



NAIROBI KENYA

KIBERA PUBLIC SPACE PROJECT (KPSP) / KOUNKUEY DESIGN INITIATIVE (KDI) IN NAIROBI, KENYA

Co-designing productive public spaces

KEY CONCEPTS

CO-CREATION, PUBLIC SPACE, URBAN DESIGN, GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE, NATURE-BASED **SOLUTIONS, CHILD-FRIENDLY** DESIGN, WELLBEING, SAFETY, RECREATION, COMMUNITY, BELONGING

One of Nairobi's largest informal settlements, Kibera faces the challenges characterising informal urban spaces globally: unemployment, poverty, poor housing, and lack of safe public spaces. Poor drainage and insufficient solid waste management also subject residents to flooding. Aiming to transform underutilised urban locations into 'productive public spaces', the Kounkuey Design Initiative and Kibera residents co-created a plan to turn swampy areas near the Ngong River into low-cost, high-impact environments that include much needed amenities like sanitation blocks, flexible community spaces, and sites of urban cultivation, all of which sustainably contribute to the social, economic, and ecological good of the community.



Kibera



POPULATION

Between 400 000 and 700 000

250 000 inhabitants per km²



INFRASTRUCTURE DEFICITS

Lack of housing, water, sanitation, and safe public spaces

Tropical climate. Averages between 20°C and 28°C



CLIMATE

Flooding, evictions, crime, public health



Approximately two million people live in informal housing in Kenya's capital of Nairobi. Facing challenges from unemployment and poverty, to insufficient water and sanitation infrastructure and poor housing, Kibera is one of the city's largest informal settlements, and is also seen as a 'hotspot' of non-conflict violence (including postelection violence, protests, petty crime, and gang violence). Residents also contend with regular localised flooding, and a lack of both private (household-level) and public space for people to safely spend leisure and social time.

Approach

Aiming to transform unsafe and under-used sites into "Productive Public Spaces", KDI—specialising in architecture, landscape, engineering, and urban planning —works with communities to co-create permanent parks and temporary vacant-lot activations, enhancing these spaces with key amenities like community buildings, water and sanitation facilities, and green infrastructure. KDI does not look for problems to fix within distressed communities, but rather follows a participatory approach in which the community takes a central role in project conceptualisation and implementation. While ideas for interventions come from the community, specialists from KDI are available to enhance locally cultivated ideas, blending them with technical knowledge and design innovation, and also connecting them to resources. Stakeholder alignment processes and participatory design workshops further ensure that community needs and priorities are considered before project implementation. Finally, implementation also involves community members, who are employed in the building of the infrastructure, a process that further builds capacity and skill-sharing.

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Formed in 2006, KDI works in Kenya and the USA. KDI heavily relies on grants and international donor funds to support its participatory planning and design approach to sustainable development. With communities involved in projects from conceptualisation through to implementation, this participatory approach addresses potential conflict between political influence within the settlement and the political stance of local and national governments. With specific projects lasting one to two years, funding can be a challenge. However, KDI addresses this by always attempting to upscale projects, and capacitate communities for self-sustainability. For example, women from various KSPS projects formed the KSPS Women's Association, which comes together to ensure the continuity of all of their projects through collective fundraising activities.

The Impact

IMPACT	SOCIAL	ENVIRONMENTAL	ECONOMIC
Job creation	X		X
Flooding reduced both in frequency and intensity	X	X	X
Women's empowerment	X		X
New open space for gardens and children's recreation	X	X	X
Access to sanitation facilities	X		
Reduced flooding in houses near streams	X	X	X

Looking Ahead

inspired replication of productive public spaces in other areas. For example, the Nairobi municipality used the KDI project implementation model to implement 'self-help' projects across communities in Kibera and other townships. Learn More

The co-creation process employed by KDI in Kibera has



6. Waterloo Architecture. (2021). Kounkuey Design Initiative. Available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6IL42RgrD5g (Accessed on 20 September 2022).

Bibliography