Action research in Accra:

Improving waste management

AFRICAN CITIES RESEARCH CONSORTIUM

Project brief



What is the ACRC programme?

The African Cities Research Consortium (ACRC) is a collaborative approach to tackling complex problems in the continent's rapidly changing cities. Funded by FCDO, it aims to generate robust insights and evidence that will help improve the living conditions, services and life chances of all city residents, particularly for disadvantaged communities.

Work in 12 African cities – including Accra – began in 2020, with foundation phase research focusing on generating a rich, nuanced understanding of the city. It combined a systems approach with political analysis to identify potential areas of reform in different contexts. To address the systemic nature of these challenges, ACRC focused on urban development domains, clustered around economic, built environment and societal issues, to go beyond sectoral silos and provide the potential to unlock reform.

ACRC is currently establishing the implementation phase of its work in Accra and four other cities. Action research projects designed to address priority issues highlighted during the foundation phase research and stakeholder engagements are being set up, managed by city-based teams. Through this action research, the aim is to build evidence and support coalitions of urban reformers, and to show how complex problems in African cities can be solved collectively.

What is the waste management action research project in Accra?

The first of four planned ACRC action research projects in Accra aims to improve living conditions for city residents, by seeking to better understand and address waste management issues. Based on practice, this action research approach is designed to be more sustainable than traditional research. The goal is to create attainable actions in managing waste within the city and thereby improve the circular economy. It involves a consortium of research institutions, civil society organisations and community-based researchers working together to bring about reforms in the city.

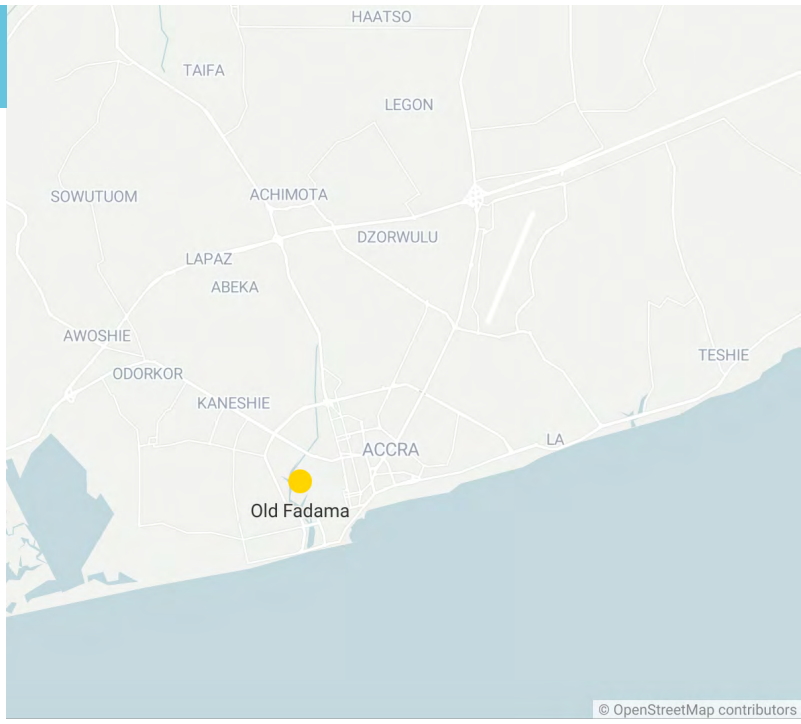
The initiative is examining waste management in Accra – especially in informal settlements – and establishing waste-to-compost production as a pipeline in supporting urban agriculture. It also involves mobilising women savers of the Ghana Federation of Urban Poor (GHAFUP) in Old Fadama into a cooperative. This initiative is aimed at ensuring that women can take a driving role in the proper management of waste – to mitigate climate change, improve health and hygiene, and create sustainable jobs – as well as triggering policy discussions on community-run composting as a means of effectively managing municipal solid waste. Deliberate community ownership through women cooperatives is an advantage to the project, ensuring smooth operations and sustainability.



How is the initiative being implemented?

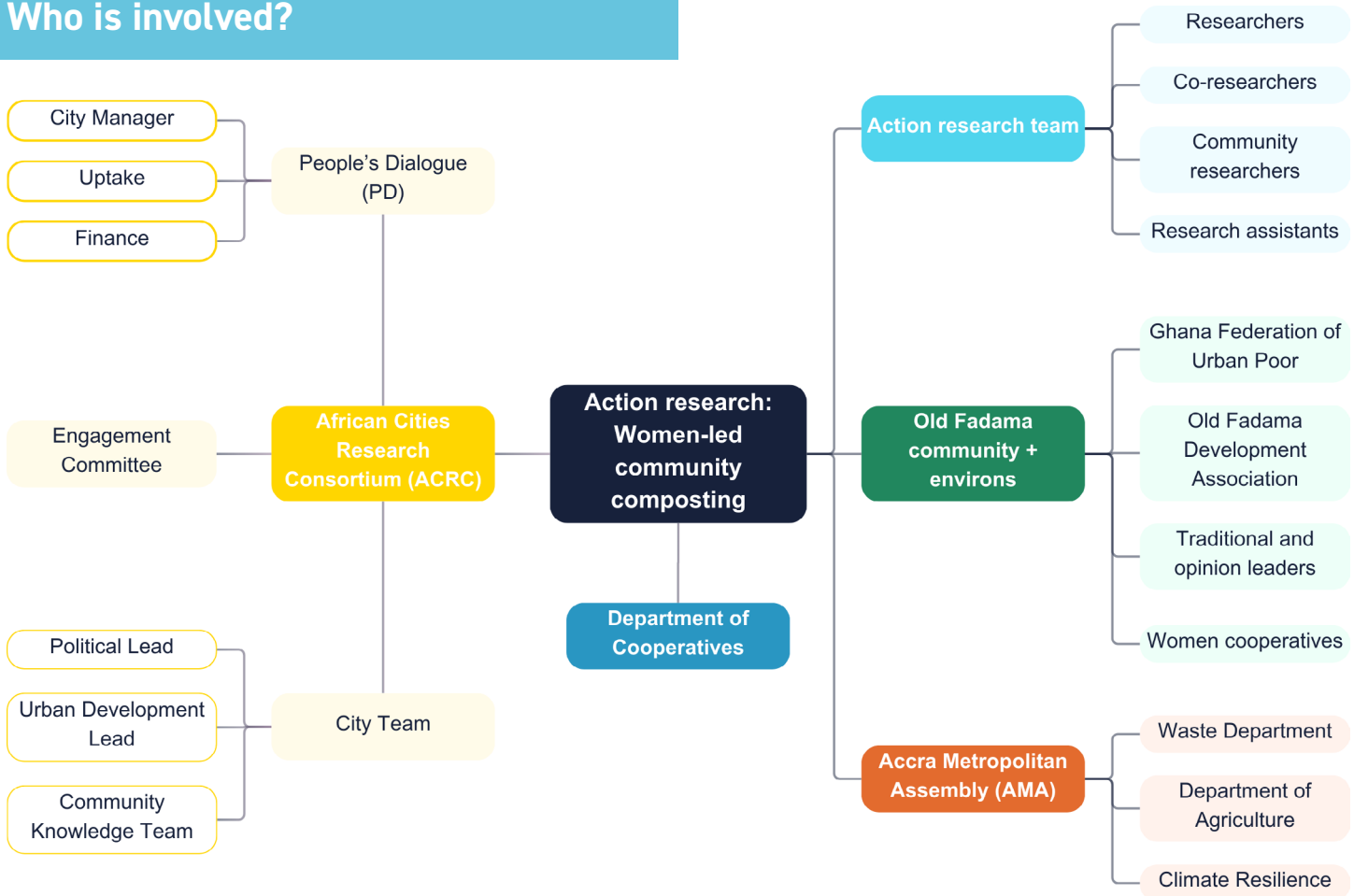
The project is being implemented in Old Fadama and its environs. It involves local authority Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), private and development partners, academic and community researchers, and civil society organisations (CSOs). It is an iterative process that involves community and academic researchers co-creating, co-planning, co-designing and co-implementing the initiative. This approach allows for continuous refinement and improvement of research outcomes, ensuring they are responsive to real-city complexities.

It also involves setting up a community compost plant in Old Fadama to produce compost to serve as fertiliser for identified urban agricultural cooperatives in the city. AMA has already allocated land for the compost plant in Old Fadama. A study on the composition of municipal solid waste (MSW) conducted by the AMA Waste Management Department showed that about 65% of the waste stream consists of organics. Inert material arising from the practice of hand sweeping sand constituted about 17% of the waste stream. Together, both organics and inert material accounted for about 82% of the waste. This high percentage of organic material suggests that composting is an appropriate and viable disposal technique for MSW in the city.



This makes urgent the call to mobilise the GHAFUP women savings groups and other women in Old Fadama into zero waste cooperatives, to enable them to turn waste into money through sorting, separation and composting. Along the value chain, women are seen at the sorting space where they are engaged by "middlemen" and bulk buyers who primarily use them for sorting because of their diligence and attention to detail. The scheme would run exclusively as a microenterprise.

Who is involved?



What is the overarching objective?

The initiative aims to establish a cooperative of women savings groups in Old Fadama, who are expected to be the beneficiary owners of the waste-to-compost microenterprise. The project is latched onto the Accra Resilience Strategy, whose 27 initiatives are geared towards "collective attempt to address the city's shocks and stresses" and also the Accra Greening and Beautification Project – an initiative aimed at beautifying the metropolis by building partnership with communities, institutions, schools and homes, focusing on cultural relevance, eco-friendliness, technology, smartness and commerce. The overarching objective therefore is to drastically reduce waste generation and improve waste management, not only for informal settlements, but also for the city of Accra collectively, through:

1. **The Women-led Community Composting solution**, which will provide transparency and control of the waste and recycling operations within settlements.

2. **Integration of informal solid waste workers** into the main city's waste management.

3. **Providing infrastructure and facilities**, by constructing community composting centres and working with the Waste and Agriculture Departments.

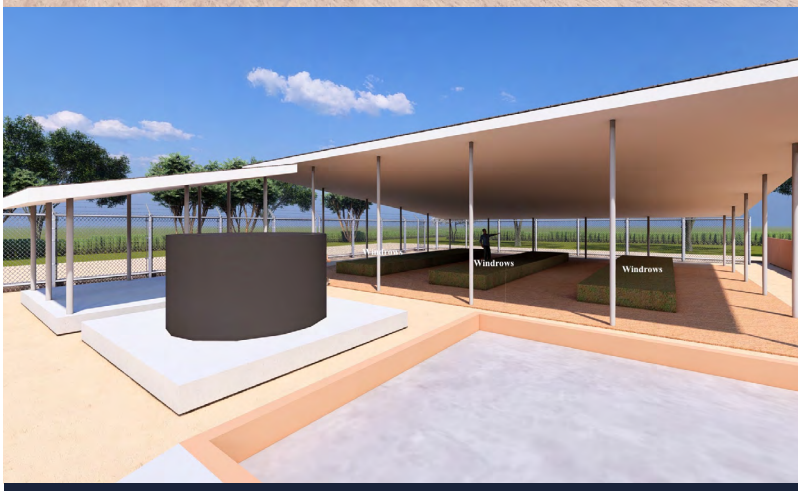
4. **Policy advocacy for gender-responsive waste management policies** at the city level, emphasising the importance of gender considerations in waste management planning.

5. **Establishing community engagement and participation platforms**. This involves collaborating closely with the residents of informal settlements for an inclusive planning decision, and identifying their needs, concerns and priorities related to waste management.

6. **Training and capacity building programmes** at two levels (state and non-state actors), to empower city officials, women, men and youth with the skills and knowledge needed for effective waste management. This includes technical training, business and entrepreneurial skills development.







About this project brief

This is an overview of an action research project being implemented in Accra. All information was correct at the time of production (May 2025).

Read more about ACRC's research in Accra

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