

## MEDIA RELEASE

### SUB-SAHARAN CITIES EMBRACE NATURE TO TACKLE CLIMATE THREATS

Tackling flash floods, urban heat, and other climate change threats in three sub-Saharan African Cities

***A new project will use solutions found in nature to improve the resilience of 2.2 million people in Dire Dawa (Ethiopia), Kigali (Rwanda), and Johannesburg (South Africa).***

**Tuesday, 28 May 2024, Johannesburg** – A new 3-year project will reduce climate-fuelled flood risks and enhance the resilience of approximately 2.2 million people in three sub-Saharan African cities while promoting gender equality and social inclusion while strengthening biodiversity protection.

The Scaling Urban Nature-Based Solutions for Climate Adaptation in Sub-Saharan Africa (SUNCASA) project will undertake watershed restoration and adaptation actions in Dire Dawa (Ethiopia), Kigali (Rwanda), and Johannesburg (South Africa).

Jointly managed by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and the World Resources Institute (WRI) — and guided and implemented by a wide array of local partners, policymakers, and stakeholders — SUNCASA will directly benefit approximately 2.2 million people in high-flood-risk areas, while indirectly benefiting an estimated 7 million residents in the three cities. The project is funded by Global Affairs Canada through the Partnering for Climate Programme. Approximately CAD 29 million will be invested in the three cities until 2026.

Specific actions were identified through multiple rounds of engagement with key stakeholders in each of the three cities. Through the City Water Resilience Approach, stakeholders worked collaboratively to develop high-impact solutions to critical resilience challenges. These include:

- Catchment restoration in the Dechatu River in Dire Dawa for flood risk reduction, water stress mitigation, urban tree planting and green space development to alleviate the heat island effect in lower income neighbourhoods;
- Restoration of six critical upstream micro-catchments of the lower Nyabarong River watershed in Kigali to reduce downstream floods and landslide risks and
- Removal of alien invasive species, afforestation, reforestation, and riverbank restoration in the Johannesburg Jukskei River catchment to reduce flood risk and increase water quality.

Flash floods continue to pose a significant risk to Dire Dawa's residents, while catchment degradation has affected water security and the livelihoods of vulnerable communities. In Dire Dawa, SUNCASA will work with women farmers and local small

and medium-sized enterprises to rehabilitate the Dechatu Catchment through a combination of reforestation and agroforestry, helping to address water stress and enhance the economic resilience of the most vulnerable. The project will also aim to reduce stormwater runoff and heat within the city through tree-planting campaigns that target low-income neighbourhoods.

Invasive species in wetlands and river systems threaten the water security of the City of Johannesburg, increasing flood risk and impacting biodiversity. The SUNCASA project will work with local communities along the Jukskei River Catchment to remove alien invasive species clogging waterways, helping to reduce flood risk by rehabilitating riverbanks. The project will directly support 14 local cooperatives, expand employment opportunities, and ensure women and youth leadership in ecosystem conservation.

Climate change and urban expansion are increasing the impact of flood events and landslides in Kigali. The SUNCASA project will support local farmers and women-led cooperatives in rehabilitating the Kigali sub-catchment, reducing flood risks in densely populated urban areas. Restoration efforts will prioritise the protection of agricultural lands and the expansion of urban forest cover, reducing soil loss, improving agricultural productivity, and boosting air quality.

"As Mayor of the Dire Dawa Administration, it is my priority to rally political support for solutions that help our administration address citizens' vulnerability to climate change-related disasters, like rapid-onset floods. The Dire Dawa Administration welcomes the recent announcement from Global Affairs Canada regarding new funding to support locally led nature-based solutions for the rehabilitation of the Awash River Basin's Eastern Catchment. This investment means more women and youth at the forefront of our climate adaptation measures, helping to boost water security not only in Dire Dawa but in our neighbouring cities as well," says **H.E. Kedir Juhar, Mayor of Dire Dawa, Ethiopia.**

"The City of Kigali welcomes the recent commitment from the Government of Canada to support the city's green aspirations with the resources needed to increase its climate resilience through nature-based solutions for watershed restoration targeting urban high-risk areas. We look forward to advancing this work with our partners in alignment with Kigali's ambitious green development goals and strengthening communities against climate impacts," notes **Lord Mayor Samuel Dusengiyumva, Mayor of Kigali.**

"Flood protection is a critical aspect of the City of Johannesburg's Water Security Strategy. Exacerbated by climate change and urbanisation, flooding poses a significant risk to lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure, causing devastation and disruption on a massive scale. Through the protection and restoration of ecosystems, we can address flood risk across the City while enhancing water quality, preserving critical habitats, and safeguarding ecological integrity for generations to come. This is where the SUNCASA project comes into play, as it will implement the nature-based solutions outlined in our strategy," explains **Cllr Kabelo Gwamanda, the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, South Africa.**

“Canada is proud to continuously partner with IISD, a Canadian organisation that leads the charge for sustainable development around the world. Together, we are pleased to support the cities of Johannesburg, Dire Dawa, and Kigali in advancing their climate change adaptation, biodiversity conservation, and livelihood priorities through gender-responsive nature-based solutions. As part of Canada’s CAD 5.3 billion Climate Finance commitment (2021–2026), Partnering for Climate supports projects that use nature-based solutions to help communities and people in sub-Saharan Africa become more resilient to the impacts of climate change,” says **Honourable Ahmed Hussen, Canada’s Minister of International Development.**

"Despite their wide-ranging benefits for people and the planet, nature-based solutions are not being scaled up enough to fulfil their potential. SUNCASA is a tremendous opportunity to advance this cause. IISD is pleased to be applying our experience with nature-based solutions to the management of this project in partnership with WRI, and we look forward to working with our wide array of local partners to implement it for the benefit of communities and ecosystems in sub-Saharan Africa," asserts **Patricia Fuller, CEO and President, IISD.**

“Africa’s cities are the fastest-growing in the world. Yet half of these urban residents are living in informal settlements and are dangerously threatened by climate risks from droughts, floods, and extreme heat. To address these challenges, we must harness the power of nature — trees and other forms of “green infrastructure” that can clean and cool the air, build flood resilience, and improve people’s health and well-being. Canada’s Partnering for Climate Initiative will allow IISD and WRI to work with cities across the continent to mobilise political support, deliver technical assistance, and unlock finance, effectively streamlining the process to scale up nature-based solutions to support vulnerable communities,” notes **Ani Dasgupta, President and CEO, World Resources Institute.**

## Useful links

SUNCASA website: [suncasa.org](https://suncasa.org)

IISD Website: [Nature-based Infrastructure Global Resource Centre](https://www.iisd.org/nature-based-infrastructure)

WRI Website: [WRI Ross Center for Sustainable Cities](https://www.wri.org/ross-center)

Media Release: [Prime Minister advances progress toward a peaceful, healthy future at United Nations General Assembly \(21 September 2023\)](#)

Backgrounder: [Canada supports strong, ambitious international action at the 78th Session of the United Nations General Assembly](#)

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Ottawa, and Toronto, our work affects lives in nearly 100 countries. Learn more at [iisd.org](https://iisd.org)

Founded in 1982, the World Resources Institute (WRI) is an independent, nonprofit global research organisation that turns big ideas into action at the nexus of environment, economic opportunity, and human well-being. We are working to address seven critical challenges that the world must overcome this decade to secure a sustainable future for people and the planet: climate change, energy, food, forests, water, sustainable cities, and the ocean. WRI has a global staff of over 1,800 people with work spanning 60 countries. We have offices in Africa, Brazil, China, Europe, India, Indonesia, Mexico, Colombia, and the United States, as well as a growing presence in other countries and regions.

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