

Equitable Tree Access in Nairobi



Green City

Healthy City

Climate Issue: Unequal Tree Access

- Around the world, significant inequalities exist in tree cover based on income, ethnicity, and other socioeconomic characteristics
- Underprivileged neighborhoods tend to have less tree cover than privileged neighborhoods
- Street trees contribute to climate resilience, but are often overlooked in urban development projects
- Disparities in urban tree distribution are an issue of environmental justice, given the crucial health and wellbeing benefits trees provide.

Nairobi: At a Crossroads

- Nairobi is the capital city of Kenya, and has a population of ~4.4 million people
- Urban expansion in Nairobi has resulted in ~10% forest loss over the last 20 years
- The distribution of street trees in Nairobi is unequal: affluent neighborhoods enjoy many trees, while poorer areas have little to no trees
- The government has made ambitious public commitments to increase tree cover by 30%
- Government and residents are strongly committed to tree planting. However, there are challenges to reaching the official target.

Next Steps: Greening Nairobi

CHALLENGE: Limited tree cover
SOLUTION: The city is working with international agencies and research institutions to catalog public green spaces via remote sensing.

CHALLENGE: Seedling availability
SOLUTION: Kenya Urban Roads Authority and Kenya Forest Service are providing sites and seedlings to resident groups conducting roadside planting.

CHALLENGE: Workforce coordination
SOLUTION: Community-based organizations and social institutions are leading tree planting efforts and are also creating pocket parks in informal settlements.



IN A NUTSHELL

- Tree cover is unevenly distributed in Nairobi
- Tree cover is limited for underprivileged social groups
- Street trees cool cities, improve air quality, reduce stormwater runoff, give sustenance, foster social cohesion and beautify streets

Cities must ensure residents have equitable access to street trees and the climate benefits they provide.

WHAT CAN YOUR CITY DO?

FORMALIZE a municipal aim to provide equitable access to street trees

ASSESS the current street tree canopy to set goals and measure progress

FOLLOW the “right tree in the right place” principle – select trees that match site conditions

ENGAGE residents in inventorying, planting, and watering. This ensures resident input and buy-in

FOCUS on growing, not just planting trees. Invest in care, maintenance, and evaluation

PROMOTE diversity in street trees to increase resilience to blights and environmental change.

To find out more information on this case study, contact **Alice Gerow** at alice.gerow@yale.edu. This research was supported by a Hixon Fellowship.