



Urban Agenda Platform

The global platform for sharing progress, action and knowledge on the implementation of the New Urban Agenda to achieve sustainable urban development.

Courtyard System for Management of Public Spaces

Award Scheme

Dubai International Award

Summary

Our submission for the award under this category is premised on the success we have had through community action in initiating transformation of a populous local neighborhood in Nairobi (Dandora) and improve: the street life, personal safety, economic opportunities for the youth, better waste management, mitigation of urban decay and creation plus maintenance of new public spaces.

Background and Objective

Area: Dandora - low-income neighborhood, 11km from Nairobi CBD Population: 141,885 Major problems: High crime rate, criminal youth gangs, youth unemployment, urban decay, unregulated dumpsite and its deleterious effects on both environment and health for surrounding communities and beyond, waste covering most open spaces Targetted social group: unemployed youth

Actions and Implementation

Two main challenges 1. Convincing the youth to engage in a physically intensive courtyard transformation intervention without guarantees that there would be an income 2. Convincing the residents and authorities that youth who were previously members of criminal gangs were on a path of transformation and needed their support How they were overcome The entry point was the youth. If we could convince them to "volunteer" and show the residents and authorities that they were on a path of rehabilitation, then maybe we could win their support. We therefore co-opted local youth who are influencers including renown hip-hop stars who grew up but left Dandora to engage with the youth and show them the long term benefits of the intervention. Our gaming strategy through the Changing Faces Challenge was also seen as fun and competitive and many youth were drawn to it. Once the youth bought into the strategy and agreed to volunteer for at least 3 months to demonstrate their rehabilitation to residents and authorities, it became infinitely easier to win the support of the latter. Benchmarks and tools We have developed a detailed and robust "Courtyard Grading System". This tool allows us to measure the performance of the group across three broad areas: impact on physical space, governance and innovation. The tool is applied on a quarterly basis to all participating teams and works not only to measure the impact of the teams but also provide a learning tool on how teams can improve from one quarter to the next.

Outcomes and Impacts

Financial: Courtyard system is financially self-sufficient. Youth groups initiate transformation of spaces as volunteers. After demonstrating results of their action, residents of surrounding plots pay regular monthly contribution of USD 1 per household to cover maintenance costs and generate income for the youth. Transformation of streets is funded by external donors: the Model Street was funded by UN-Habitat and DOEN foundation. Social and economic: Young men were first to be engaged in transformation since they used to be perceived as the most crime-prone group. Engagement in meaningful activities and newly-earned income turned them from crime. Moreover, their perception by older residents and women has changed, breaking with their stigmatization, opening new opportunities for them and improving community relations. Cultural: The courtyard system is a bottom-up initiative, pushed forward by the community leader and youth from the community. Although aiming to change mindsets of the community, its community-driven nature allows a progressive and sustainable change. Environmental: As result of the courtyard system introducing culture of clean-ups and waste collection, the community becomes aware of the importance of keeping their environment clean. A significant reduction of waste disposed over open spaces is prone to reduce soil and water pollution in the area. Planting trees and other greenery is prone to improve air quality. Institutional: Public authorities have become more supportive of community-driven initiatives in the area over time. Their political support facilitates and accelerates implementation of the project. A network gathering like-minded initiatives operating in other parts of Nairobi is being set up. It will represent the framework for cooperation between diverse stakeholders (CBOs, NGOs, international and local urban experts, public authorities and private sector) to ensure a coordinated city-wide strategy for restoration of public spaces. The courtyard approach can be scaled up to the entire Nairobi through the network.

Gender and Social Inclusivity



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The transfer under this project happened between the Dandora Transformation League (DTL) and the Making Cities Together (MCT) coalition. MCT is a coalition of local and international NGOs working in Nairobi, Kenya to improve public spaces through placemaking. Whereas the courtyard transformation model was initiated by DTL, the main purpose of the engagement with MCT was firstly to build the skills required to scale up the courtyard transformation strategy and secondly to help establish connections with technical and financial resources required to implement the scaling up strategy. Through this transfer which entailed hands-on training of DTL members, we received substantial capacity in creating participatory designs together with the community in a way that ensures placemaking interventions have the full support of the recipient community. A key outcome of this transfer has been the Model Street project which represents a logical step in our strategy from the transformation of semi-public courtyards to fully public streets adjacent to the courtyards. It has also resulted in establishing partnerships with multilateral funding partners like UNHabitat. Based on our engagement with MCT we now have the tools and connections necessary to more systematically undertake participatory planning initiatives with the communities we work with.

Innovative Initiative

Sustainable transformation of the cities happens gradually and MUST involve community involvement. Whereas it is possible to engage in rapid large-scale government interventions, the cost of maintaining them, especially if they were implemented against community wishes eventually becomes higher than the cost of the intervention. This realization has helped to shape our expectation at the speed at which we expect the transformation to happen which has generally been slower than our expectations. However, conversely, the support of the community, especially from the communities after numerous engagements with them has shown far greater support and commitment than we expected to contribute to support in the youth interventions. Lesson 2 Build on local initiatives. Whereas it may be easy to transplant new ideas to new places, the long term impact can only be sustained if the initial thrust was from local demand. In the case of our courtyard transformation, we have seen significant difference in performance between the courtyards where there was a local request for assistance versus courts who were recruited to join. This has reshaped the focus of our outreach from trying to recruit new youth groups to buy into our intervention and instead focus on helping the youth to understand the long term impact of this intervention and only once they are convinced and make a local request do we then extend assistance to them.

Resources devoted to delivery

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Conclusion

One of the incidental outcomes of our work and that of various organizations around placemaking in Nairobi has been the publication of a Bill on management of public spaces by the Nairobi City Government. The publication of the first draft of the Bill is in of itself a major milestone in securing the support and engagement of municipal authorities. The second notable outcome was the suspension of debate in the bill by the Nairobi City Assembly as a result of lobbying by placemaking organizations including DTL about inadequacies in the Bill. Whereas the Bill was meant to provide a framework to guide use and management of public spaces, in the end it was a list of restrictions of what citizens can or cannot do in public parks. We therefore hope to be part of the teams leading the revision of the Bill to ensure that there is a wider definition of public spaces, greater involvement of communities in the use and management of public spaces and a clear interface between communities and the city authorities on how to use, maintain and preserve public spaces.