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NAIROBI FLOOD RESILIENCE ROUNDTABLE

Advancing Multi-Stakeholder Action for Sustainable Urban Planning

From Deliberation to Decisive Action

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

19TH MARCH, 2026

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OVERVIEW

The **Nairobi Flood Resilience Roundtable**, held on **Thursday, 19 March 2026** at the Professional Centre in Nairobi's Central Business District, was convened by the **Kenya Institute of Planners (KIP)** in collaboration with **UN-Habitat**, bringing together senior national and county government officials, technical agencies, development partners and built environment professionals to address the escalating urban flooding crisis in Nairobi.

Held in the context of recent severe flood events, the roundtable focused on **identifying practical, coordinated and immediately implementable actions to reduce risk, protect lives and safeguard critical infrastructure**. The engagement marked a deliberate shift from fragmented responses toward a **shared, multi-agency commitment** to action, anchored in planning, governance, infrastructure and sustainable financing.

2. STRATEGIC CONTEXT AND RATIONALE FOR ACTION

Urban flooding in Nairobi is a **systemic and largely human-induced challenge**, rooted in the city's historical development within a fragile wetland and riverine ecosystem, compounded by rapid unplanned urbanisation, encroachment into natural drainage systems and persistent weaknesses in enforcement and institutional coordination.

The roundtable established that the issue is **not a lack of policies or technical knowledge, but rather a failure of implementation, enforcement and alignment across institutions**. Existing planning and environmental frameworks are broadly adequate but remain underutilised and weakly enforced, while infrastructure development has been fragmented and insufficiently integrated with spatial planning and flood risk considerations.

Critically, flood risk in Nairobi is now **structurally embedded in its urban form**, requiring a shift from reactive interventions to **proactive, risk-informed and coordinated urban development**. This places spatial planning, particularly the preparation, approval and implementation of detailed Local Physical and Land Use Development Plans, at the center of the solution, as the primary tool for aligning infrastructure investment, environmental management and disaster risk reduction.

The strategic imperative is therefore clear: **to transition decisively from analysis to implementation**, through technically grounded, institutionally coordinated and adequately financed actions that address both immediate risks and long-term urban resilience.

3. KEY MESSAGE

At its core, the Nairobi Flood Resilience Roundtable delivered a clear and compelling call to action: -

"The solutions are known. The priority now is implementation.
The urgency lies in the collective resolve to act decisively and without delay."

There was strong consensus that urban flooding in Nairobi is **fundamentally a planning and governance challenge**. It is driven by: -

i. Rapid and unplanned urbanisation, including encroachment into wetlands and riparian corridors;
ii. Weak enforcement of planning, environmental and development control regulations;
iii. Fragmented institutional mandates and limited multi-agency coordination.

While climate change exacerbates flood risks, it is not the primary cause. The Roundtable emphasized hat the path forward is pragmatic, expert-led and action-oriented, requiring immediate, medium and long-term interventions anchored in technical rigor, integrated planning and accountable governance.

4. KEY STRATEGIC INSIGHTS

1. Flood Risk is Structurally Embedded

Nairobi's ecological foundation as a wetland and riverine system makes flooding an inherent and predictable hazard. Historical and ongoing urban development has often disregarded these natural constraints.

2. Urbanisation and Environmental Degradation

Rapid, unplanned growth and encroachment into wetlands, riparian zones and green spaces have dramatically reduced natural drainage and flood absorption capacity, exacerbating flood exposure.

3. Intensifying Impacts

Climate variability is increasing the frequency, intensity and destructiveness of rainfall events. This results in loss of life, displacement, economic disruption and severe impacts on critical infrastructure, including transport networks and aviation facilities.

4. Infrastructure Deficits

Existing drainage and stormwater management systems are fragmented, outdated, and poorly maintained, limiting their effectiveness in mitigating urban floods and increasing vulnerability across the city.

5. Governance and Enforcement Failures

The flood crisis is driven primarily by human and institutional factors: fragmented mandates, weak coordination across national and county agencies and ineffective enforcement of planning, environmental and development control frameworks have amplified flood risks and constrained resilience.

6. Data and Early Warning Gaps

Flood risk mapping, geospatial datasets and early warning systems are underutilised and disconnected from operational planning, limiting anticipatory and risk-informed decision-making.

7. Vulnerable Populations

Communities in informal settlements and high-risk zones remain disproportionately exposed to flood impacts, highlighting the urgent need for risk-sensitive planning, social protection and targeted interventions.

8. Feasibility and Urgency of Action

There is a strong consensus that practical, technically sound solutions exist. The immediate priority is to transition from analysis to implementation, guided by applied research, professional standards and multi-disciplinary expertise.

5. STRATEGIC PRIORITY AREAS FOR ACTION

1. Urban Planning and Land Use Management – Uncontrolled development in riparian reserves and the lack of detailed local plans have maximised flood risk.

- Rapid mapping of flood-prone areas and strict enforcement of no-build zones in riparian buffers.
- Urgently prepare, approve and implement detailed Local Physical and Land Use Development Plans (LPLUDPs) to guide all development and anchor sectoral investments.
- Enforce zoning regulations, protect riparian corridors and wetlands, and integrate flood risk into all planning decisions.

2. Infrastructure and Stormwater Management – Nairobi's drainage is undersized, aging, and poorly maintained, often treated as a standalone function rather than part of an integrated urban system.

- Undertake immediate city-wide emergency desilting, clearance of drainage hotspots and rehabilitation.
- Develop and implement a Comprehensive Urban Drainage Master Plan aligned with spatial plans and climate projections.
- Invest in climate-resilient and integrated infrastructure systems.

3. Nature-Based and Climate Adaptation Solutions –There is a critical need to move beyond purely "grey" (engineered) infrastructure to hybrid green-grey systems that utilise wetlands and rivers as ecological infrastructure.

- Secure critical wetlands and initiate pilot green interventions such as rain gardens and bio-retention areas.
- Protect and restore urban rivers, wetlands and ecological systems.
- Mainstream ecosystem-based adaptation into all city policies and infrastructure investment planning.
- Scale up green and blue infrastructure, including sponge city approaches and hybrid grey-green systems.

4. Governance and Institutional Coordination – Fragmentation between national and county governments leads to overlapping mandates and reactive management.

- Issue clear regulatory directives to halt high-risk developments and enhance inter-agency joint enforcement.
- Strengthen enforcement of planning and environmental regulations.
- Establish a multi-agency Flood Resilience coordination framework with a legal mandate to coordinate data sharing and standard operating procedures (SOPs) across sectors.
- Institutionalise the roundtable as a permanent technical platform.
- Depoliticise planning and enhance accountability.

5. Data, Mapping, and Early Warning Systems –While data exists, it is fragmented and not effectively linked to decision-making or community response.

- Improve the timeliness and dissemination of alerts, linking them to defined evacuation and emergency action plans.
- Integrate flood risk data and geospatial mapping into planning and development control.
- Strengthen early warning systems and link them to response mechanisms.
- Establish a centralized, integrated flood data and decision-support system using AI-supported analytics and predictive modeling to shift toward anticipatory management.

6. Financing Urban Flood Resilience –Current efforts are hampered by reactive, short-term budgeting.

- Prioritise and fund bankable projects for immediate and medium-term interventions and mobilize short-term funding from government budgets and development partners.
- Leverage climate finance, public-private partnerships and innovative instruments, including securitisation, recognising flooding as a national disaster.
- Establish a dedicated Nairobi Urban Resilience Fund to support multi-year, large-scale interventions.

6. CROSS-CUTTING IMPERATIVES

1. Anchor Interventions in Robust Spatial Planning

All actions must be grounded in detailed Local Physical and Land Use Development Plans (LPLUDPs), which serve as the foundation for sectoral programmes, development approvals and infrastructure investments.

2. Align with Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) Frameworks

Ensure consistency with the Nairobi City DRR Strategy and national disaster management systems, embedding flood resilience and climate adaptation into planning and implementation.

3. Technical Oversight and Multidisciplinary Expertise

Institutionalise technical review panels for major projects, leveraging the expertise of hydrologists, urban planners, engineers and environmental specialists to ensure adherence to professional standards, climate-resilient design and evidence-based solutions.

4. Strengthen Governance, Coordination and Enforcement

Enhance institutional coordination across national and county agencies, reinforce regulatory compliance and build capacity to enforce zoning, land use and environmental regulations effectively.

5. Promote Community Engagement and Behavioural Change

Engage residents, particularly in informal settlements, through civic education, participatory planning and co-designed interventions to foster responsible waste management, flood preparedness and active local stewardship.

6. Data-Driven, Anticipatory Decision-Making

Utilise integrated flood risk mapping, geospatial data and early warning systems to guide proactive, risk-informed planning and operational decisions.

7. Accountability and Adaptive Learning

Implement a robust Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) framework with transparent public reporting to track progress, measure impact and enable adaptive management of flood resilience interventions.

Photo 1: Roundtable proceedings on March 19th 2026

7. IMPLEMENTATION ROADMAP: IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

1. Policy Advisory Brief

- Prepare and issue a comprehensive brief consolidating the Roundtable's findings, recommendations and strategic priorities to inform national and county leadership for urgent decision-making.

2. Multi-Agency Coordination Framework

- Formalise the Nairobi Urban Flood Resilience Taskforce to break institutional silos, define clear mandates and ensure coordinated implementation across national and county agencies, technical institutions, and development partners.

3. Project Identification and Prioritisation

- Map and prioritise high-impact, bankable projects for immediate investment, including drainage rehabilitation, river and wetland restoration and early warning system enhancements, ensuring alignment with spatial and sectoral plans.

4. Technical Consultations and Standards

- Convene follow-up expert-level consultations to refine engineering designs, climate-resilient infrastructure standards and nature-based interventions, providing practical guidance for project implementation.

5. Standing Technical Platform

- Institutionalise the Roundtable as a permanent, action-oriented technical forum to track implementation, monitor progress, update standards, and ensure accountability through transparent reporting and adaptive learning.

8. CONCLUSION

The Roundtable marked a **decisive shift from diagnosis to action**, emphasizing that Nairobi's flooding crisis is fundamentally a **planning and governance challenge**, not solely a climatic one. The technical solutions are well-established, feasible and tested; the remaining **imperative is the city's collective resolve to act decisively and without delay**.

Ultimately, **safeguarding lives, protecting critical infrastructure and securing Nairobi's future as a resilient, inclusive and livable city** depends on the city's ability to transition urgently from **knowledge to action, from plans to implementation and from fragmented responses to coordinated resilience-building**.

Beyond addressing the immediate crisis, the Roundtable advocates for **institutionalising a proactive, collaborative and multi-agency approach to urban flood resilience**, ensuring that Nairobi's development trajectory is **safe, sustainable and climate-resilient for generations to come**.

The call is unequivocal: the solutions are known; the priority is **immediate, coordinated and technically rigorous action**.

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