

Advocates for Public Spaces: Summary Report 2025



Advocates for Public Spaces (APS)

Advocates for Public Spaces (APS) in Uganda works closely with local and national governments to improve the quality, accessibility, and quantity of public spaces that are essential for healthy, inclusive, and resilient cities.

In 2025, APS focused on walkability to open public spaces, promoting Non-Motorized Transport (NMT) through community engagement events, and providing technical support to Kampala's Informal Transport Working Group. In addition, APS worked on improving the Kasubi Market in Kampala and engaging with farmers to improve agricultural value chains. This report provides a summary of this work APS advanced in 2025.

Urban Walkability Study

Narrow sidewalks, traffic congestion, ongoing construction, and scattered obstructions can all influence whether residents and visitors choose to walk, cycle, or even visit a park at all. APS examined all these issues in a walkability study that looked at the street environment leading to open public spaces to assess residents' access to the city's parks.

A team of four research assistants surveyed streets leading to key public spaces and recorded pedestrian infrastructure conditions using Kobo Toolbox. This tool and methodology were adapted from APS partners at Work for a Better Bangladesh. The study revealed a number of encouraging improvements. Intersections upgraded with traffic lights and zebra crossings have made walking and cycling considerably safer. Most surveyed roads featured footpaths or walkways along both sides, many of them newly fitted with brick paving designed to make active travel more comfortable and enjoyable. Upgraded streets leading to open green spaces had zebra crossings, signal lights, road signs, and traffic police, with street lighting that facilitated safer movement at night. They also supported travel with wheelchairs.

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The study also documented the area's mix of land uses. Majority of land-uses were offices, shops, boda boda stages (street-side parking for commercial motorcycle taxis), residences, restaurants and cafés, schools, hospitals, and street vendors. As a result of this diversity of land-uses present in the communities, several challenges in the pedestrian environment persist. Walkways are frequently blocked by obstructions such as car entry and exit cuts, electric poles, cables, CCTV camera stands, parked vehicles and motorcycles, shop merchandise, advertising boards, street vendors, trees, parked trucks, open manholes, construction materials, and trash cans. Additionally, vehicles and motorcycles were often illegally parked on walkways.

Taken together, many upgraded roads linking residential communities provide walking and cycling facilities, which has improved accessibility within various areas of Kampala. Yet challenges persist. APS will finalize and publish a full research report in 2026 and will share findings with stakeholders to guide future interventions in Kampala's streets and public spaces. The lessons learned from this project aim to inform policy, improve pedestrian infrastructure, and inspire continued collaboration between government agencies, civil society, and the public.



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Kampala City Festival

After a seven-year absence following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Kampala City Festival was held again in 2025, aimed at celebrating the culture, history, and diversity of the city. A one-day event, it is designed to promote inclusive participation, providing platforms for youth, women, entrepreneurs, and creatives to showcase their work and engage with the public.

The theme for 2025 was “Celebrating Kampala: Culture, Innovation and Sustainability”, and featured various pre-festival events and citywide activities including: cultural performances, a procession through the city, innovation expos, environmental clean-ups, green projects, agricultural exhibitions, food fairs, health outreach activities and a grand finale at Kololo Ceremonial Grounds contributing to the city’s long-term vision of inclusivity, liveability, and sustainability.

Leading up to the festival, several pre-festival events were organized in an effort to build anticipation and promote the main event. APS participated as partners to the Kampala Capital City Authority in the planning and execution of several pre-festival events:

- **Park Regeneration at Kitebi Primary School (Lubaga Division) and Kiswa Primary School (Nakawa Division):** These events revitalized school playgrounds by planting new trees and grass to create safe, inviting spaces for play and other recreational activities. Various individuals and organizations took part, including school administration and teaching staff, KCCA officials, CSOs, members from the Islamic Chamber of Commerce and Industry Uganda, Uganda Nursery and Organic Gardening Association, staff from the Ministry of Water and Environment, and other community members.



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- **The Kampala Car Free Day:** The Kampala Car Free Day organized by the city is an annual event to promote walking, cycling, skating, cleaner air, and reduced traffic congestion in the city. Last year, it was held as a pre-festival event, themed ‘A Livable City, Enjoyable Streets’. Major roads were closed off to motorists, providing space to pedestrians and cyclists to play football, paint, skip rope, and partake in other recreational games in the middle of Kampala’s usually busy streets. Beyond leisure, the day also featured a blood donation drive and the commissioning of the 3D “I Love Kampala” symbol at the independence monument to enhance public engagement. Additionally, during the Car-Free Day, the Minister for Kampala Metropolitan Affairs Minsa Kabanda commissioned refurbished public toilets and new seating facilities at the Kampala City Square Park. The Minister and other participants planted trees in the square and along the surrounding streets, highlighting the city’s commitment to green and accessible parks and public spaces, improving air quality, and beautification in Kampala.



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A rising level of public engagement (over 1000 participants) was seen during these events, reflecting increasing interest in making Kampala a livable city. The integration of green initiatives, such as the tree planting, has also helped raise environmental awareness. Additionally, the growing involvement from the private sector and civil society through sponsorships and partnerships has enhanced the visibility and scale of events focused on urban livability.

Informal Transport Working Group

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES), is a German non-profit organization committed to fostering socio-political and economic development, operating across the globe (including in Uganda). They brought together various stakeholders and organized four thematic working groups: Basic services, Informal Transport, Informal Trade and Basic Housing. Combined, the groups make the Urban Informality Working Group, where local actors and stakeholders come together to define, discuss and raise the most pressing issues of informality in Uganda's urban communities, and facilitating a stronger recognition of informality as an urban reality.

As a member of the Urban Informality Working Group, APS continues to participate in various engagements that make the core of the group's advocacy efforts. Four major challenges were identified in informal settlements/settings: lack of recognition of informal activities, local governance is exclusionary of the informal sector, limited access to affordable services, and exclusion from decision-making.

The Urban Informality Working Group engaged with mayors and councillors at both city- and division-levels in Kampala, technical-level decision makers from KCCA, and the Ministry of Works and Transport, discussing four sectors characterized by extreme informality (informal transport, trade, housing, and basic services).

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These engagements were an opportunity for each of the thematic working groups to share reports on related research and short videos depicting the challenges that need to be addressed. These materials were also released publicly to improve advocacy and service provision in Kampala. The individual reports have also been merged into a unified report that is being prepared for presentation to the Ugandan parliament, and at international platforms including the UNHabitat in Nairobi.

Kasubi Market Improvement Project

The Kasubi Market Improvement Project is a continuation of efforts to enhance the market environment. In 2025, the project focused specifically on improving fish stalls, which were in poor condition, with the aim to promote safer fish handling and storage practices for better product quality and ensure customer satisfaction and confidence in vendors.

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These infrastructure improvements serve both immediate operational needs within the market and the long-term advocacy goals for improved market spaces in Kampala. This will be achieved through promotion of better market infrastructure to strengthen hygiene and sanitation standards across fresh food markets and encourage safer and healthier working conditions for vendors and traders. It also seeks to influence city authorities and stakeholders to invest in modernized market facilities and support sustainable urban market development in Kampala and across Uganda to improve food safety and public health practices within market spaces.



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Farmers in Uganda

APS met with leaders of farmers' cooperatives from central and western Uganda. These discussions explored potential collaboration in areas such as healthy food production, access to fresh and affordable produce, and value addition. Particularly regarding value additions, Uganda offers strong opportunities in value-added agricultural products across several key sectors. Processing dairy from the Western Uganda cattle corridor extends shelf life and improves returns for farmers. Fruit processing (e.g. dried fruits) and bakery products using fruits supports nutrition diversification. Grain processing can strengthen urban food supply chains while boosting farmer earnings. Finally, herbal and organic products are gaining traction in local and regional markets. Collectively, these products reduce post-harvest losses, create employment, raise farmer incomes, and improve nutritional access for urban communities.

Additionally, APS is promoting the concept of 'Farmers' Corners' in public markets. The idea is to create a dedicated space for farmers to sell directly to the consumer. Discussions with various stakeholders are still ongoing on the design of the corners, how farmers can co-exist with traditional vendors, and the ways in which digital platforms can support broader market access both locally and internationally. Opportunities for farmers to adopt modernized farming practices and reduced chemical usage in their products are also being explored.

Conclusion

APS and its partners have made great progress across various areas of work toward improving urban livability. Next steps include publishing the full walkability research report, presenting the Urban Informality Working Group findings, continue market improvements at Kasubi Market, and advancing discussions on Farmers Corners in public markets. APS will continue to engage government agencies, civil society, and community stakeholders to ensure their efforts transform into concrete policy and infrastructure improvements that benefit communities.