

‘Must Seed Model Street’: making cities together - Kenya

Organisation implementing the project

The project submission for the World Habitat Awards was made by [KUWA](#), a design agency with around 60 project-based staff and volunteers. KUWA specialises in facilitating ‘human centred design’ and works to improve the lives of the urban poor in Kenya. Making Cities Together is a collaboration involving multiple partners (more details on partners is provided in ‘Key Features’).

The initiative began with research by [Placemakers Netherlands](#) with support from KUWA, which sought to develop an inventory of public spaces in Nairobi. The collaboration helped to stimulate a more comprehensive UN-Habitat Public Spaces Inventory¹ (led by Placemakers staff), in turn leading to the launch of Making Cities Together (facilitated by KUWA).

Project Description

Making Cities Together is a collaborative project supporting community-led design to improve public spaces in Dandora, Nairobi. Beginning in 2014, Making Cities Together nurtured community leadership, involvement and inclusion, bringing different perspectives together (community groups, private sector organisations, NGOs, individual citizens and experts).

In the first year of the collaboration, through a series of facilitated events, three initiatives were developed: ‘[Must Seed](#)’; ‘[Responsive City](#)’; and ‘[Korogocho’s streets](#)’. The ‘Must Seed’ initiative was selected for implementation and work began to make it happen in 2015.

‘Must Seed’ is about making big changes through small actions. The focus of the idea is to create a ‘Model Street’ with a set of small but noticeable changes. This includes paving streets, improving drainage, improving facades, installing rubbish bins, planting trees, cleaning up courtyards, creating shared open spaces and installing entry gates to the neighbourhood.

The approach to creating the Model Street built on an existing [Dandora Transformation League](#) (a youth-led Community Based Organisation) initiative called the [Dandora Changing Faces competition](#). The competition encouraged resident youth groups representing individual courtyards (clustered blocks of apartments) to compete once a year for prize money if they successfully upgraded their public space. With the success of ‘Model Street’, the Changing Faces initiative has grown to involve a collaboration of organisations called the [Public Spaces Network](#), which has since expanded the competition citywide to Nairobi.

Implementation of the ‘Must Seed Model Street’ project involved a range of facilitated and community driven activities including Placemaking Labs, Minecraft Workshops and Building Parties.

The Model Street was launched in April 2018.

¹ The UN-Habitat Public Space Programme audited and mapped shared spaces in Nairobi City County, their uses and those accountable for managing them. See <https://unhabitat.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/CommunityLedCitywideOpenPublicSpacesInventoryAndAssessment.pdf>

Aims and Objectives

The Making Cities Together project is about changing perceptions and mobilising community action. The Dandora dumpsite is notorious for high levels of crime and pollution and suffers from a very negative image. By innovating to make use of the recyclable resources offered by the dumpsite itself in improving the neighbourhood, the project aims to change Dandora's image to represent community innovation, potential and inspiration for others across Nairobi, Kenya and beyond.

The initiative started out focusing on the communities living in Phase 2 in Dandora (different neighbourhoods are known as 'phases'). Over 5,000 residents live in Phase 2, which was developed as social housing by the World Bank in the 1970s.

'Making Cities Together' has successfully implemented the ambitions of the community. Actions taken include the paving of the road, clearing of rubbish and drainages, creation of courtyards/children's play areas, beautification of building facades through artistic painting, installation of both rubbish bins along the street and modern kiosks to increase security of businesses and enhance aesthetics of the street, and the planting of trees.

Gateways that lead into the community and model street have been constructed using Minecraft as a tool of participation. Future plans for the model street include street/gate lighting, continuation of painting and the creation of a local maintenance plan.

Context

Dandora is home to the largest informal dumpsite in East Africa. The neighbourhoods around it (including Phase 2, the focus of this project) have been largely unregulated for decades and have fallen into disrepair.

Most of the waste produced by Nairobi's 4 million people ends up here. People living nearby have a much higher incidence of health problems (respiratory issues and other symptoms reflecting the high level of pollution and toxic materials in the environment). The dumpsite is also the source of an informal economy, with many people locally dependent on waste collection and recycling for their livelihood. Because the site is informal and unregulated, gangs and cartels operate 'policing' of the dumpsite².

The Making Cities Together project has involved multiple partners to work together on improving the environment, perceptions and community spirit across Dandora.

An initial [crowdfunding video](#) was launched at the beginning of the project to raise awareness and funding for the challenges involved.

Key Features

A network of 40 partners has been involved in the project, including:

- Key partners & facilitators: Placemakers, International New Town Institute (INTI).

² See articles on Dandora Dumpsite here: <https://pulitzercenter.org/projects/kenya-nairobi-dandora-waste-management-public-health-poverty-sanitation-crisis>

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- Funding: Stichting DOEN, (NL), UN-Habitat (also provided technical expertise and access to Minecraft App), East African Institute (AKU), Embassy of the Netherlands in Kenya, Rendeavour - Tatu City, International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP).
 - Community engagement, project management & technical support:
 - Dandora Transformation League (DTL) - led on community engagement, project management and implementation.
 - Technical University of Kenya/University of Nairobi - provided student volunteers for community research.
 - Dutch Alliance for Sustainable Urban Development in Africa (DASUDA) - provided feedback during the lab.
 - Nairobi City County (NCC) - signed-off on building permits and waived implementation fees.
 - Avanti Architecture Ltd. - created mock design of Model Street.
 - Cave Ltd. - lead consultants on construction, created gateway design to Model Street.
 - Hormingon – contractors.
 - Village Market - sponsored paint.
 - Urban Bites - sponsored refreshments.

Outcomes were delivered through six stages:

1. Field research - Students conducted initial in-depth socio-spatial research of public spaces in Nairobi, starting an inventory which eventually became the UN-Habitat Public Space programme. The students later presented during the placemaking lab and were part of the design teams.
 2. Placemaking labs - Sessions involving international and local experts as well as the Community Based Organisations (CBOs) chosen to lead community involvement (based on the initial research). The 'Must Seed' project was selected for implementation after this stage. The Dandora Transformation League provided and facilitated representation for the community of Dandora.
 3. Minecraft workshop - A shared design session held with the support of UN-Habitat. This approach provided community representatives with Minecraft gaming software so they could reimagine public spaces together. Dandora has a diverse demography consisting of a rich mix of different ages, gender and socio-economic groups. The Dandora Transformation League selected 26 participants made up of equal parts men/women, different age groups, various courts (housing estates), those with disabilities, and different income levels. Each representative had to be available for four interactive sessions.
 4. [Building Parties](#) - Organised by the Dandora Transformation League with technical support and funding from a range of partners involved in the Making Cities Together initiative, community leaders and resident volunteers got together at weekends to take action to improve the community.
 5. Implementation - Works requiring additional technical support were taken forward by the Dandora Transformation League with technical support from Making Cities Together partners.
 6. Launch - The Model Street was officially launched by UN-Habitat and Dandora Transformation League on Saturday 14 April 2018.
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Funding

The [International New Town Institute](#) and [International Federation for Housing and Planning](#) provided around USD\$2,000 to fund initial research via the ‘placemaking lab’.

Other costs were funded between the [DOEN Foundation](#), [UN-Habitat](#) and [Placemakers](#) as follows:

- Workshop Minecraft Designs: USD\$2,820 (DOEN Foundation, UN-Habitat and Placemakers).
- Construction of Minecraft Designs: USD\$76,400 (DOEN Foundation and UN-Habitat).
- Elaboration of the Minecraft Design: USD\$4,930 (DOEN Foundation and UN-Habitat).
- Equipment hire for cleaning the street: USD\$7,540 (UN-Habitat).
- Building Party to support community mobilisation: USD\$11,770 (DOEN Foundation and UN-Habitat).
- Launch of Court Yard Competition & Entrances on Model Street: USD\$6,178 (UN-Habitat).
- Public Event on Public Spaces: USD\$5,500 (DOEN Foundation).
- Community Maintenance Planning: USD\$1,420 (UN-Habitat).

Project Documentation and Reporting/Local Capacity Building/Financial and Administrative Costs: USD\$24,950 (DOEN Foundation and UN-Habitat).

Innovation

Key innovative features include:

- the high level of collaboration achieved between partners and the community;
- the ‘big changes through small actions’ approach;
- the use of Minecraft to facilitate public participation and creative thinking;
- the approach employed by the Dandora Transformation League to encourage community and youth engagement with the project³.

An innovative project ambition included the transfer of new recycling techniques (developed in the Netherlands) to increase the use of materials from the dumpsite for the benefit of the community. Unfortunately, this has not yet been achieved⁴.

³ See <http://dandora-transformation.org/our-basic-approach/>

⁴ See <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/upcycle-community-technology#/>

Environmental Impact

The project has achieved an environmental impact by improving sanitation, drainage and general cleanliness. It also involved tree planting and elements of upcycling (making tyre swings and rubbish bins out of recycled metal).

The architects working on the gateways into the model street selected building materials according to their resilience and local availability.

The Dandora Transformation League approach results in a cleaner living environment while simultaneously creating sustainable employment for young people.

Unblocking drains has prevented flooding, reducing the risk of water-borne diseases.

Financial Sustainability

Dandora Transformation League and the Public Space Network secured further funding in 2018 from UN-Habitat to build on current work. The money will be used to help implement the strategy formed through the Making Cities Together collaboration.

The maintenance of the Model Street can be sustained without external funding. The Dandora Transformation League has facilitated a programme where business owners pay for young people to clean the street every week, providing employment for ten or more young people.

The Making Cities Together partnership is (in 2018) considering what it will do next following the success of the Model Street initiative.

Social Impact

The 'Making Cities Together' process has a real focus on inclusion.

All stages incorporated a participatory process, guided by the Community Based Organisation (the Dandora Transformation League) which identified and recruited people from across the neighbourhood.

For some women who were not active in the process the team introduced flag making (as they had noticed the women sitting on the streets doing beadwork). The flags were then used to section off the streets during building parties.

Teenage artists were brought in to paint, and Minecraft enabled the inclusion of disabled people, children and elderly people. Others were attracted through social events like lunches and the building parties.

Overall the process has motivated and involved young people in particular, and others across the neighbourhood. The improvements have had a positive impact on the health and safety of residents. This has led to an increased sense of empowerment and stronger connections and influence for the community.

Auditing public open space helped Making Cities Together partners engage in regional policy-making. This work led to a commitment by [Nairobi City County](#) to develop a Public Open Spaces Bill. Over 1,000 public spaces were identified in the city⁵. The bill seeks to protect and improve these spaces for public use and promote shared responsibility in the maintenance of them.

The project has improved public space in Phase 2 of the Dandora community, which houses over 5,000 low income people. Impacts include:

- Increased safety (reduced crime through better lighting and community policing).
- Improved neighbourhood maintenance and management.
- Local shops have seen increased business (according to a survey of owners there are more customers and they are able to stay open later as the street feels safer).
- New businesses have opened (one in particular rents out skates and bikes to children so they can play on the newly paved street).

Greater community involvement increased land values, which has encouraged more residents to upgrade (paint and fix up) their houses.

Barriers

Using mixed finance to fund the project was a challenge for the partners, which required clear management and diligence. Power struggles and relationship tensions were overcome through dialogue.

A controversial election result occurred during project implementation which required ongoing communication and patience between partners⁶.

Lessons learned

- Build in adequate time for unexpected delays, to reduce the strain on relationships.
- Starting an initiative like this where people are not used to it requires a high level of commitment and perseverance, but acceptance becomes quicker once the process can be shown to succeed.

Evaluation

A report 'Minecraft Workshop in Dandora: Process and outcomes' was published in 2015⁷. The report found that using Minecraft to engage the community was highly effective both in people being able to express and visualise their needs, and in decision-makers understanding what they were being told. Some improvements were suggested in relation to inclusion - for example changing the times of workshops to avoid busy times for women and children, and directly involving local schools.

⁵ See <https://unhabitat.org/nairobi-county-makes-public-spaces-a-priority/>

⁶ See <https://www.hrw.org/africa/kenya>

⁷ See <http://placemakers.nl/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Report-Minecraft-final-report-160412.pdf>

KUWA and Making Cities Together partners have been discussing their involvement in the project and reflecting on how the process might be improved. There is currently (August 2018) no formal evaluation for the project.

Recognition

The Dandora Transformation League (DTL) was awarded the 2017 Dubai Municipality and UN-Habitat International Award for Best Practice in Improving the Living Environment. The award was in recognition of the work of DTL in organising young people and helping to transform Dandora into a clean, green and safe neighbourhood while creating jobs for young people in the area⁸.

The project has been featured on television segments by Yes, Daily Nation, KTN and K24. Articles about the project have been featured by UN-HABITAT and Parents Africa.

Visitors have come to the project from local church groups, [KUKUA](#) (an organisation leveraging technology to improve literacy rates in Africa), [PPS](#) (Project for Public Spaces), the Dutch embassy, UN-Habitat, UN Environment Programme, other youth groups, celebrities, local practitioners, UN-Habitat Afghanistan and local and international universities.

Participants also attended an [Urban Thinkers Campus](#) hosted by the project in 2017.

Transfer

Following the launch of the Model Street, the Making Cities Together partners will review options for the future based on the progress they have made collaboratively so far. This may lead to further work, for example, to deliver the other two initiatives conceived via the Placemaking Labs ([‘Responsive City’](#) and [‘Korogocho’s streets’](#)).

Residents of Phase 4 (an area neighbouring Phase 2 in Dandora), have seen the impact of the Making Cities Together project and begun to carry out similar projects on their own.

Together with others, the Dandora Transformation League have launched the [Public Space Network](#) (PSN) – a Public-Private-People Partnership set up to collectively improve public spaces across Nairobi.

KUWA is leading on a [‘Placemaking Week’](#). They are working on the 2018 event with PSN and intend to handover full management of the event to them in 2019.

The project has identified the main barriers to transfer as local trust with the community, funding and facilitation.

⁸ See <http://www.pressreleasepoint.com/new-model-street-launched-dandora-kenya>