-term adaptation planning to **local institutions and communities.** Developed to guide adaptation programs and funding **toward locally owned and community-driven** solutions, these principles emphasize **inclusive participation, flexible financing, and institutional capacity-building** for sustainable climate resilience.

The eight LLA principles outline key approaches that ensure adaptation initiatives empower local actors, promote transparency, and integrate traditional and scientific knowledge. These include:

1. **Devolving decision-making to the local level,** granting communities and local institutions direct access to **finance and governance over adaptation actions.**
2. **Addressing structural inequalities** by integrating gender, economic, and social equity into climate adaptation strategies.
3. **Providing long-term, predictable funding** to **strengthen local governance, capacity, and sustainability** beyond project cycles.
4. **Investing in local capabilities** to ensure communities can manage and sustain adaptation efforts independently.
5. **Combining scientific and local knowledge** for a **context-specific understanding of climate risks and solutions.**
6. **Enabling flexible learning and adaptation,** ensuring projects **remain responsive to evolving climate challenges.**
7. **Enhancing transparency and accountability** in financial and decision-making processes to empower local stakeholders.
8. **Encouraging multi-sectoral collaboration** to align adaptation actions with **development, disaster risk reduction, and environmental governance.**

[1] World Resources Institute (WRI). *"Principles for Locally Led Adaptation."* Available at: https://www.wri.org/initiatives/locally-led-adaptation/principles-locally-led-adaptation.

This report evaluates the SEA project's alignment with **Locally Led Adaptation principles,** with a particular focus on **community engagement**. Through an analysis of the project's activities in Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Comoros, highlights how the SEA project demonstrated meaningful community involvement, identified challenges, and achieved significant successes.

Methodology

The evaluation draws from interviews conducted with stakeholders, beneficiaries, and the OXFAM community involved in this project in Malawi, Mozambique, Comoros, and Madagascar complemented by the SEA project's inception report. It applies the LLA principles, focusing on their implementation at the community level.

This study is based on data collected through interviews with stakeholders and beneficiaries across the four SEA countries, as well as project documentation. The interviews were structured around the eight LLA principles, with questions designed to explore how community engagement, decision-making, and knowledge integration were implemented. Each interview was tailored to local contexts, ensuring a representative understanding of how LLA principles shaped the project outcomes.

This methodology ensures a bottom-up perspective, incorporating voices from municipal authorities, community leaders, and technical partners. The analysis identifies patterns across countries, as well as specific experiences and innovations unique to each country.

Figure 2 - Field visit in Sadzi Ward, Zomba, Malawi. March 2022. Ph.Tavwana Chirwa

Findings and Analysis

This section presents findings according to the eight **Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) principles,** highlighting common trends and unique experiences where relevant. The SEA project effectively embedded locally led adaptation strategies, strengthening governance, capacity-building, and climate resilience in urban areas across Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Comoros. Additionally, it is essential to recognize how investing in local capacities significantly impacted the project's sustainability, ensuring long-term ownership and resilience-building within communities and municipal institutions. This proved valuable, as it prevented the project from simply having an immediate impact, but rather laid the foundation for sustainable change that intends to maintain a lasting effect in the four countries.

1. Devolving Decision-Making to the Local Level

Empowering local institutions and communities in decision-making is a fundamental pillar of locally led adaptation. The SEA project successfully engaged municipal authorities, community representatives, and local stakeholders to co-design and implement interventions.

- In **Mozambique**, the establishment of **Coordination City Project Team (CPT) meetings** at the municipal level provided a platform for **regular decision-making,** ensuring transparency, accountability, and shared ownership. Working directly with Oxfam, the municipalities, and community representatives, this platform allowed for continuous project monitoring and adaptive decision-making, strengthening collaboration between institutions and residents.

- **Madagascar** actively involved **municipal officials and community members** in the selection of **drainage infrastructure, road rehabilitation, and mangrove restoration areas**, ensuring interventions aligned with both scientific assessments and local knowledge.

- **Comoros** demonstrated a strong example of **community-led decision-making**, where **landowners collaborated with municipal authorities** to allocate space for drainage infrastructure, facilitating the smooth implementation of climate adaptation efforts.

- **Malawi** prioritized **participatory decision-making,** integrating local knowledge in infrastructure planning, particularly in the **placement of gabion baskets** for flood mitigation.

2. Ensuring Inclusive Participation

Ensuring inclusive participation is essential for equitable climate adaptation. The SEA project actively worked to integrate **gender, economic, and social equity** into its adaptation strategies. Traditional gender norms often exclude women from employment opportunities. However, the SEA project actively promoted gender equity by facilitating women's involvement in the project activities. These initiatives challenged gender norms

and provided new employment opportunities for women, contributing to long-term social and economic empowerment.

- In **Mozambique**, **gender inclusion policies** encouraged women's employment in infrastructure projects and promoted their participation in **disaster risk management committees**, breaking traditional gender norms by requiring contractors to hire women for infrastructure projects. Women participated in construction work, challenging long-standing gender biases and expanding economic opportunities

- **Malawi** promoted **women's representation in forest management committees**, and **the inclusion of disabled individuals** in leadership roles, ensuring inclusive decision-making within forest conservation efforts.

- **Madagascar** focused on targeted employment initiatives, benefiting **single mothers, unemployed youth, and people with disabilities,** ensuring economic inclusion through project-related job opportunities. Women's participation in public works and community decision-making was strengthened through targeted employment initiatives.

- **Comoros** integrated **gender-sensitive approaches into waste management and drainage maintenance programs,** ensuring that adaptation strategies were inclusive and equitable.

3. Facilitating Flexible Funding Mechanisms

Financial sustainability is key to ensuring that locally led adaptation efforts extend beyond project cycles. SEA project teams had to navigate budget limitations by implementing **flexible funding mechanisms** to address evolving community needs.

- In **Mozambique**, budget limitations posed a significant challenge throughout the implementation of the project. However adaptive management strategies, including reallocating funds based on evolving community needs, allowed for flexibility. One key example was the community-driven decision to procure a bulldozer, which was not originally included in the project plan, and was a critical resource for long-term flood management.

- **Comoros** faced budget limitations, which prevented the implementation of additional drainage systems in some high-risk areas. However, local authorities and residents **mobilized their own resources** to maintain existing structures, ensuring that existing systems would remain functional in the short-term future.

- **Malawi** redirected funding to support **community-driven reforestation** initiatives, shifting from conventional tree planting to **natural regeneration approaches**. While cutting immediate costs, this initiative laid the foundation for more sustainable growth in the future, ensuring long-term benefits for the area. Additionally, the construction of

a key bridge connecting an evacuation center to surrounding communities was a crucial step in ensuring safe passage during floods.

- **Madagascar** successfully secured **municipal co-funding to sustain urban resilience initiatives** and extended the SEA project's duration, beyond what was initially forecast.

4. Investing in Local Capacities

Investing in local capacities was one of the SEA project's most impactful strategies, ensuring that communities and institutions could manage and sustain adaptation efforts independently beyond the project's completion. Strengthening governance structures, providing technical training, and integrating climate resilience skills across municipal institutions contributed to long-term adaptation success. This strongly manifested the project's intention to have a lasting impact on the communities well beyond its conclusion.

- In **Malawi**, the SEA project strengthened institutional capacity through training sessions on waste management, forest conservation, and flood prevention. Local communities were also equipped with technical skills to maintain flood control infrastructure beyond the project's duration.

- **Mozambique** prioritized **training for municipal teams**, ensuring they could effectively operate early warning systems and climate adaptation infrastructure. Reinforcing community-led disaster preparedness initiatives through ongoing training and institutional engagement

- **In Comoros** The project reinforced local governance structures through targeted training programs for municipal staff, environmental agencies, and waste management authorities. Training programs focused on drainage system maintenance, solid waste management, and early warning systems. These efforts aimed to ensure that communities could sustain project outcomes beyond the funding period.

- **Madagascar** integrated training programs on climate resilience, waste management, and flood prevention into municipal governance. Local officials were trained in **procurement procedures, urban planning, and flood risk management**, ensuring municipal officials could lead resilience planning independently.

5. Integrating Local and Scientific Knowledge

The integration of traditional knowledge with scientific research was a defining feature of the SEA project, ensuring climate adaptation strategies were **both evidence-based and contextually relevant.** The importance of using local and scientific knowledge in these countries was valuable because it allowed local people to share their expertise, which facilitated the implementation of the SEA project, greatly speeding up the process.

- **Madagascar** leveraged **local fishers' expertise** for mangrove reforestation, using traditional ecological knowledge to determine optimal planting periods. By using

traditional ecological knowledge with scientific knowledge, the project ensured that the rehabilitation of mangrove forests was done efficiently. Additionally, **Madagascar** piloted **green, blue, and grey infrastructure solutions**, combining **engineered flood protection** with **nature-based solutions like mangrove rehabilitation to reduce flood risks.**[2]

- **Malawi** installed **automated weather stations** to enhance climate risk monitoring by improving flood prediction models and strengthening disaster preparedness.

- **Comoros** utilized historical flood-level data from local elders to calibrate **meteorological forecasting tools**, improving climate risk models. Additionally, using locally sourced stones for infrastructure reinforcement reduces the reliance on expensive imported materials which demonstrates that local knowledge was implemented in this project.

- **Mozambique** rehabilitated to enhance the **community radio stations** to broadcast **early flood warnings,** ensuring that vulnerable populations had **timely access to climate risk information**. Additionally, stakeholder consultation in project design, enallowing local leaders and technical experts to combine knowledge demonstrated that the project combined local knowledge with scientific knowledge to strengthen climate resilience.

6. Enabling Flexible Learning and Adaptation

The SEA project incorporated **adaptive risk management** to ensure resilience despite logistical, economic, and climate challenges. By doing this, the project could rapidly adapt to unforeseen circumstances and accomplish its goals within the desired timeframe.

- **Comoros developed community-led monitoring systems to track flood-prone areas** and reduce long-term risks. The project employed an adaptive management approach to mitigate climate uncertainties, by providing training to the municipal government in climate risk scenario planning, adjusting construction schedules based on meteorological forecasts, and modifying labor mobilization strategies.

- **Mozambique** employed **flexible budgeting**, allowing for **adaptive flood control measures** based on evolving community needs.

- **Madagascar's Safe Haven Model**, a **climate-resilient community shelter**, was developed based on feedback from **local women's groups and vulnerable households**, providing emergency refuge during extreme weather events.

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[2] Shreya Nath. *"Blue-Green-Grey Infrastructures."* OpenCity, Available at: https://data.opencity.in/dataset/9ddb3dfb-44fe-46a1-b08c-6e3093842376/resource/234e5856-d83d-47e0-8f48-1f4b2a24c008/download/blue-green-grey-infrastructures-shreya-nath.pdf

- **Malawi** implemented **multi-stakeholder emergency response planning**, improving coordination between municipal authorities and community representatives. Despite the limited time and funding, some capacity-building activities were not fully operational by the project's end. although bicycle ambulances were proposed to assist with evacuations, they were deemed impractical due to Zomba's steep terrain, highlighting the importance of context-specific adaptation measures.

7. Ensuring Transparency and Accountability

The SEA project fostered transparency by ensuring decision-making and financial processes were **accessible, participatory, and accountable.** This strongly fostered a sense of community and belonging related to the project, also ensuring that it would be implemented in a fair way.

- **Mozambique** facilitated the establishment of **Coordination City Project Team (CPT)** meetings allowing for continuous project monitoring, accountability, and problem-solving. This platform allowed for **continuous project monitoring and ensured transparency.**

- **Madagascar** engaged municipal representatives, community leaders, and technical experts in project oversight, **ensuring interventions were aligned with both scientific assessments and community priorities in a transparent way.** Quarterly meetings were held with representatives from municipal institutions, local associations, and community groups also contributed to the **project's transparency in decision-making and increased the sense of community.**

- In **Comoros** the project **facilitated regular meetings between municipal authorities, technical service providers, and residents, ensuring shared decision-making**. Regular coordinating meetings between Oxfam, UN-Habitat, and municipal authorities facilitated knowledge-sharing and problem-solving, thus ensuring transparency.

- In **Malawi**, the project worked closely with ward-level structures and community representatives through the **City Project Team (CPT),** a governance structure comprising **local political leaders and technical leaders who helped direct and oversee project activities,** which contributed to enhancing transparency and accountability.

8. Encouraging Multi-Sectoral Collaboration

Cross-sector partnerships were a key feature of the SEA project, fostering collaboration between **government, civil society, and international organizations.** This resulted in the project being consistently implemented across various sectors.

- **Mozambique** strengthened partnerships with public-**private sector actors** for long-term infrastructure maintenance and urban planning. Early consultations with local

communities, and regular municipal-level discussions with local governments, Oxfam, UN-habitat, and community representatives strengthened collaboration between government, civil society, and international organizations.

- **Comoros** demonstrated best practices in inter-agency coordination, with **Oxfam** collaborating with **UN-Habitat** and municipal authorities. Dialogues facilitated by neighborhood leaders and municipal authorities in the construction of drainage channels demonstrate the project's success with the emphasis on a community-led decision-making process.

- In **Madagascar, Oxfam's** partnership **with *UN-Habitat, local NGOs, and municipal agencies*** ensured knowledge-sharing and integration of climate-resilient solutions into municipal policies. The collaboration fostered stronger linkages between national adaptation policies and local implementation.

- In **Malawi**, institutional collaboration with **the Forest Research Institute** helped shift restoration approaches from traditional planning to **natural regeneration approach** strengthening ecological resilience. Additionally, the involvement of Local engineers from **Zomba City Council** played a vital role in the implementation of the project.

Figure 3 - Monitoring Bridge infrastructural work in Morondava, Madagascar, July 2024 - Ph. Patricia Andrianaivo

Madagascar: Stakeholder and Oxfam Perspectives

During interviews with the **Madagascar project team**, **stakeholders—including the mayor of Morondava, a solid waste management consultant, and a community leader—were also involved**. Their perspectives provided valuable insights into the project's implementation, successes, and challenges.

1. **Stakeholder Insights:**

    - Emphasized the **role of municipal representatives** in overseeing public works and reinforcing community engagement.
    - Highlighted **waste management improvements** driven by community-led initiatives.
    - Noted the impact of **resident-led maintenance committees** ensuring sustainability in urban sanitation and drainage upkeep.

2. **Oxfam's Implementation Perspective:**

    - Integrated local perspectives into quarterly **co-creation meetings**.
    - Developed **the Safe Haven Model**, responding directly to community feedback.
    - Institutionalized **climate adaptation infrastructure management** within municipal governance.

By structuring the findings according to the **eight LLA principles**, this analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of how locally lead adaptation strategies were successfully implemented across four urban contexts in South-Eastern Africa. The SEA project demonstrated that **community-driven decision-making, integrated local knowledge, adaptive financing, and cross-sectoral collaboration** are critical elements for **effective climate resilience initiatives**.

Conclusion: Advancing Urban Climate Resilience through Locally Led Adaptation

The **Building Urban Climate Resilience in South-Eastern Africa (SEA) project** demonstrates that *community engagement, participatory governance, and institutional collaboration* are central to fostering sustainable climate resilience in urban settings. Implemented across the four countries of **Malawi, Mozambique, Madagascar, and Comoros**, the project effectively aligned with the **Locally Led Adaptation (LLA), community engagement principle**, ensuring that communities were not just beneficiaries but active participants in decision-making, implementation, and long-term sustainability planning.

Key Takeaways from the SEA Project

1. Community-Led Decision-Making Drives Impact

The SEA project illustrated **participatory governance,** where community members and local institutions played a decisive role in shaping interventions. From the design of flood mitigation systems in **Malawi** to the rehabilitation of mangrove forests in **Madagascar,** each initiative was based on local knowledge and needs. Municipal representatives, community leaders, and technical experts collaborated to co-create solutions that were not only relevant but also widely accepted by local populations.

2. Institutional Strengthening is Key to Long-Term Resilience

While community participation was fundamental, **empowering local governance structures** ensured that climate resilience efforts extended beyond the project timeline. Across the four countries, the project reinforced municipal institutions' technical and financial capacities, training local officials on procurement processes, infrastructure maintenance, disaster risk management, and sustainable land use planning. In **Comoros and Madagascar**, institutional partnerships ensured municipal ownership of flood control and waste management infrastructure, safeguarding long-term sustainability. This reflected the project's goal to not just provide immediate solutions but also lay the foundation for permanent change.

3. Inclusive and Equitable Climate Action Enhances Social Resilience

The SEA project recognized that **vulnerable groups–women, youth, and persons with disabilities–**must be central to climate adaptation efforts. By integrating gender-inclusive employment models in **Mozambique and Madagascar**, and ensuring that forest conservation committees in **Malawi** included marginalized voices, the project took meaningful steps toward breaking systemic barriers to participation. These efforts reinforced social cohesion, created economic opportunities, and strengthened local ownership of resilience measures.

4. Blending Scientific and Traditional Knowledge Enhances Adaptation

The project successfully integrated scientific climate data with traditional knowledge systems, fostering adaptive solutions tailored to each city's environmental context. For instance:

- **Automated weather stations** in Malawi improved early warning systems, enhancing disaster preparedness.
- **Community radio broadcasts** in Mozambique ensured that localized climate risk information reached at-risk populations.
- **Historical flood level mapping** in Comoros, combined with traditional masonry techniques, helped optimize drainage infrastructure for long-term use.

5. Sustainability Planning and Resource Mobilization is Crucial for Scaling Up

While the SEA project made significant strides in urban resilience, continued investment, and local resource mobilization remain critical to sustaining and scaling these efforts. Municipal governments, local businesses, and development agencies must work together to mainstream LLA principles into urban planning frameworks. The project's success in fostering **community-driven** maintenance committees for waste management and drainage systems provides a replicable model for ensuring project sustainability.

Final Reflection and Key Recommendations: Scaling Locally Led Adaptation Beyond the SEA Project

The SEA project proves that **Locally Led Adaptation (LLA) principles** are not just theoretical guidelines—they are practical frameworks that drive **community-led, sustainable climate resilience.** By ensuring that local voices are at the center of decision-making, that municipal institutions are empowered, and that interventions integrate both scientific and indigenous knowledge, the project has laid a foundation for **scaling urban climate resilience efforts across South-Eastern Africa and beyond**.

Key Recommendations for Strengthening LLA in Future Climate Adaptation Projects

- **Institutionalizing LLA principles within urban governance frameworks**: Local and national governments should embed LLA principles into **climate policies, municipal plans, and regulatory frameworks** to ensure **long-term sustainability** beyond project timelines. A formalize approach will secure local leadership in adaptation efforts and **reduce dependency on external actors.**?

- **Strengthening multi-level partnerships:** Collaboration between **international agencies, NGOs, municipal governments and local communities** should go beyond implementation phases. Future projects should establish **long-term advisory committees or multi-stakeholder platforms** to ensure **continuous dialogue and joint decision-making** among all actors.

- **Enhancing budget flexibility and long-term financial planning:** Future projects should incorporate adaptive budgeting mechanisms that allow fund reallocations based on evolving local needs. Additionally, municipal authorities should be supported in developing their own local, funding strategies. (climate funds, tax-based incentives, and public-private partnerships) to sustain adaptation measures after donor funding ends?

- **Investing in local staff and technical expertise:** Future projects should train and retain local staff, ensuring that technical knowledge remains within communities. Local enterprises, municipal technical teams, and community-led organizations should be prioritized for long-term capacity-building and employment opportunities in climate adaptation programs.

- By embedding **collaboration, adaptability, and inclusivity** at the core of future climate adaptation projects, cities can proactively prepare for climate risks while strengthening community-driven resilience models. The SEA project serves as a replicable and scalable model for climate-vulnerable urban areas worldwide, showcasing that climate adaptation is most effective when led by the people it seeks to protect.

Figure 4 - Field visit of the project stakeholders in Chókwè, Mozambique, June 2024 - Ph. Sergio Mossela

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