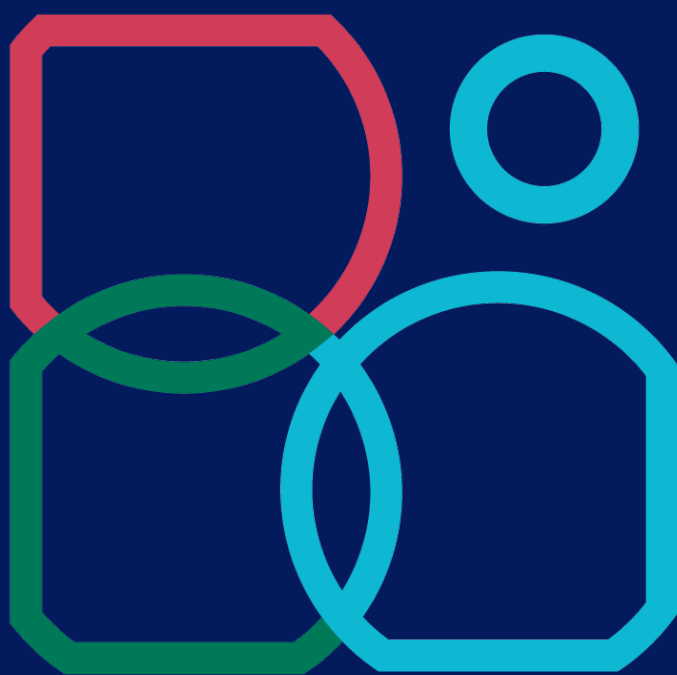




**Urban Futures in East Africa: Lessons from Current African Cities
Transformation Towards Sustainable Neighbourhoods**

Date: 3-5 June 2026

Venue: University of Rwanda, Kigali

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Executive Summary

The second LEARN Symposium convened on 03–05 June 2026 in Kigali, Rwanda, bringing together academics, policymakers, civil society actors, private sector representatives, and communities from Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Burundi, and the Netherlands. Co-hosted by the University of Rwanda and organised by LDE Global, the symposium examined how East African cities are transforming neighbourhoods into more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient spaces and advanced LEARN's governance and research agenda.

The central finding of this symposium is a structural tension that the evidence itself surfaces but that requires explicit statement: Rwanda's National Urbanisation Policy targets 70 percent urbanisation by 2050, while WRI's 30-year spatial analysis found that approximately 65 percent of Kigali's current population already lives in informal settlements. A national strategy oriented toward majority urbanisation is therefore proceeding without a resolved approach to the majority of the urban population already living outside the formal systems that the strategy assumes. This is not a future risk. It is the current condition that the strategy must contend with.

A second structural tension follows directly from the first: the same Day 1 session that presented the 70 percent urbanisation target also left unresolved a direct audience question on how agricultural land is being protected as cities expand. In a land-scarce, food security-sensitive context, an urbanisation strategy of this scale and a land protection question of such importance cannot be treated as separate conversations. The symposium identified both components of this land-use trade-off without yet naming a resolution.

Three additional themes emerged across all three days. First, in-situ community upgrading models such as Mpazi succeed when the government and community move at a pace that allows infrastructure delivery and social fabric preservation to proceed together, as demonstrated by the contrasting case of Medellín's PRIMED programme (1993–2003); heavy enforcement that accelerates physical delivery risks eroding the social fabric that upgrading is meant to protect. Second, co-creation was named throughout the symposium as a value but was demonstrated as a practice in only a small number of cases, most clearly by CCI Tanzania's community-implemented sanitation model and Kenya's community-led land consolidation model. The distance between the principle and practice remains LEARN's central institutional challenge. Third, the symposium explicitly rejected faddism, the pursuit of imported urban development concepts, in favour of grounded, locally produced evidence, a position summarised in the LEARN Secretariat's own framing that the network belongs in the grey area between master plans and pavement.

The symposium produced three consensus recommendations from Day 2 breakout groups: neighbourhood planning must be holistic from the design stage; implementation must be community-oriented from the outset; and LEARN's research must be practical enough for communities to use.

Day 3 governance discussions advanced decisions on LEARN's charter, Advisory Council, and membership structure, and endorsed a cross-cutting comparative research publication examining in-situ community upgrading across East African countries.

This report is classified as requiring targeted completion rather than restructuring. The participant list (Annex I) remains pending from the LEARN Secretariat. All quantitative figures have been verified and corrected in this revision, including the distinction between the Nyandungu Eco-Park's 4,000 green jobs and the separate 100,000 green job target of the five-wetland programme that follows Nyandungu's model. A dedicated cross-cutting themes section and a Next Steps table with responsible parties and timelines have been added to strengthen the report's usability for institutional follow-through.



1. Overview and Key Outcomes

1.1 What is LEARN?

The LDE-East Africa Research Network (LEARN) is an emerging interdisciplinary research network that brings together academics, policymakers, practitioners, civil society actors, and communities from East Africa and the Netherlands. Its primary focus is to foster the co-production of actionable, practical, and impactful urban research in Africa. The network is grounded in the principles of inclusivity, equitable partnership, co-ownership, and co-creation, and is positioned at the science-policy-society nexus. LEARN's five research areas are urban resilience, cities and climate change, informality, art culture and heritage, and digitalisation.

1.2 The 2026 LEARN Symposium

The second LEARN Symposium was convened from 03 to 05 June 2026 in Kigali, Rwanda. It was co-hosted by the University of Rwanda through its School of Architecture and Built Environment (SABE) and organised by the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus Universities (LDE) Global, a strategic alliance between Leiden University, Delft University of Technology, and Erasmus University Rotterdam. Participants came from academic, government, civil society, private sector, and community organisations across Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Burundi, and the Netherlands.



The symposium had a highly participatory, reflective, and immersive format. As the LEARN Secretariat noted in its post-symposium communication to participants, the gathering convened not around a PowerPoint but around a fire: a deliberate choice to foster honest dialogue, shared discomfort and

collective commitment. The event balanced high-level reflection, local grounding, and collaborative working sessions over three full days.

1.3 Symposium Objectives

The symposium's overall objective was to facilitate a cross-regional exchange on how African cities, particularly in East Africa, are transforming existing neighbourhoods into more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient spaces. The specific objectives were as follows:

- Showcase local innovations in housing, infrastructure, governance, and community-led urban development.
- Strengthen collaborative research between academic and non-academic urban actors, focusing on co-produced knowledge.
- Advance LEARN's strategic priorities in urban resilience, mutual learning, and impactful urban policy engagement.
- Reflect on LEARN's governance, alignment of priorities, and future direction as a network.

1.4 Key Highlights and Outcomes

- Practitioners reminded the room that master plans mean nothing without detailed schemes that fit the social fabric of the area. Communities have called for a move from consultation to co-creation, from being subjects of study to equal partners. City officials asked for evidence that was apolitical, trustworthy, and pavement tested. Academics acknowledged that translation from theory to practice is difficult. Private sector voices pushed participants to see urban challenges as opportunities and to ask difficult questions about who really benefits from urban transformation.
- Rwanda's urban transformation portfolio was presented as one of the most advanced in East Africa, including Participatory Land Readjustment (over 10,000 hectares upgraded nationally), the Mpazi in-situ rehousing project (688 housing units delivered without displacing residents), and the Nyandungu Eco-Park (121 hectares of restored wetland generating 4,000 green jobs).
- A critical finding across all sessions was that when enforcement becomes heavy during in-situ community upgrading, governments risk accelerating physical outcomes while losing the social fabric that makes a neighbourhood a community. The PRIMED programme in Medellín, Colombia (1993–2003) was cited as a contrasting model of decade-long incremental upgrading paced to community organisation. A Kenyan case was also raised in which community members collectively purchased consolidated land, with government support following the permitting stage.
- A key insight across all three days was that faddism, the pursuit of imported urban development concepts, will not build the cities of the future. The symposium consistently pointed toward grounded, locally produced evidence as the foundation for durable urban transformation.
- WRI's 30-year spatial analysis found that informal settlements house approximately 65 percent of Kigali's population. Read against Rwanda's 70 percent urbanisation target for 2050, this figure exposes a structural tension addressed in Section 2, Cross-Cutting Themes, of this report.

- Civil society presentations provided the symposium's most ground-level perspectives. CCI Tanzania presented a community-implemented simplified sewerage model and directly called on academics to research it. A qualitative study of women street vendors in Kigali found that governance responses combined eviction, confiscation, and arrest with limited socioeconomic support.
- Day 2 breakout groups produced three consensus recommendations on holistic planning, community-oriented implementation, and practical research.
- Day 3 governance discussions advanced LEARN's charter, Advisory Council, and membership structure and endorsed a cross-cutting comparative publication on in-situ community upgrading across East Africa.



2. Cross-Cutting Themes

The following five themes recurred across multiple sessions on all three days. They are presented here as a consolidated analytical layer above the chronological proceedings record in Sections 5 through 7, so that a reader does not need to extract them manually from individual sessions:

Theme 1: The Urbanisation-Informality Contradiction

Rwanda's National Urbanisation Policy targets 70 percent urbanisation by 2050. WRI's spatial analysis found that approximately 65 percent of Kigali's population currently lives in informal settlements. These two figures, both presented during the symposium, describe a single structural condition: a national strategy oriented toward majority formal urbanisation is proceeding without a resolved approach to the majority of the urban population already living outside the formal systems that the strategy assumes. This is the most consequential finding supported by the symposium's own evidence, and LEARN's research agenda should treat it as a primary research question rather than a background fact.

Theme 2: Urban Growth and the Land It Consumes

A direct audience question on Day 1 asked how agricultural land would be protected as Rwanda pursues its 70 percent urbanisation target. The question remains unanswered. Read alongside Theme 1, this exposes a second structural trade-off: a land-scarce, food security-sensitive country pursuing majority urbanisation by 2050 faces direct competition between urban expansion and agricultural land retention. The symposium identified both components of this trade-off without resolving it. LEARN should commission research that explicitly names and quantifies this trade-off, connecting it to the National Urbanisation Policy's land use provisions.

Theme 3: Speed Versus Social Fabric in Community Upgrading

Rwanda's Mpazi project and the comparative Medellín PRIMED case (1993–2003) together demonstrate that in-situ upgrading outcomes depend on the pace. Where the government and community move together, infrastructure delivery and social fabric preservation can proceed jointly. Where enforcement accelerates physical delivery ahead of community organisation, the social fabric that upgrading is meant to protect is put at risk. This tension applies directly to the Nyabugogo and Kanogo wetland rehabilitation projects observed during the Day 2 field visit, where the question of what happened to households previously farming the wetlands remained unresolved.

Theme 4: Co-Creation as Principle Versus Co-Creation as Demonstrated Practice

Co-creation was named as a value in nearly every session across all three days but was demonstrated with specific evidence in only a small number of cases: CCI Tanzania's community-implemented Simplified Sewerage model and the Kenyan case of community-led land consolidation followed by government permitting support. Elsewhere, including Rwanda's own land readjustment and rehousing programmes, co-creation was asserted as a design principle without the same level of evidence for community-originated decision-making.

Closing the distance between principle and practice is LEARN's central institutional challenge, not only a feature of the cities it studies.

Theme 5: Grounded Evidence Versus Imported Concepts

The symposium explicitly rejected faddism, the pursuit of imported urban development buzzwords such as smart cities or resilient cities, in favour of evidence grounded in local realities. The LEARN

Secretariat's own framing, that the network belongs in the grey area between master plans and pavement, between theory and practice, between formal and informal, captures this position. Art, culture, and heritage were named by LEARN as one of five core research areas during the symposium's opening session but received no dedicated session-level treatment across the three days. This is recorded here as a programming gap for LEARN's future attention, not as an editorial omission from this report.



Visit to Nyandungu Eco-Park

3. Policy Implications for Rwanda's National Urbanisation Policy

Rwanda's 2025 National Urbanisation Policy, presented by MININFRA on Day 1 (Section 5.3), provides the policy framework against which the evidence presented at this symposium should be read. Three implications follow directly from these proceedings.

First, the policy's 70 percent urbanisation target by 2050 is being pursued without a published definition of affordable housing specific to the Rwandan context, relying instead on the UN-Habitat standard. Given the scale of housing delivery the target implies, a nationally grounded affordability definition is a prerequisite for equitable implementation, not a refinement.

Second, the policy's land use provisions have not, on the evidence presented at this symposium, been reconciled with the scale of informality WRI's analysis identifies in Kigali, nor with the agricultural land protection question raised by the audience and left unanswered. Both gaps sit within the policy's

implementation period and should be addressed through dedicated technical working groups rather than being left to individual project-level resolution.

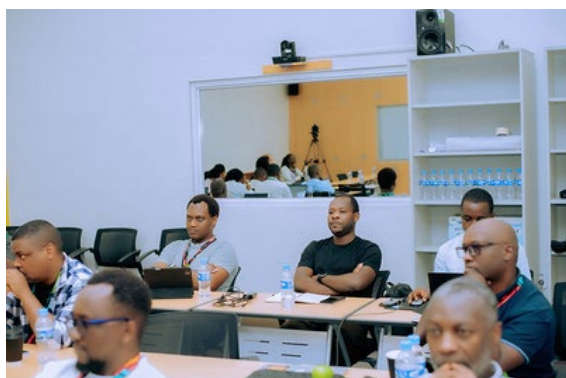
Third, Rwanda's land governance achievements, including the National Land Authority's registration system and the Participatory Land Readjustment model, represent genuine policy successes upon which the National Urbanisation Policy can be directly built. LEARN's recommended comparative publication on in-situ community upgrading (Annex II) should be positioned explicitly as evidence intended to inform the policy's ongoing implementation and not only as an academic output.



Dr. Mbathi giving an overview of the LEARN network.

4. Workshop Proceedings

Sections 5 through 7 record the symposium proceedings chronologically by day. Section 2 provides the consolidated cross-cutting analysis; the sections that follow provide the underlying session-level record.





Participants of the LEARN Symposium 2026

5. Day One Proceedings | Wednesday 03 June 2026

5.1 Welcome Address and Opening Remarks

UR-CST Representative (on behalf of the Principal); Dean, School of Architecture and Built Environment

The symposium opened with formal welcome remarks delivered on behalf of the principal of the University of Rwanda College of Science and Technology. Both addresses emphasised that the symposium theme of urban futures and sustainable neighbourhood transformation aligns directly with Rwanda's national urban development priorities and that the diversity of participants assembled represents precisely the kind of multi-stakeholder knowledge environment that Rwanda's urban challenges require. The University of Rwanda co-hosted this symposium not as a formality but out of an institutional commitment to producing knowledge that is useful, not merely published.



Prof. Kabera, UR-CST Representative

5.2 Introduction to LEARN: Key Themes, Overview, and Achievements

Dr. Musyimi Mbathi, LEARN East Africa Secretary; Prof. Wim van den Doel, LDE Global

Dr. Musyimi Mbathi introduced LEARN as an international multidisciplinary community driving impactful research on urban issues in East Africa. He presented the network's five research areas: urban resilience, cities and climate change, informality, art culture and heritage, and digitalisation, and described LEARN's mission to set the foundation for urban futures through collaborative, co-produced knowledge. He highlighted Rwanda's geographical context as giving it particular significance as a centre of urban development in the region.



Dr. Mbathi, LEARN East Africa Secretary

Dr. Mbathi described LEARN's engagement with college learners in community outreach, where students were encouraged to produce knowledge products, including journal articles, to inform government decisions regarding city transformation. He urged continued and deepened exposure of students to urban development issues, positioning students as current knowledge producers rather than merely future ones. The report notes that no dedicated student or youth voice appeared as a presenter or panellist across the three-day programme; LEARN's stated commitment to student engagement is not yet matched by direct student representation in the symposium format itself.

Dr. Mbathi raised the substantive question that anchored discussions throughout the day: how does land connect to all five of LEARN's research areas? His answer was collective action by all stakeholders. Land was framed not as one topic among five but as the connective tissue running through urban resilience, climate change, informality, heritage and digitalisation simultaneously. This framing did not, in the proceedings as recorded, extend to a substantive discussion of art, culture, and heritage specifically; the theme was named but not developed further in this or subsequent sessions (see Section 2, Theme 5).

Prof. Wim van den Doel examined what makes knowledge networks work, offering the assessment that networking is easier said than done, and that shared purpose, sustained investment of time and credibility, equitable distribution of research labour and recognition, and governance structures that prevent powerful actors from capturing the agenda are essential ingredients for network sustainability. Audience questions covered how LEARN raises funds, how it translates student engagement into practical solutions, and whether the institutional informality of East African Community structures presents obstacles to LEARN's regional ambitions.

For LEARN's own institutional development, this session's significance lies less in its content summary than in establishing the standard, articulated here and returned to on Day 3, that network value must be demonstrated rather than assumed.

5.3 High-Level Keynote: Rwanda's Urban Development Priorities

Madame Esther (presenting on behalf of Dr. Jacques), Ministry of Infrastructure (MININFRA)

MININFRA presented Rwanda's 2025 National Urbanisation Policy, framing urbanisation as essential across all aspects of life. Rwanda targets 70 percent urbanisation by 2050 and 39 percent by 2030, with Kigali at 86.9 percent urban driving national economic transition, and secondary cities are expected to absorb significant population growth. The presentation covered Rwanda's integrated urban policy instruments: the Cleaner Transport Mobility Initiative, nature-based solutions including wetland rehabilitation, digital building permit platforms (KUBAKA), one-stop centres for land registration and titling, and the Green City Kigali initiative.



Madame Esther, MININFRA Representative

MININFRA noted that urban housing is not about houses but about liveable communities integrated into Rwanda's broader development. Audience questions surfaced important gaps: Rwanda still relies on the UN-Habitat definition of affordable housing rather than a nationally grounded standard; balanced cooperation between government and academia exists, but a great deal more is still needed; public-private partnerships were proposed for addressing housing cost challenges; and a direct question about how the government measures whether a neighbourhood has been upgraded enough in terms of inclusivity and equity was not fully resolved. This session's data, particularly the 70 percent urbanisation target, is the figure against which WRI's 65 percent informality finding (Section 6.2) should be read; see Section 2, Theme 1 for the consolidated analysis.

5.4 Overview of the Urban Research and Collaboration Programme

Dr. Musyimi Mbathi, LEARN East Africa Secretary; Prof. Wim van den Doel, LDE Global

Dr. Musyimi Mbathi presented the institutional framework within which LEARN operates, situating East African cities' urban trajectories within the global picture and underscoring the importance of research partnerships that connect global and local knowledge. The programme's focus on transdisciplinary, North-South collaborative research was underlined as a necessary corrective to models in which African urban contexts serve primarily as data sources for outputs produced elsewhere in the Global North. This session functioned as an institutional framing for the symposium's broader North-South partnership questions, which resurfaced in the Day 1 audience discussion on LEARN's funding and institutional informality (Section 5.2) and in the Day 3 governance session on partnership agreements (Section 7.2).



Collaborative discussions shaping practical solutions for sustainable urban development.

5.5 Setting the Scene: Urban Research Networks in Africa

Prof. Shuaib Lwasa, Erasmus University Rotterdam

Prof. Shuaib Lwasa facilitated an interactive session that examined what participants expected from LEARN as a network. After stakeholders articulated their expectations, Prof. Lwasa reversed the conversation with the question that became the intellectual turning point of Day 1: What do you bring to this network, more than what you take away?

Responses pointed toward bringing theory into practice, producing politically neutral evidence, and strengthening collaboration between academia and communities. Prof. Lwasa offered four conditions for network effectiveness: a clear and shared field of interest, recognition of the value of collective work, genuine voluntary engagement, and sustained participation over time. The session also asked how

participants envision East African urban communities in 25 years, with responses converging on the need for evidence grounded in lived experience and produced in genuine partnership with communities.



Building connections across institutions to advance research, policy, and practice.

5.6 Urban Development and Transformations: Presentations from Rwandese Partners

Facilitator: Dr. John Mugisha

Assoc. Prof. Jean Pierre Bizimana, University of Rwanda: Presented the land readjustment methodology and process in Rwanda, including the Nunga project. Land readjustment has been applied extensively across Kigali, demonstrating community mobilisation and adaptive governance capacity. Challenges identified include inadequate site location, insufficient space at some sites, and land becoming less affordable after readjustment due to rising values. This challenge connects directly to the speed-versus-social-fabric tension described in Section 2, Theme 3.

Rwanda Housing Authority (DG RHA): Highlighted smart and digital governance innovations in improving urban spatial planning and housing delivery, including public-private partnership mechanisms to address the high cost of urban housing.

National Land Authority (Alexis Rutangwa, NLA): Presented outcomes of Rwanda's land governance reform: 12 million parcels registered, 80 percent reduction in land disputes, 42 percent increase in land values, over 2 million women as landowners, and a land mortgage market exceeding

20 billion US dollars. Rwanda's land governance system is sufficiently advanced to serve as a genuine regional learning case for LEARN Network partners.

City of Kigali (Muhirwa Solange): Presented the Mpazi Participatory Neighbourhood Design as a case study of in-situ housing upgrading. As of May 2025, 688 units had been delivered and 172 families had been allocated homes. Residents remain in their communities, children remain in their schools, and ground floors accommodate businesses. The model is being replicated in Nyabisindu, Rwanda. Mpazi is the symposium's clearest demonstration of the pace-and-social-fabric balance discussed in Section 2, Theme 3



Presenting innovative approaches to sustainable urban development

5.7 Urban Transformation in Rwanda: Community and Neighbourhood-Level Experiences

Facilitator: Dr. John Mugisha

Rwanda Urban Planning Institute (Eng. Munyaburanga Vivien, RUPI): Presented RUPI's role as a technical bridge between national policy and neighbourhood-scale planning, and the challenges of translating the 2025 National Urbanisation Policy and Kigali Master Plan 2050 into operational neighbourhood plans across Rwanda's varied contexts.

Urban Wetland Management (Kambogo Ildephonse): Addressed Kigali's wetlands as sites of ecological function, climate resilience, and informal residences. The Nyandungu Eco-Park was presented as the model outcome: 121 hectares of restored wetland, 17,000 trees planted across 55 indigenous species, over 100 bird species, 6,000 visitors monthly, and 4,000 green jobs generated specifically at the Nyandungu site. This figure of 4,000 jobs applies only to the Nyandungu site and is distinct from the separate 100,000-job target of the five-wetland programme (Section 6.4). The challenges include pollution control, ongoing restoration demands, and limited research.

Digital Ecosystem for Real Estate and Urban Services (CEO, TERRA): TERRA's digital platform for real estate and urban services was presented, illustrating how digital tools are reshaping building permits, land transactions, and service delivery. Questions regarding equitable access for informal settlement residents were raised.



Exploring innovative ideas to address urban challenges.

5.8 Audience Questions to Rwandese Presenters

Seven substantive questions were directed at the Rwandan panel collectively following the afternoon sessions. Together, they reveal the most contested dimensions of Rwanda's urban transformation narrative.

- How will Rwanda meet the needs of the projected 70 percent urban population by 2050?
- How does the government manage expectations between landlords and tenants in the context of urban upgrading?
- How was land readjustment handled across Rwanda's varying geographical contexts?
- What is the definition of land registration in Rwanda?
- What has been the real community experience of land readjustment beyond policy design?
- To what extent has co-creation actually shaped community development on the ground?
- How are agricultural lands being protected as cities expand toward the 70 percent urbanisation target?

The question of agricultural land protection has not received a complete answer. For one of Africa's most densely settled countries, this carries long-term implications for food security and is addressed as a standalone cross-cutting theme in Section 2, Theme 2, with a corresponding action point in Section 8 of this paper.



Interactive sessions fostering peer learning

6. Day Two Proceedings | Thursday 04 June 2026

6.1 Thematic Exchange and Policy Dialogue: Urban Policies in East Africa

Facilitator: Dr. John Mugisha; Panel convenor: Prof. Musyimi Mbathi

A regional panel brought together representatives from Kenya, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Uganda, Burundi, and Rwanda to exchange perspectives on the challenges of urban policy. Common challenges across all countries included the gap between policy ambition and local implementation capacity, the persistent scale of informality in all major cities, financing constraints for affordable housing and green infrastructure, and weak linkages between the research evidence and policy decisions. Rwanda's land registration system was noted as significantly more advanced than most regional comparators. The panel affirmed that East African cities have more to learn from each other than from imported planning models, directly echoing the rejection of faddism articulated on Day 1 and in the LEARN Secretariat's closing communication (Section 2, Theme 5).



Strengthening partnerships through dialogue and shared learning.

6.2 Presentations from Multilateral Agencies and Development Partners

Facilitator: Dr. John Mugisha

Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI): Presented work on green urban development financing, including carbon market mechanisms and green infrastructure investment relevant to the financing gaps identified on Day 1.

World Bank: Outlined the 100-million-US-dollar Rwanda Urban Mobility Improvement Project targeting dedicated bus lanes, electric buses, improved pedestrian and cycling infrastructure, and a Nyabugogo transit hub serving up to 180,000 passengers daily by 2030. The Bank emphasised the need to align infrastructure investment with community-level upgrading.

World Resources Institute (Marc Manyifika, WRI Rwanda): Presented WRI's Rwanda Cities Programme, structured around four flagship areas: Regenerate, Connect, Thrive, and Influence. WRI's 30-year spatial analysis found that informal settlements house approximately 65 percent of Kigali's population with high flood and landslide exposure. This finding, read against MININFRA's 70 percent urbanisation target (Section 5.3), is the basis of the urbanisation-informality contradiction discussed in Section 2, Theme 1. WRI established a Rwanda office in 2024 with a 2026–2035 strategy, following a People-Nature-Climate systems approach.

6.3 Civil Society Presentations

Centre for Community Initiatives / CCI (Dr. Tim Ndezi, Tanzania): Presented CCI's work across 8 Tanzanian cities supporting the Tanzania Urban Poor Federation of 20,000 members. The core innovation was Simplified Sewerage, a low-cost, community-implemented sanitation system demonstrated at Vingunguti in Dar es Salaam, which also generates biogas for household cooking. Dr. Ndezi explicitly called on academics to research and document simplified sewerage solutions, a direct invitation to LEARN's research agenda and a concrete example of co-creation as demonstrated practice (Section 2, Theme 4).



Dr. Tim Ndezi, Tanzania

SDI and Women Network Rwanda: SDI presented participatory community profiling and savings group models as evidence that communities are actively organising rather than waiting for formal planning. The Women Network Rwanda highlighted women's specific vulnerability to displacement, insecure tenure, and exclusion from urban governance, calling for gender-disaggregated approaches to community upgrading.



kilion nyambuga, SDI Kenya

Research on Women Street Vendors (Marie Claire Uwamahoro): A qualitative study of women street vendors in Kigali found that governance responses combine disciplinary mechanisms, including eviction, confiscation, and arrest, with limited socioeconomic support. The study placed a human face on what urban governance looks like from the ground up and stands as the symposium's most direct evidence of the gap between policy ambition and lived experience, as named in Section 2, Theme 1.



Marie Claire Uwamahoro

6.4 Nyandungu Eco-Park: From Degraded Wetland to Urban Eco-Tourism

Kambogo Ildephonse

A presentation traced the transformation of the Nyandungu wetland from a site damaged by sand mining, quarrying, and overgrazing to Rwanda's first restored urban eco-park: 121 hectares, 17,000 trees across 55 indigenous species, over 100 bird species, 6,000 visitors monthly, and 4,000 green jobs generated at the Nyandungu site specifically, managed in a public-private partnership between the Government of Rwanda and QA Avenue Solutions.

The operational challenges identified for LEARN attention include pollution control, ongoing restoration demands, and limited research on the park's ecological performance and community impact. Nyandungu serves as the model for a separate, larger five-wetland rehabilitation programme covering 500 ha across Kigali, including the Nyabugogo and Kanogo sites visited on the afternoon of Day 2 (Section 6.6). This larger programme targets 100,000 green jobs across its full scope. The 4,000 figure applies only to Nyandungu and should not be combined with or confused with the 100,000 programme-wide targets.

6.5 Breakout Groups: Building Resilient Communities Differently

Facilitator: Dr. John Mugisha

Two breakout groups worked around the question: how and what can we do differently to build resilient communities and neighbourhoods? Both groups converged on three recommendations that were recorded as the symposium's strongest consensus outputs.

- Neighbourhood and community planning should adopt a holistic approach that integrates infrastructure, ecology, governance, and social inclusion from the design stage.
- Implementation should be community-oriented from the outset, starting with community mobilisation and champions, rather than adding consultation to pre-designed plans.
- LEARN's research must be practical enough for communities, practitioners, and decision-makers to use.

6.6 Field Visits: Housing Programme and Land Readjustment Sites

Guide: Assoc. Prof. Jean Pierre Bizimana

Mpazi Rehousing Project: Participants visited the completed Mpazi project site. The residents interviewed expressed satisfaction with improved safety and home quality. Ravine reconstruction, green spaces, and commercial ground floors were directly observed. The model is being replicated in Nyabisindu, Rwanda.

Nyabugogo and Kanogo Wetland Rehabilitation: Participants observed rehabilitation works at approximately 67 percent completion across the 500-hectare, five-wetland programme referenced in Section 6.4. The question of what happened to people who previously farmed the wetland areas before

the restoration law changed, and whether they are among the programme's 100,000 green job targets, was raised and not fully resolved. This remains an open action item (see Section 8).



Mpazi Rehousing Project

6.7 Evening Dinner and Informal Networking

Facilitator: Dr. Ernest Uwayezu

An evening dinner and informal networking event were held at the Grand Legacy Hotel, facilitating relationship building between participants across institutional and national contexts.

7. Day Three Proceedings | Friday 05 June 2026

7.1 Recap: Key Takeaways from Days 1 and 2

Constant Mahame, Rapporteur

The Day 3 opening integrated take-aways from both preceding days into a thematic synthesis organised around the threads developed in Section 2 of this report: the urbanisation-informality contradiction, urban growth and the land it consumes, speed versus social fabric in community upgrading, co-creation as principle versus practice, and the challenge of defining what LEARN brings to the East African urban research landscape that existing actors do not already provide.

7.2 Networking, Informal Engagement, and Call for Position Papers

A dedicated session for networking and collaboration exploration invited participants to build research partnerships, identify shared interests, and commit to collaborative activities beyond the symposium itself. A call for position papers was issued, inviting submissions on research themes relevant to LEARN's agenda. Specific position paper themes and the formal submission timeline were not finalised within the symposium programme and remain to be communicated by the LEARN Secretariat; this is recorded as an open item in Section 8 of this report.



Collaborative exercises designed to strengthen practical solutions 7.3 Highlights and Key Takeaways from the Symposium

Dr. Musyimi Mbathi presented the key highlights of the symposium over three days. Prof. Dr. Shuaib Lwasa addressed the way forward, returning directly to the question he had posed on Day 1, what does

LEARN bring to the table, and invited participants to reflect on what each person and institution would do differently as a result of what they heard, debated, and committed to in Kigali. Prof. Lwasa noted that the grey area between master plans and pavement, between theory and practice, between formal and informal, is where the real city lives and where LEARN belongs, a framing this report adopts as its organising metaphor across Sections 1, 2, and 7.

7.4 Closing Remarks and Vote of Thanks

Dr. Elsie Onsongo; Dr. Ernest Uwayezu; Vice-Dean, School of Architecture and Built Environment, University of Rwanda

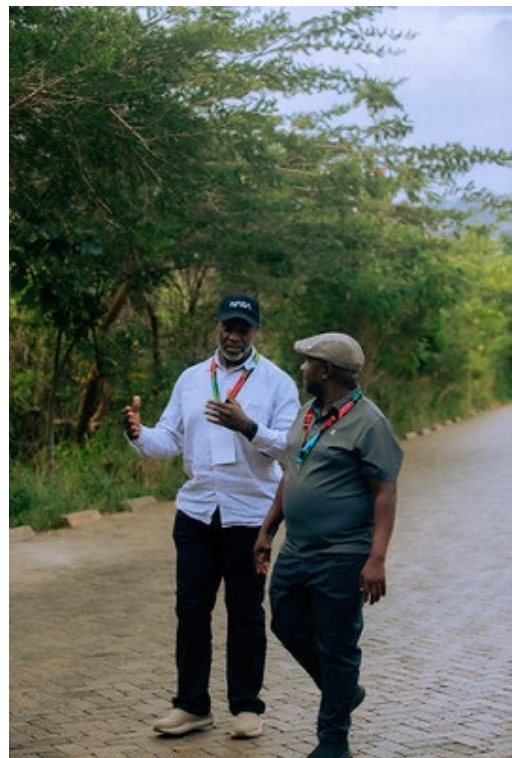
The closing remarks acknowledged three days of rigorous, honest, and forward-looking dialogue. Dr. Uwayezu, Dean of the School of Architecture and Built Environment, reaffirmed the University of Rwanda's commitment to research that produces something useful, not just something published, and called on all participants to carry the symposium's insights back to their institutions, cities, and communities as a mandate for concrete change. Collective gratitude was expressed to the University of Rwanda for its warmth and hospitality as a co-host, to all speakers and moderators for their honesty and depth, and to every participant who asked a hard question, shared a raw insight, or listened deeply.

7.5 Field Visit: Nyandungu Eco-Park

Guide: Assoc. Prof. Jean Pierre Bizimana

The afternoon field visit to the Nyandungu Eco-Park allowed participants to observe urban ecological restoration on a large scale. The park's combination of biodiversity restoration, community access, recreational infrastructure, and green job creation (4,000 jobs at this site specifically) was directly experienced. Participants noted its potential as both a research site and a replication model for the larger five-wetland programme and observed that the limited research challenge identified by the park's presenter (Section 6.4) represents a direct opportunity for LEARN engagement.





Participants at Nyandungu Eco-Park

8. Action Points and Next Steps

The following table consolidates the symposium's forward commitments with responsible parties and timelines, where these were specified during the proceedings. Where ownership or timing was not specified, this is marked TBD (to be determined) for completion by the LEARN Secretariat prior to the final circulation.

No.	Action	Responsible Party	Timeline
1	Establish LEARN's governance structures, including the Advisory Council, LEARN Committee, country/regional representatives, and membership framework, as agreed upon in the Day 3 charter session.	LEARN Secretariat / Advisory Council (to be elected)	TBD – Secretariat to confirm
2	Commission the cross-cutting comparative publication on in-situ community upgrading across East African countries, drawing on the Medellín PRIMED and Kenyan community land consolidation cases.	LEARN research coordination function (lead to be confirmed)	Constant Mahame
3	Commission dedicated research on agricultural land protection under Rwanda's 70 percent urbanisation target, addressing the Day 1 audience question left unresolved (Section 5.8, Section 2 Theme 2).	TBD – no owner specified during proceedings	TBD
4	Coordinate the development of fundable research proposals targeting one or two cross-cutting issues from the symposium, referencing the EAGER trans-net model, for submission to relevant funders.	LEARN Secretariat with academic partners	TBD – Secretariat to confirm
5	Establish ongoing cross-city knowledge exchanges between Kigali, Nairobi, Kampala, Dar es Salaam, and other East African cities represented at the symposium.	LEARN Secretariat	TBD – Secretariat to confirm
6	Finalise and communicate the position paper themes and submission timeline (Section 7.3).	LEARN Secretariat	TBD – Secretariat to confirm

7	Share the symposium report with all participants and LEARN partners, incorporating the participant list (Annex I).	LEARN Secretariat/ Rapporteur	Upon receipt of participant list from Secretariat
8	Encourage pilot projects that translate symposium recommendations into implementable community-level actions in member cities.	LEARN member institutions	TBD – Secretariat to confirm
9	Investigate and document the status of households previously farming the Nyabugogo/Kanogo wetland areas, including their inclusion in the five-wetland programme's 100,000 green jobs target (Section 6.6).	TBD – no owner specified during proceedings	TBD
10	Develop a nationally grounded definition of affordable housing for Rwanda, addressing the gap identified in Sections 5.3 and 3.	MININFRA, with research support from LEARN academic partners	TBD – Secretariat to confirm

Notes: Items marked TBD reflect genuine gaps in the proceedings record, rather than omissions by the rapporteur. The LEARN Secretariat is invited to complete these fields prior to the final circulation of this report.

Annex I: Recommendations and Suggestions from Day 3

The following recommendations were formally presented during the Day 3 governance session:

On Governance and Identity

- Clarify the recognition of each LEARN member before the charter is finalised.
- Establish a representative network for each country or region.
- LEARN should have a clear and distinct institutional identity.
- Elect an Advisory Council and LEARN committee with defined mandates.
- Define membership criteria and confirm no membership fees.
- Strengthen academia-industry collaborations as part of the LEARN model.
- Clarify how individual researchers can enter into partnership agreements with LEARN.

On Research and Knowledge Production

- Encourage pilot projects to implement LEARN research outputs from theory into practice.
- Coordinate the development of fundable research proposals on one or two cross-cutting issues from the symposium.
- Increase LEARN's focus on digital transformation as both a research theme and network tool.
- Build strong and sustainable partnerships between LEARN and institutional members grounded in equitable co-ownership.
- Commission a cross-cutting comparative publication examining in-situ community upgrading across East African countries, drawing on case studies from each participating country. The publication should draw on international models, including the PRIMED programme in Medellín, Colombia (1993–2003), which demonstrated a decade-long approach to incremental upgrading in which the government provided infrastructure step by step while communities preserved their cultural identity and social organisation, and a Kenyan case in which communities collectively raised funds, purchased consolidated land, and received government support in obtaining building permits. The publication aims to produce evidence-based policy recommendations for LEARN to influence urban policy across the region.

Annex II: About This Publication

This report documents the proceedings of the second LDE-East Africa Research Network (LEARN) Symposium, held from 03 to 05 June 2026 in Kigali, Rwanda. The symposium was co-hosted by the University of Rwanda and organised by LDE Global. The report was prepared by Constant Mahame,

Rapporteur, University of Rwanda, School of Architecture and Built Environment, Department of Construction Economics and Management.

Annex III: Pictures

<https://flic.kr/s/aHBqjCWx4a>

Let's Continue LEARN-ing!
We express our gratitude to all symposium participants, presenters, and organisers.



LEARN 