

Opportunities to Advance Clean Air and Climate Action in Cape Town

Summary for Decisionmakers

The Cityzens for Clean Air initiative seeks to amplify youth voices to advance evidence-informed action on clean air and healthy public space across the African continent, including Cape Town.

Using an open call for applications, young people aged 18-35 years applied to be citizen scientists and "Run Leaders". In Cape Town, eight young people were selected and trained. On 30th July 2022, the Run Leaders were joined by over 100 runners whom they recruited and took to the streets of Cape Town to run seven designated 5-15km routes and collect data. The routes were designed to capture the diverse socio-economic spectrum across the city. During the runs, they collected data on air quality using wearable sensors. Using a bespoke mobile application, citizen scientists also captured multimedia (photo, audio, video, text) data on aspects of the built environment that influence health and perceived sources of polluted or clean air encountered during the run.

This briefing offers a summary of key results and makes recommendations for how the City of Cape Town can become a leading player in air quality, youth engagement, and climate action.

Key Findings

There are large inequities in clean air across different areas.

For example, Khayelitsha had the greatest diversity in air quality, ranging from moderate, unhealthy, very unhealthy, unhealthy for sensitive groups and hazardous air quality compared to Seapoint and Greenpoint.

Residential areas like Kenilworth, Claremont and Kalk Bay, had relatively good and moderate air quality, while Seapoint, close to the busy main road, showed some levels of unhealthy air for sensitive groups.

Young people are motivated and eager to support clean air action in their neighbourhoods, but don't have clear, accessible opportunities to do so.

Over 200 people participated in the #CityzensforCleanAir running events organised by youth leaders between July and October, and hundreds more are expected to join future runs. The energy unleashed by the Cityzens initiative shows the untapped energy of young people to help improve their city and neighbourhood.

Improving data access increases public engagement.

Access to quality data, complemented by multimedia health and climate risk data, increases citizens' awareness, enfranchises the public, and motivates public engagement and support for clean air and climate policy agendas.

The fight for the liveability of Africa will take place how we design and manage our cities and town - we have an opportunity to do it right and put best evidence-based planning at the heart of forging the African dream.

Roland, youth citizen scientist, Cape Town

How Cape Town Decisionmakers Can Take Action

1

Cape Town citizens have real-time access to data about the air we breathe.

Recommendations:

- Create a network of low-cost, community-based air quality sensors distributed across city neighbourhoods, with open-source, real-time data access for the public.
- Make current air quality data open to the public and easily accessible, so residents check real-time.

2

Young people have a say in the decisions that affect our air and future.

Recommendations:

- Establish a participatory decision making mechanism that includes young people from diverse areas of Cape Town on where air quality sensors go, what interventions happen as a result of the data, and how the results are shared with the public in a timely manner.

3

Cape Town is a climate resilient city that helps – not harms – our health.

Recommendations:

- Cape Town joins the eleven other cities that have signed the C40 African Cities for Clean Air pledge and sets goals to achieve the pledge.
- Make current air quality data open to the public and easily accessible, so residents check real-time.

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Learn more and access the full findings for Cape Town:

