

[LOGIN/SIGN UP TO SAVE](#)

Case Studies and Best Practice Examples May 2022

Freetown's highly replicable way of self-financing urban reforestation

[Adapting to Climate Change](#)[Finance and Economics](#)[Spotlight On: Urban Climate Finance](#)Author(s): **C40 Cities Climate Leadership Group, C40 Knowledge Hub, Eric Hubbard, City of Freetown**Featured Region(s): **Africa**Featured Cities: **Freetown**

#*FreetownTheTreetown* is the Sierra Leonean capital's campaign to plant and grow a million trees by the end of 2022. It prioritises areas at risk of landslide, as well as riverbanks and the low-income areas most in need of regreening. By taking a community ownership approach and using blended sources of finance and digital innovation, Freetown has developed a replicable, sustainable financing model for urban nature-based solutions. Here, Technical Director of the #*FreetownTheTreeTown* campaign Eric Hubbard and his team share their advice for peers in other cities – especially those that are under-resourced.

What has Freetown achieved?

Freetown, Sierra Leone, is among the world's雨iest cities. We have also experienced rapid tree loss in recent years, estimated at some 555 hectares – or 500,000-plus trees – annually since 2011. The national government oversees the legal framework governing urban greening and land use, limiting Freetown's options for curbing tree loss and requiring reforestation. Heavy rains, coupled with this deforestation, have resulted in devastating landslides, including an event in 2017 which claimed nearly 1,000 lives.¹

#*FreetownTheTreetown* is Mayor Yvonne Aki-Sawyerr's campaign, linked to the [Transform Freetown](#) strategy, to reforest the city and surrounding areas to reverse tree loss and reduce such disaster risks. Our

overall goal is to increase canopy cover by 50% from 2018 levels by the end of 2022.  English

is a simple, eye-catching target, but delivering the green infrastructure required may take more than a million.

In the first two years since its launch in January 2020, 560,000 trees have been planted, digitally tracked and ‘tokenised’, with 578 hectares of urban land in and around Freetown restored. We are targeting the tree planting strategically in different areas for different purposes:

- To improve the equitable distribution of trees and green space, 35% of areas targeted for new trees or vegetation are informal settlements that currently have low coverage.
- Planting by roadsides, schools and in residential areas (totalling almost 165 hectares to date) aims to reduce heat stress and improve air quality.
- Planting in Freetown’s water catchment and greenbelt (104 hectares) aims to improve water security.
- Planting in the upper water catchment and on high slopes around Freetown (280 hectares) aims to reduce the risk of flash flooding and landslides.
- Mangrove reforestation (32 hectares) aims to reduce coastal erosion and flooding.





English

As well as planting new trees, #*FreetownTheTreetown* is helping to discourage environmental harmful practices, such as sand mining, and to reduce deforestation and mangrove destruction in targeted areas. The full ecosystem services from the trees planted during the initial three-year campaign will come later, around 2030, once they are more established. There has already been a discernible reduction in flooding and landslide risk as a result of planting in the upper catchment areas.

The campaign has also directly or indirectly created over 1,000 green jobs along the value chain, from workers in tree nurseries to community growers – of whom 80% are youths and 48% are women.

Freetown's leading innovation, however, is the financing approach we have developed.

How does #*FreetownTheTreetown* fit into Freetown's climate action planning?

Freetown has established a Climate Action Standing Committee to guide climate mitigation and adaptation policy. It is in the process of finalising an inaugural Climate Action Plan (CAP) (likely to be launched in late 2022) and an Urban Forestry Strategy, with specific tree-planting and urban greening guidelines. The #*FreetownTheTreetown* campaign pre-dates these plans, but has been integrated into the adaptation strategy in the CAP, alongside related measures such as Freetown's Heat-Health Task Force and the appointment of a Chief Heat Officer – the first such appointment in Africa.

Freetown's advice on financing urban re-forestry

Involve the community in planting, maintenance and tracking to maximise local economic benefits and keep costs down

#*FreetownTheTreetown* uses a community growing model, where reforestation is co-designed and co-managed by the community and the city government. Freetown residents are involved in decision-making on where trees are planted and receive payments to plant, grow and digitally track trees on a mobile TreeTracker app. Freetown partnered with a global technology firm, Greenstand, to develop a customised system to track tree planting and growth. The app is available to other cities, but the interface would need to be tailored to your municipality.

The digital system creates a unique geotagged record for each tree planted. Growers revisit each tree periodically to water and maintain it, and to verify and document its survival, receiving micro-payments via mobile money every two months over the first three to five years of the tree's life (when trees need most maintenance). Growers' financial compensation is tied to continued tracking. Seedlings have also been procured from local nurseries to maximise the benefits to the local economy. The model has enabled 80% of the total resources leveraged for the project to be injected into local communities.

The tree data entered by paid city residents is verified by #FreetownTheTreetown staff,  English speaking a reliable and transparent dataset to facilitate payments and to leverage private investment.



'Tokenise' your trees to leverage investment from an eager private market and create a self-sustaining financing model

To secure the longer-term benefits, it is critical to maintain and grow the trees, not just plant them. For Freetown, the cost of getting a tree from a nursery into the ground in a reforesting context costs around US\$ 1. Planting the trees, alone, will cost US\$ 1 million. Growing those trees into established plants will cost more.

Attaching value (a 'token') to each tree has enabled Freetown to create a market for reforestation to fund the trees' growth and support further planting. The tokens offer impact investment opportunities and are sold to corporations and institutions with climate and/or corporate social responsibility (CSR) targets. Investors purchase impact tokens wholesale as carbon offsets from the city, through a third-party fund manager. The revenue is ringfenced for funding further reforestation and nature-based solutions, ultimately creating a self-sustaining model. Currently, the tokens are sold through CSR contracts, targeting

corporations that have made net zero pledges. Ultimately, Freetown intends to use carbon credits/offsets, which require registration and other processes.



We are not self-financing yet. In 2022, we expect to generate 25% in revenue against leveraged resources from the sale of tokens and to ramp up to self-financing over the next three to five years. Our experience has shown that the private market is eager for these kinds of investment opportunities.



You will need upfront capital to fund the first round of tree planting

In Freetown, we could not begin to trade anything until the first trees were planted, tracked and tokenised. Only in 2021, after 250,000 trees had been planted in 2020, could we trade the trees and begin reinvesting. If your city, like ours, does not have the upfront resources required to plant those initial trees, the good news is that there appears to be significant interest in nature-based solutions and urban re-forestry from major donors, including the World Bank, the African Development Bank and the Islamic Development Bank.

Freetown secured US\$ 1.8 million from the World Bank, which was critical to the initial planting in 2020 to 2022, and another US\$ 1 million (from 2022 to 2024) from the Bloomberg Global Challenge, which has enabled more planting. The Bloomberg cash injection is also being used to build a database of potential

investors, including firms with supply chains into Sierra Leone.



Work with neighbouring municipalities in your watershed

The Western Area of Sierra Leone is made up of two local authorities: the Western Area Urban District (Freetown) and the Western Area Rural District Council (WARD-C). It is impossible to implement reforestation to address climate risks in Freetown without involving our neighbour, WARD-C, which is home to the watershed that supplies Freetown's water and where the flood cycle begins.

#*FreetownTheTreetown*, therefore, covers all 13 catchments that make up the Western Area.

Watch [Mayor Yvonne Aki Sawyerr's TED talk](#) about the programme, or the following video, to learn more.

Welcome to Freetown the Tree Town





Article Feedback

Please help us improve the relevance and utility of our content by answering the questions below:

Where are you currently employed? *

- By a C40 Member City By a city that is not a member of C40 I do not work for a city

What is your opinion of the quality of this article? *

- Very High High Average Low Very Low

Are you able to take an action* based on this article? *

- Yes No

If you used the translation feature (a machine translation tool), did you find it helpful?

- Not Used Very Helpful Somewhat Helpful Not Helpful

Additional feedback:

Submit

Show References and Credits