

Creating Great Public Spaces in Three African Cities

Summary Report



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Introduction

In Africa -like in many other places in the world – public spaces are used for public life, commerce and interaction. However, lack of funds, planning, and maintenance, as well as priority for motorized vehicles, has turned many public spaces into unsafe, unforgiving and unconnected places. In addition, many public spaces are difficult to access, especially for those living in vulnerable situations. This is especially the case for the cities of Accra, Ghana, Kampala, Uganda, and Niamey, Niger. There is a significant lack of formal public spaces in these cities, particularly in the outlying areas where the slum settlements are located. Of those spaces that do exist, they are degraded, of poor quality, and under constant threat of being developed into other purposes.

In order to begin addressing the critical issue of public spaces we began working on a project, funded by UN-Habitat, that would implement pilot projects in the 3 cities intended to test innovative solutions for:

- Conducting a community engagement process that ensures a people-centred approach to the design of the space;
- Engaging women, children, and the differently abled in the design of the parks;
- Including multiple uses that meet community needs;
- Improving access to the public spaces;
- Developing community-based maintenance;
- Formalizing the process of citizen engagement into city policies;
- Raising awareness among the public and decision-makers regarding the importance of public spaces;
- Strengthen local and national policies that protect, preserve, and enhance public spaces.

In Accra, Ghana the local lead organization was the Mmofra Foundation, who are experts in Accra on creating safe, fun, and educational public spaces for children. Accra, like most cities in the world, is expanding at a rapid pace. The pressure on the ground in the metropolis to make way for urban development translates into the cutting of age-old trees, and the taking over of playgrounds, parks, waterways, and other essential community resources. Mmofra Foundation has found that city authorities' plans and the competing, uncoordinated priorities of city dwellers, vendors, commercial vehicles, private developers and others contribute to traffic jams and congestion, infrastructure and services challenges, excluding recreational public spaces from the development policies and ignoring their importance in the shaping of sustainable cities.



Picture 1: Teshie Park before intervention

Mmofra chose Teshie Park and Library as the site for their pilot project. This is a community space that was originally a park and library, but had been severely degraded and was now acting as a dumping ground for rubbish from the local municipality. Despite the lack of infrastructure at the space and the poor quality of the space itself, the community had been protecting this site for many years

and used the space for community celebrations.

In Kampala, Uganda the local lead organization was Advocates for Public Spaces (APS) who formed in 2016 because they saw a need for advocacy that would create better streets, parks, and markets in Uganda. Kampala is also experiencing significant pressures resulting from increased population and demand for land. Studies of public spaces in Kampala show there is a lack of formal public parks and open spaces in the city, particularly in outlying areas and slum settlements. And, of those formal spaces that do exist, they are often of poor quality. This has led to people using informal spaces that are not protected and provide unsafe conditions for the local population.



Picture 2: Lukuli playground before intervention

APS chose Lukuli playground as the site of their intervention. Lukuli Playground is in an area of need in the city. It is located in a poor community and suburb where the huge recreational needs of local residents are completely neglected, as the state of the park demonstrated. Lukuli Playground serves 12 Parishes with an approximate population of 409,500. The site is a community owned space and the community had been protecting the site from development for many years.

In Niamey, Niger the local lead organization was Public Spaces for All who has been working on public space issues, including streets, parks, and markets since 2014. Public

space is a growing issue in Niger but not one that had received much government attention in the past. Despite the rapid growth of the population of Niamey, there are only seven parks for city. And of those seven, only two are operational while the others are under rehabilitation. The city is in desperate need of additional public spaces for residents.



Picture 3: Yantala open space before intervention

Public Spaces for All chose an open space in the suburb of Yantala as the site for their intervention. This space was devoid of any infrastructure but was a space frequented by the local community and was often used as a space to play football. In addition, a Mosque was located next to the site, which was seen as an ideal companion destination for a public space.

For this project we used 5 strategies:

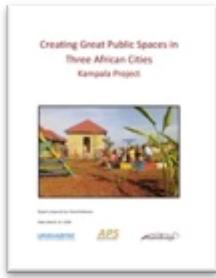
1. Community Engagement
2. Capacity Building
3. Awareness Raising
4. Infrastructure Changes
5. Policy

These 5 strategies ensured we took a comprehensive approach to the pilot projects. This report provides the summary for all three projects. For full details about the individual projects visit the Project Reports on the HealthBridge website:



<https://healthbridge.ca/library/entry/creating-great-public-spaces-in-three-african-cities-accra-final-report>

https://healthbridge.ca/images/uploads/library/Creating_Great_Public_Spaces_in_three_African_Cities_Niamey_report_final.pdf



<https://healthbridge.ca/library/entry/creating-great-public-spaces-in-three-african-cities-uganda-final-report>

Community Engagement

Community engagement was a critical element for all three projects and provided the basis for all infrastructure improvements. The key activity organized for community engagement was the Minecraft Workshop organized by UN-Habitat. Minecraft is a computer game adapted for use as a community engagement tool for developing people-centred public spaces. It is best imagined as a complex 'digital Lego' that allows community members to build structures within the game together. However, before the Minecraft workshop could be organized, each city needed to arrange several community meetings with local organizations, local leaders, and local stakeholders. These meetings provided an opportunity for the local teams to explain the importance of public spaces, outline the activities and expected outcomes for the project and receive local buy-in for the steps that would be needed to realize the vision of an improved public space. In total the local teams organized 19 meetings with over 412 participants and were able to recruit 42 participants to attend the workshop.



Picture 4: Community engagement activity in Niamey

Following the success and momentum created from the community meetings, each city organized a 3-day Minecraft workshop where members of the community and local decision-makers were involved in creating designs for the parks that were then used as the basis for the final design approved by the community. In total 77 participants attended the three workshops, which included representatives from the community, city departments, and government officials. The community reported back that they found the Minecraft game a valuable tool for helping them visualize the changes they would like to make.



Picture 5: Participant presenting Minecraft model in Accra

In addition, each of the three communities organized meetings focused on how the public spaces would be maintained over time. Maintenance of public spaces is a key issue as the best space can quickly deteriorate without regular care and maintenance. In Accra the project team organized a meeting with the local MP, the Residents' Association and other key stakeholders and business groups in order to develop a plan to maintain the space and discuss ways the second and third phases of the project could be implemented. In Niamey, a local management committee was formed to oversee the maintenance of the site. In Kampala a Board of Trustees was reactivated and agreed to be responsible for the site's maintenance by hiring a local security guard and playground manager.

The results of these activities included increased community engagement in all three communities and increased ownership of the spaces. This is evidenced by the contribution of over 72 volunteers who contributed 224 hours of their time along with community donations of plants, grass, and facilities. In addition, Kampala Capital City Authority contributed 150 seedlings to the site. These contributions enhanced the overall project and helped create excitement within the neighbourhoods.

Activity, Result, and Outcome Table:

Activity	Accra Outcomes	Niamey Outcomes	Kampala Outcomes	Totals
Establish a community engagement process for the design of the parks that ensures participation of children, youth, women and people living with disabilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 meetings hosted with the Teshie –Nungua Estate Residents Association. - Between 5 and 15 community participants - 19 community members recruited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 meetings with community - 378 participants (238 children and 140 adults, 241 males and 137 females) -15 Minecraft participants selected 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 5 meetings - 19 participants -36 participants recruited 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 19 meetings - 412 participants -42 participants recruited
Organize 3 Minecraft Workshops involving multiple stakeholders to develop the designs of the park.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 19 participants ranging between ages of 8 and 65 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 27 participants ranging between ages of 15 and 65 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 31 participants total including 25 males, 6 females 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 Minecraft workshops organized (3-days long) - 77 participants
With community input, develop a process for park maintenance, identify, who, what, where, when and how.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 meeting organized - participants included residents’ association, local MP, Muslim Association, and other stakeholders - 4 community members have taken responsibility for maintaining the park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 meeting organized - A five-member management committee (3 from the community, one from the municipality 1 and one from Public Spaces for All) was set up to manage the park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 Playground Board of Trustees reactivated - Two meetings of the Board of Trustees - One facility guard has been hired - A manager is in the process of being hired - Private groups using the space are now required to pay fees to help maintain 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 meetings organized - 1 Management Committee formed - 1 Board of Trustees formed - 1 guard hired - Fee structure for private functions created to help fund maintenance

Results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased community engagement in all three communities through participation in the meetings, the Minecraft workshops, by offering their time and resources to develop the spaces - Increased community ownership of the spaces - 72 volunteers contributed 224 hours of volunteer time (12 youth volunteers in Niamey for 180 hours and 60 volunteers ages 3 to 84 in Accra for 144 hours over two weeks of construction) along with volunteer time in Kampala for cleaning the site - Ghs 1865 was donated in kind for park elements in Accra such as grass and paving - Community contributions in Accra included use of computer facilities during Minecraft workshop, a loaned generator and construction tools during the build, access to a welding workshop, supplies of water, plants - Donation of 150 tree seedlings, a fuelled tractor, and staff to de-silt and clean the drainage area by city authority in Kampala - Reduction of rubbish and garbage in all three sites
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Capacity Building

Capacity building was an important component of our project and was implemented differently in each of the communities. In Niamey, they considered the capacity building and policy elements of the project a critical starting point to improve public spaces. Eight meetings with over 27 officials were organized where public spaces were discussed, information about their importance shared, and linkages between other city and national priority issues was made. In addition, the local team felt that a workshop would be an appropriate way to follow up on the 1:1 meetings and would help improve the capacity among decision-makers. Public spaces is a very new issue for government officials in Niamey but interest was high among both national and local decision-makers. As a result, 3 workshops were organized with 39 decision-makers where some of the more technical aspects of implementing public spaces projects was discussed. The officials indicated that their capacity was improved as a result of their participation and an important result of these workshops (along with a policy workshop) was a commitment to include public spaces in the upcoming revision of the National Strategy on Urban Development.

A workshop was not considered the most effective way of delivering capacity building in both Accra and Kampala. In Accra, it was felt that a workshop was too soon in the process and that it would be better to explore a workshop after the pilot was completed and further research on the quantity and quality of the public space environment could be conducted. In Kampala, a workshop had been organized prior to the start of the process and city officials were already well aware of the importance of public spaces and the necessary elements. In both cities, 1:1 meetings with officials were organized

instead as a way of garnering government support and these officials sent government representatives to the Minecraft workshop and community build in order to better understand the ways that meaningful community participation can be organized. In total, 5 meetings were organized with 2 elected officials and 5 bureaucrats.



Picture 6: Meeting with Yantala Chief



Picture 7: Meeting among Lukulu Trustees

Finally, both Accra and Niamey organized trainings and capacity building activities for community members focused on both park development and park maintenance. In Accra, 2 days of volunteer trainings were organized to support volunteers in participating in the park build with 30 community members participating. In total Accra had over 60 volunteers help with their community build (as reported above) and these trainings helped provide the foundations for that success. In Niamey, the 2 workshops organized were more focused on the maintenance of the park with 18 people in attendance. The results of the capacity building activities include increased capacity and commitment of the community and elected officials in developing and maintaining public spaces.

Activity, Result, and Outcome Table:

Activity	Accra Outcomes	Niamey Outcomes	Kampala Outcomes	Totals
Organize a workshop with government officials at the federal and local level.	No workshops organized as it was felt to be too earlier in the advocacy for such a workshop - 2 officials from the Municipal Assembly took part in the Minecraft Workshop	-3 workshops - 39 decision-makers including: - Ministry of the City (18) - Ministry of Housing (3) - Ministry of Environment (2) - Municipalities of Niamey (16)	No capacity workshops were organized. - 2 KCCA officials were assigned to the project and attended the community meetings	- 3 workshops - 39 decision-makers

<p>Meet 1:1 with officials. Prepare documents for distribution.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 Meetings organized with the Member of Parliament Ledzokuku-Krowor Constituency and his staff where the park is situated - Gave his full commitment to the further development of the park 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Distributed 450 advocacy documents - 8 Meetings organized - 27 participants from the Ministry of the City and Urban Sanitation, the High office for Niamey nice “Niamey Nyala”, Town Hall and the 5 municipalities of Niamey 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 meetings - 4 KCCA officials in the landscaping department - 1 Division Mayor Increased support from KCCA - 1 official assigned to represent KCCA on the Board of Trustees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 13 meetings - 4 elected official - 30 bureaucrats
<p>Organize trainings with local citizens regarding park maintenance and development.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 days of volunteer trainings - 30 community members participated - 4 community members have taken over the interim management of the park. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 2 trainings - 18 participants - 18 citizens have indicated their capacity has increased 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No trainings provided. However, the community has already instituted some facility caretaking activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 trainings - 48 participants - increased skills needed to develop and maintain the parks
<p>Results:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased capacity and commitment of community and elected officials in developing and maintaining public spaces including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Accra, the Municipal Assembly helped prepare the site; the park development process helped increase the skills of local artisans in delivering “non-traditional” designs; the park development process also resulted in challenging gender stereotypes, increased understanding of the importance of proper litter disposal, and increased understanding and ownership of the park. - In Niamey, government officials are committed to work on policy by including the promotion of public spaces in the new National Strategy of Urban Development. Also, before that, they promised to rehabilitate the current parks and create others parks and they are respecting their promise. - In Kampala the 1:1 meetings with government officials and their participation in the process helped ease tensions between the community and officials. 			

Awareness Raising

The local teams initiated awareness-raising activities as a way of increasing the interest in the projects and the interest in public spaces among the general population. In Kampala and Niamey, the local partners did not initiate any awareness raising activities on their own but rather built those activities into the other strategies. Much of the community engagement work also had the effect of raising awareness among the community of public spaces. This resulted in changes in the perception in the community about the facility in Kampala. Initially the focus was mostly on football by men. With the inclusion of a children’s play space and planting of trees for shade the playground is starting to transform into a park. Parents and small children in particular began to see the space as belonging to them as well.

In Accra, this project became the starting point for a year-long public awareness drive, with the goal of eventually hosting a forum targeting high level policy makers; community based events and discussion would serve the purpose of building interest in the topic. It was the team’s intention to use their existing community connections to ignite the public spaces dialogue, aimed at policy makers and the greater community. The aim was to begin with smaller initiatives with great presence, working up to larger events/discussions; visible interest from the public would serve to draw the attention of politicians and policy makers, allowing Mmofra to lobby them to place public space making as a priority in future development plans. The result was increased awareness among the community and policy makers on public spaces generally and Teshie Children’s Park more specifically. The activities also resulted in the streamlining of intentions and goals, which will serve to bolster the argument for prioritising public space making at policy level.



Picture 8: Twitter chat series in Accra



Picture 9: Talking Spaces Series in Accra

Activity, Result, and Outcome Table:

Activity	Accra Outcomes	Niamey Outcomes	Kampala Outcomes	Totals
Organize community awareness campaigns	- 1 meeting (Panel discussion at Mmofra Place) - 2 Twitter Chats	Community awareness was included in the community engagement activities.	Community awareness was included in the community engagement.	1 meeting 2 Twitter Chats
Conduct meetings with journalists.	2 meetings 2 journalists participating 2 media events	3 meetings 10 journalists participating 5 media events	No meetings organized	5 meetings 12 journalists 7 media events
Prepare press releases.	1 press release 3 media instances	1 press release 19 media instances	Opted to wait for the completion of the structures first.	2 press releases 22 media instances
Results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased awareness among the media and the public about public spaces and their importance. - Increased interest in the topic among media - Increased interest in the newly designed spaces - Changes in perception among the community in Kampala about the appropriate uses of public spaces 			

Infrastructure Changes

Infrastructure change was the core activity for the project and brought to life the ideas and needs of the community. In the case of Accra, the site was originally a public space that had been abused by the municipal body (LEKMA) and other parties, which resulted in the land being used as a dumping ground for rubbish, the LEKMA's confiscated items from the surrounding locality, and construction materials. The infrastructure changes included: clearing the site; addressing storm water drainage, water, and waste disposal; securing the perimeter by using a tire and pallet fencing, mesh fencing, chicken wire fencing, and pallet fencing; constructing play components including monkey bars, swings, tire climbers, sand pits, timber walker, A frames, blackboards, toddler platform, play bench, shaded seating, bamboo maze, and hopscotch. The results of the infrastructure changes were an increased number of uses of the site as well as increased number of users. In addition, LEKMA is slowly being removed from the site.



Picture 10: Park Construction in Accra



Picture 11: Park Build in Accra



Picture 12: Finished children's park in Accra



Picture 12: Children playing in their new park in Accra



Picture 13: Hand washing station in Accra

In Niger, problems with the first site were encountered when the Mayor's were recalled by the President and the new Mayor no longer wished to use the site as a public space. This led to a major setback for the project because the Minecraft workshop had already occurred and the site had already been designed. However, municipal officials were part of the initial awareness raising and Minecraft workshop and were excited by the project. They became instrumental in identifying a second site that was only 200 m away from the original project site. This second site was an open space being used by the community for recreational purposes. However, it was not considered a formal public space and there were no facilities or equipment to aid the community in their activities. The infrastructure changes included: defining the parameter of the site using tires coloured with the colours of the Niger flag; levelling the site; construction of toilets; construction of shaded areas; planting trees; construction of a football pitch and petanque ground; construction of a children's play space; and addressing waste disposal and water availability. The results of the infrastructure change are that now more players from the community are coming to use the space now that there is a designated football and petanque area, more women are using the site because of the shade, and more school children are using the site because of the playground.



Picture 14: Park Build in Niamey



Picture 15: New toilet facility in Niamey



Picture 16: New tree in Niamey



Picture 17: Multi-purpose playground in Niamey

In Kampala, the space chosen was an existing play ground, owned by the community, that was being used predominantly by adult males in the community to play football. The community prioritized toilet construction, the need to stop the flooding in the park, and the need to address the rubbish dumping in the park. The initial toilet structure was presented to KCCA and included a basic design that was accessible for people living with disabilities but was expanded by the city in order to better accommodate more people using the site. Infrastructure changes included: site drainage fixed; a netball court added; football pitch levelled; a building housing toilets, change rooms, and a caretakers office (still be completed); planting tree seedlings; and a children's playground that included a merry-go-round, sand pool, wooden swings, benches, wood cars. Although not innovative for other communities, including a children's play space proved to be an innovation for this community and one that has resulted in increased enjoyment for the younger children in the community. These changes resulted in a dramatic increase in the number of people using the site: 100 community members before and 300 after; 20 women before and 50 women after; and 30 children before and 80 after.



Picture 18 and 19: Building toilet and change room facility in Kampala



Picture 20 and 21 : Netball court re-seeded in Kampala



Picture 22: Children’s play space in Kampala



Picture 23: Children playing in Kampala

Activity, Result, and Outcome Table:

Activity	Accra Outcomes	Niamey Outcomes	Kampala Outcomes	Totals
Organize and implement park improvements such as ground levelling, equipment repair/construction, shelter, toilets, and water taps.	<p>17 park improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 12 play components - 5 major infrastructure improvements <p>10+ innovative ideas suggested</p> <p>4 innovative ideas implemented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Perimeter fence - Outdoor reading area - Multipurpose sports pitch - Play component choices 	<p>9 park improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 4 sheds - 2 toilets - 2 grounds (football & petanque) - 1 children's playground 	<p>8 park improvements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 1 building housing toilets and changing rooms and caretakers office (still to be completed) - 1 Netball court Site drainage fixed Football pitched levelled -150 Tree Seedlings planted - 1 children's playground including: 1 Merry go round 1 Sand pool 4 Wooden swings 8 Benches 5 Wood cars 	34 park improvements
Organize a park opening ceremony to illustrate the different components of the park.	1 event (pending)	<p>The park opening ceremony was organized by the community (petanque players and the group of Muslim women)</p> <p>136 participants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Municipality: 5 - Petanque players: 12 - Group of Muslims women: 42 - National federation of petanque: 3 - Community: 74 	1 event (pending)	1 opening ceremony 136 participants
Results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased number of uses and users of each site: - In Accra, the local team increased the number of uses by including places to sit and a playground. This increased the types of users at the site. As a result of the interventions the site now has vendors catering to the increased number 			

	<p>of users, school children after school, for play and a place to do their homework, and community members seeking somewhere to sit, particularly at lunchtime and in the evenings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In Niamey, the local team increased the number of uses by including shaded places to sit, and a playspace for children. Since the intervention, the types of users has increased with more school children using the site after school (32 children), vendors surrounding the park, and women sitting under the shade using the space for study (20). - In Kampala, the local team increased the number of uses at the site by including a play space, and adding a netball court. This has increased the number of users as now children and women have activities and safe place. Before the intervention 100 community members used the playground and currently there are 300 residents that use the park daily. Before the intervention, 20 women were using the park and with the addition of the Netball court, 50 women are visiting the site daily. Prior to the intervention, 30 children were visiting the site to play football before the older members would take over. Now, over 80 children visit the play space daily. There were no people with disabilities using the park before the intervention. The children's play space has attracted 5 children with disabilities thus far.
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Policy

Policy takes time to implement and this project was one of many activities that the local lead organizations are undertaking to improve policy for public spaces. However, this project on its own could not realistically achieve a policy objective. It has, however, provided each city with an example of a how a park can be developed using a community engagement approach. In Accra the overall objective of the policy advocacy was to get the policy makers on board with the initiative, thus granting access to their resources and ensuring that the creation and maintenance of public spaces is included in future development plans. The MP has indicated his support and has agreed to support efforts to lobby other decision makers.

In Niger, policy advocacy was a major component of their project and to that end, they organized a policy workshop that addressed national level policies that could be implemented by the government. This workshop was highly successful and the department responsible for revising the National Strategy for Urban Development has agreed to include public spaces into that plan. As part of the efforts to encourage improved policy in Kampala, the area mayor was invited through local councillors to inspect the project. The objective was to interest him and members of his staff to buy into the preservation of public parks and play areas. On arrival the mayor inspected the incomplete structure, the children's play area and netball court. He appreciated the work done and suggested various measures to improve the facility. The result of this

meeting was improved understanding among the area mayor and his staff and a potential advocate for future work in this community.



Picture 24: Policy workshop in Niamey

Results from the pilot projects along with the meetings organized with decision-makers lead us to be optimistic that both national and local levels of government are now more interested in public spaces and are amenable to having public spaces policy discussions.

Activity, Result, and Outcome Table:

Activity	Accra Outcomes	Niamey Outcomes	Kampala Outcomes	Totals
Organize meetings with decision makers	- 2 formal meetings with local MP - 2 decision-makers	- 1 workshop - 11 decision-makers	- 1 site visit from area mayor	- 2 meetings - 1 workshop - 1 site visit - 14 government officials
Results:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - increased commitment from decision-makers to create, protect, and enhance public spaces - In Accra, the local MP has made a public statement committing his office to the initiative, offering support in lobbying other policy makers. In addition, efforts to connect the community to decision makers has resulted in collaboration between the government and Teshie Residents' Association and a separate project between the government and a local business. - In Niamey, there has been 2 public statements from government officials about 			

	<p>their commitment to develop public spaces. In addition, the ministry in charge of public spaces promotion committed to include policy about public spaces in the new National Strategy of Urban Development.</p> <p>- In Kampala there were no specific policy results. However, the area mayor is now an advocate and he will be helpful in our future fundraising endeavours. In addition, KCCA is interested in seeing the community engagement process applied to a different type of public space.</p>
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Progress Towards Ultimate Outcome

The ultimate outcome we wished to work towards achieving, for which our project contributed was “improved local policies, plans and designs for safe, inclusive and accessible public spaces for all which supports more compact, integrated and connected, socially inclusive cities and neighbourhoods in partner cities.” Indicators that we are moving towards achieving the ultimate outcome include:

- The projects are already being considered as a best practice in community engagement and public space improvement and are being examined by other communities in the cities. Those communities want the same model to be used in their areas. Having other communities and other community groups interested in replicating the work increases the likelihood of policy change.
- Local children in all three cities began using the parks before construction was completed, which speaks to the need for such a space in these areas and others. That they and their parents began patronising it as soon as was possible also speaks to the parks being an inclusive and accessible public space as intended.
- There has been favorable commitment of the government and municipal officials in promoting public spaces in Niger. Despite the designation of a new Minister in charge of urban development after our project began, the technical committee that formed to integrate public spaces in the new National Urban Strategy will still be established as part of the agenda of the Ministry for 2019. Also, seven municipalities outside of Niamey are really interested in promoting public spaces. Currently, the government has undertaken the rehabilitation and/or construction of parks in Niamey.
- Each site saw important volunteer contributions including by providing both time and resources as well as by attending meetings and sitting on committees and boards. This suggests that public spaces can act as a catalyst for community involvement and city building.
- In each site the community is enjoying the space immensely. This speaks to the importance of public spaces in contributing to livable cities.

These indicators suggest that these projects have contributed and will continue to contribute to our ultimate outcome.

Lessons Learned

The projects were ambitious and in many cases the projects were a first for the communities that were involved. As a result, we have many lessons we can share with other communities hoping to embark on a similar process:

- The Minecraft workshop proved to be an innovative and exciting way for community members to engage in developing their own park. However, Minecraft should not be the only community engagement activity. Community meetings before and after Minecraft are equally as important in order to ensure that the plans truly reflect the needs of the community.
- It is important to develop realistic budgets. A good example was in Kampala where the main priority for the community was the toilet facility and it was believed, when initially deciding on this priority, that the funds would be sufficient. However, the initial plans for the toilet facilities were expanded to include change rooms, the funds available were no longer sufficient. The community decided not to change course and to continue to build their structure. However, in hindsight, perhaps more time and discussion was needed to determine whether the funds available would have been better spent on other priorities. As a learning for other projects, it is important to be really clear about what budget is available and ensure that projects are not undertaken that are beyond the scope of the available funds unless fundraising efforts are already underway and it clear where the additional funds will be coming from.
- Delays are common in such project and it is therefore important to maintain the community's faith and optimism even when developments were not visible. It is important to be transparent with the community about intentions for the site.
- Ensure all local and government leaders are approached and engaged independently, as well as invited to planning meetings before construction begins. These leaders can help move things along when delays occur (as was the case with Accra and Niamey). But, it is also key that all leaders are consulted because often it is the traditional (as opposed to elected or governmental) carry a moral weight in the community that should not be under-estimated.
- Expect there to be unexpected obstacles that will need to be over-come. In Accra the main obstacle was water leakage from the main water pipe. In Niamey the main obstacle was related to needing to change sites more than half-way through the project. Obstacles can occur for many reasons and the project team will need to be able to problem solve possible solutions with the community.

Conclusion

These projects have already, in their short time, achieved many important results including increased awareness about the importance of public spaces, increased park usage, increased trust among the community and government officials, increased community engagement, and increased ownership by the community of their public space. The foundations for sustainable parks have been laid. The communities have been encouraged to take ownership of their projects from the outset, through constant dialogue and participation. The public spaces will be used as a case study for future community-led projects and engagements and will provide the foundation for our evidence-based advocacy campaigns for public space policy improvement in Accra, Kampala, and Niamey. Mmofra Foundation, Public Spaces for All, and Advocates for Public Spaces are committed to anchoring and leading advocacy with policy makers on public space in Accra.