

PUBLIC SPACE INVENTORY & ASSESSMENT

NAIROBI CITY COUNTY | KENYA

OVERVIEW AND KEY FINDINGS

2020 DRAFT



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# NAIROBI

## PUBLIC SPACE INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

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Overview and Key Findings





## our shared purpose

“ We commit ourselves to promoting safe, inclusive, accessible, green and quality public spaces, including streets, sidewalks and cycling lanes, squares, waterfront areas, gardens and parks, that are multifunctional areas designed and managed to ensure social interaction, human development, building peaceful and democratic societies and promoting cultural diversity. We reaffirm the central role of inclusive public space in reducing social and spatial inequalities across urban areas (formal and informal) and that public spaces have positive impacts on health and well-being. ”

**Transformative commitments for sustainable urban development,  
New Urban Agenda**

## OVERVIEW

Public space has emerged as a critical lifeline for cities and their residents. It has proven to be a timeless risk-reducing infrastructure, an essential urban service and an infrastructure of opportunity especially in times of crisis, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has exposed critical gaps in the accessibility, flexibility, design, management and maintenance, connectivity and equitable distribution of public space in Nairobi. These need to be addressed incrementally in order to improve health equity across the city, help the city build-back better and future-proof itself and its citizens. This report highlights the gaps in the distribution, accessibility and quality of public open spaces in Nairobi, and provides a starting point to develop an evidence-based strategy and policy for the protection, revitalization, creation, management and enjoyment of public spaces, and restoration of the city image as the ‘Green City in the Sun’. It covers distribution, types and typologies, and access and inclusivity at the city scale. It also shines light on activities and uses, landscape furniture and amenities, safety, diversity, and custodianship and management at the site scale.

# KEY MESSAGES

- 1. RESTORE NAIROBI'S PLACE AS THE GREEN CITY IN THE SUN.** Well-designed public spaces raise the visual landscape value and contribute to the overall environmental aesthetics, in turn positively impacting on the overall image of the city. Besides being an element of beauty in a crowded scene, public space gives users a pleasant break and a chance to escape from the pressures of the city. Use public spaces as a tool for urban transformation.
- 2. LEVERAGE QUALITY PUBLIC SPACES AS A BRANDING AND MARKETING TOOL FOR THE CITY.** As Nairobi seeks to establish itself as world-class African metropolis and position itself as the best business destination and attract investment, the presence of high quality public spaces become a critical marketing tool. Experience shows that corporates are attracted to locations offering well designed and well managed public spaces.
- 3. TRANSFORM POTENTIAL PUBLIC SPACES INTO WELCOMING PEOPLE-PLACES.** Using a mix of good design, social programming interventions, and a well-functioning management framework, transform public spaces like Ngong Forest, disused quarries and landfills, and infrastructure Rights of Way to promote their use and enjoyment as public spaces.
- 4. ANCHOR PUBLIC SPACE IN NORMATIVE PROGRAMS OF THE CITY.** In order to systematically and sustainably finance, manage and monitor the creation, protection and upgrading of public spaces, it is imperative that the idea of public space is anchored at the core of urban planning, air quality and wider climate action, urban regeneration, slum upgrading and regeneration of Nairobi river.
- 5. ENHANCE CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE ON URBAN DESIGN AND PUBLIC SPACE.** Strengthen the capacity of the directorate of urban design and open space management both financially and human resource-wise and consolidate all public space related programs, initiatives, projects and activities spanning different sectors. In addition, widen the scope of the directorate to include research on new innovations, design, implementation of public space reclamation and revitalisation interventions, and maintenance.
- 6. FACILITATE ACCESSIBILITY, INCLUSIVENESS AND SAFETY OF PUBLIC SPACES.** Through an elaborate legal framework, policies and partnerships with various actors, legislate and promote governance and management models that foster social inclusivity, accessibility and safety of public spaces while maintaining the quality of the services therein.
- 7. EXPLORE AND CULTIVATE INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIPS AROUND PUBLIC SPACE.** Strengthen partnerships and collaborations with the academia, professional bodies, research institutions and the private sector among others to provide design, management and programming solutions for the city's public spaces by incorporating the public space agenda in their curricula.



- 8. RECLAIM AND RECOVER LAND ORIGINALLY DESIGNATED AS PUBLIC OPEN SPACE.** With the amount of urban land used and experienced as public spaces currently standing at 3106 Ha, the Nairobi Metropolitan Services, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry and the Nairobi City County Government in collaboration with other national government agencies such as the National Lands Commission should urgently initiate an in-depth audit of all lands in the city county to establish the ownership of public spaces.
- 9. BUILD AND CULTIVATE POLITICAL WILL TOWARDS PUBLIC SPACE.** Through evidence-based research and negotiations, heighten the awareness of the political leadership and policy makers on the need and importance of public, and green spaces hence facilitate creation, protection and management of public spaces.
- 10. REVIEW REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES FOR PUBLIC SPACES.** Ensure that laid down rules and regulations governing the design, implementation, management and maintenance of public spaces facilitate the participation of non-state actors, and that they do not create unnecessary barriers to the participation of potential partners.

# KEY FINDINGS

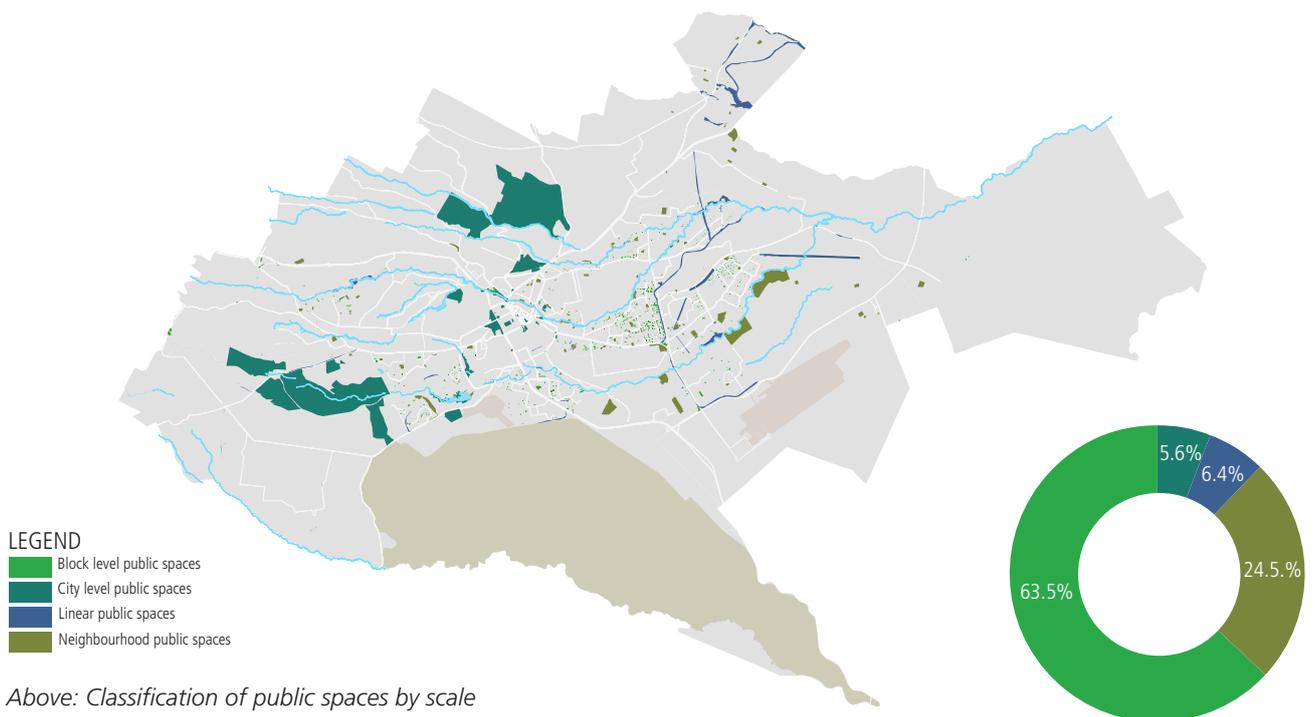
## NAIROBI HAS A RICH DIVERSITY OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES

Nairobi’s Public Open Space ecosystem is a complex tapestry of natural and environmental contrasts. The typologies of public open space include urban forests, cemeteries, parks and gardens, squares and courtyards, and road reserves amongst others. However, the ecosystem is dominated by potential public open spaces, such as derelict land, infrastructure rights of way such as electricity wayleaves, railway reserves and riparian reserves. Other typologies of public spaces in the city include amenity green spaces, public parking lots, street corners and other non-defined spaces which include disused quarries. Public parking lots for instance are used as parking spaces during the week and either as public markets on Saturdays and during public holidays, and as skating rinks on Sundays.

The inventory revealed that the city has 526 block level public spaces. Majority of them are courtyards, playgrounds and gardens. At the neighbourhood level, there are 203

public spaces. These include neighbourhood squares gardens, neighbourhood parks and sports fields. The city also has 46 city level public spaces. These include the large and strategic public spaces around the city. On the other hand, the city has 53 linear public spaces. Majority of these are potential public spaces. They include infrastructure-rights-of-way like electricity way leave, railway reserve and road reserves.

NUMBER OF PUBLIC OPEN SPACES PER TYPOLOGY			
#	TYPOLGY	NUMBER	AREA (HA)
1.	Urban Forests	2	1930.3
2.	Nature reserves	2	94.1
3.	Parks and Gardens	34	129.6
4.	Playgrounds	99	90
5.	Cemeteries	6	10.2
6.	Squares	14	11.6
7.	Sports fields	51	65.5
8.	Courtyards	413	56.6
9.	Infrastructure ROW	5	319.6
10.	Others	206	398.9
#	TOTAL	826	3106.6



Above: Classification of public spaces by scale

## DISPARITIES IN THE DISTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC SPACES

The distribution of public open spaces in Nairobi City County reinforces the social and economic inequalities regarding access. Equitable distribution of public spaces across the city is an important element for creating a cohesive city, balancing growth and revitalizing impoverished communities and inner city neighbourhoods.

Overall, there are 826 public spaces in Nairobi City County. They occupy a combined area of 3106.4Ha. This is equivalent to 5.32 percent of the built up area and translates to 6.56

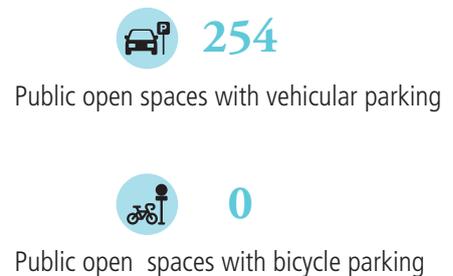
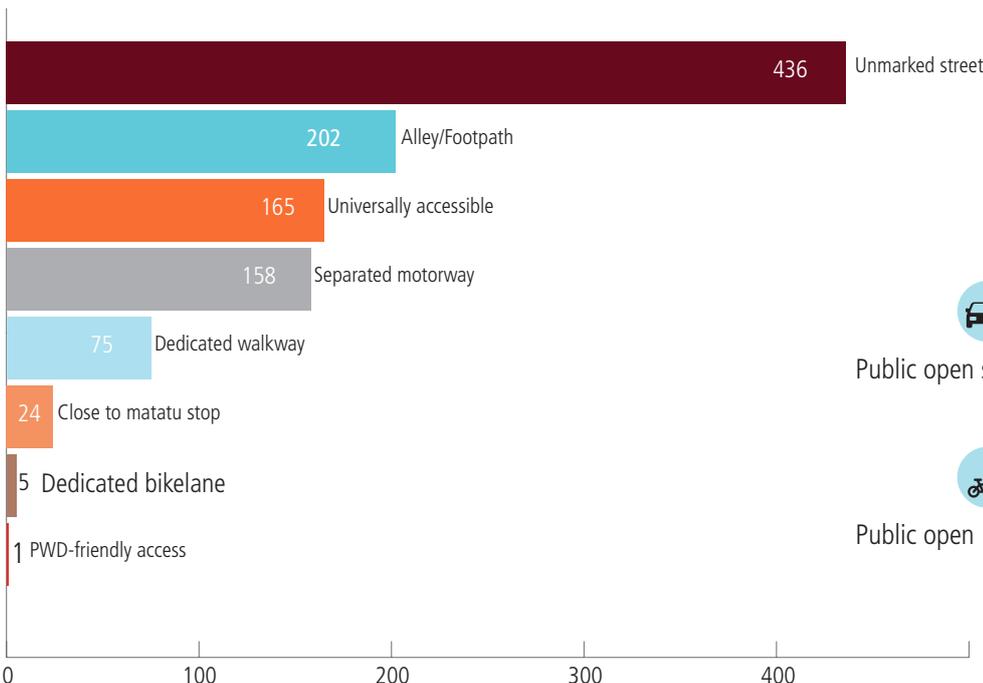
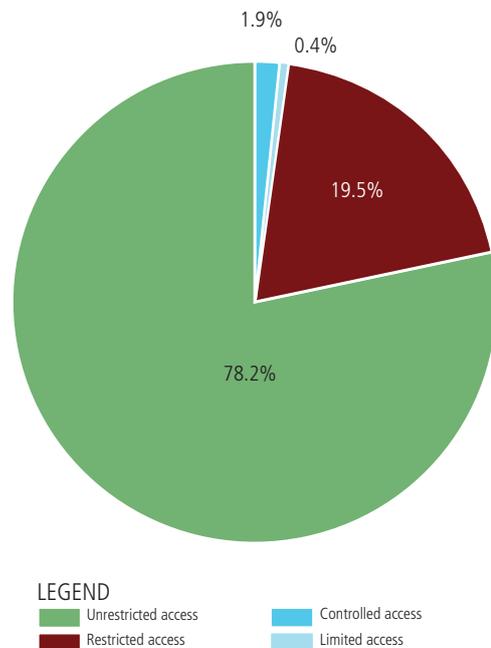
square metres per capita public open space. Studies have shown that successful cities have a minimum percentage of 15-20 percent of urban land allocated to public open spaces. There is a clear need for Nairobi to work towards improving the amount of urban land designated, used and experienced as public space. This is particularly important to future-proof the city from stress and such shocks climate and health disaster risks.



## ACCESSIBILITY IS AN INTERPLAY OF INFRASTRUCTURE & ENTRY FEES

Infrastructure differential can be a crucial enabler or barrier to accessibility and inclusivity in public spaces. Universal design, for instance, design of walkways, entrances and amenities such as toilets can promote access to and inclusivity in public spaces. In Nairobi, only 19.8 per cent of the 826 public open spaces have inclusive infrastructure. Noteworthy, despite the fact that over 47 percent of Nairobians meet their daily commute needs by walking, only 75 of the 826 public open spaces have dedicated walkways connected to them. Additionally, only five and 24 of the public spaces respectively are connected by a bicycle lane and have matatu stops within 400 metres respectively.

Across the city, a new trend is evolving where access to public spaces is limited by charging entry fees. This management model is particularly evident in public spaces managed by national government and non-state actors. On the other hand, access to 16 public spaces is controlled by opening hours.



Accessibility infrastructure for public spaces in Nairobi

## LANDSCAPE FURNITURE AND AMENITIES ARE INADEQUATE

Landscape furniture and amenities create excellent settings for resting, sitting, eating, waiting, people-watching and social encounters. They add a sense of comfort and pleasure to public spaces, inviting people to stay and linger.

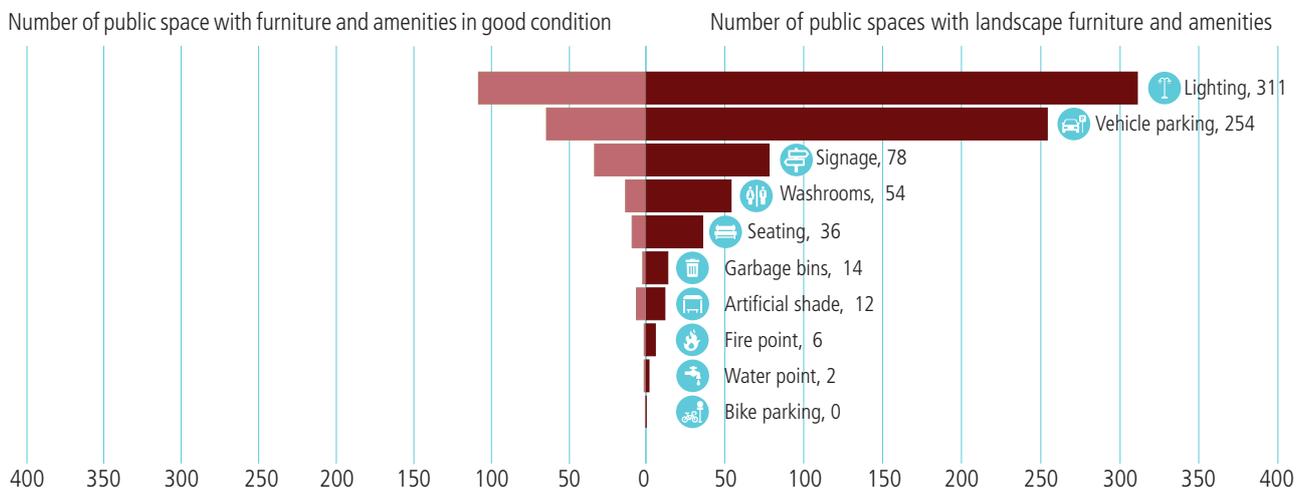
The study found that 316 public spaces have lighting, of which only 108 paces have their lamps in good condition, making more than half of the public spaces no-go zones at night. The assessment further revealed that only thirty-six public spaces have seating, of which, only nine have seating that are in a good condition. Such basic amenities as washrooms are available in only fifty-four public spaces, of which the ones in good condition are in just thirteen public spaces. It is also worth noting that in the entire city, water points are available in only five public spaces, and not a single public open space has a bicycle parking rack.

In the wake of COVID-19 pandemic, it is important for the city to invest more in making public spaces amenable,

providing basic risk-reducing services such as clean water to enable hand-washing among other uses.



Children Corner at Mlango Kubwa © UN-Habitat/ Kirsten Milhahn

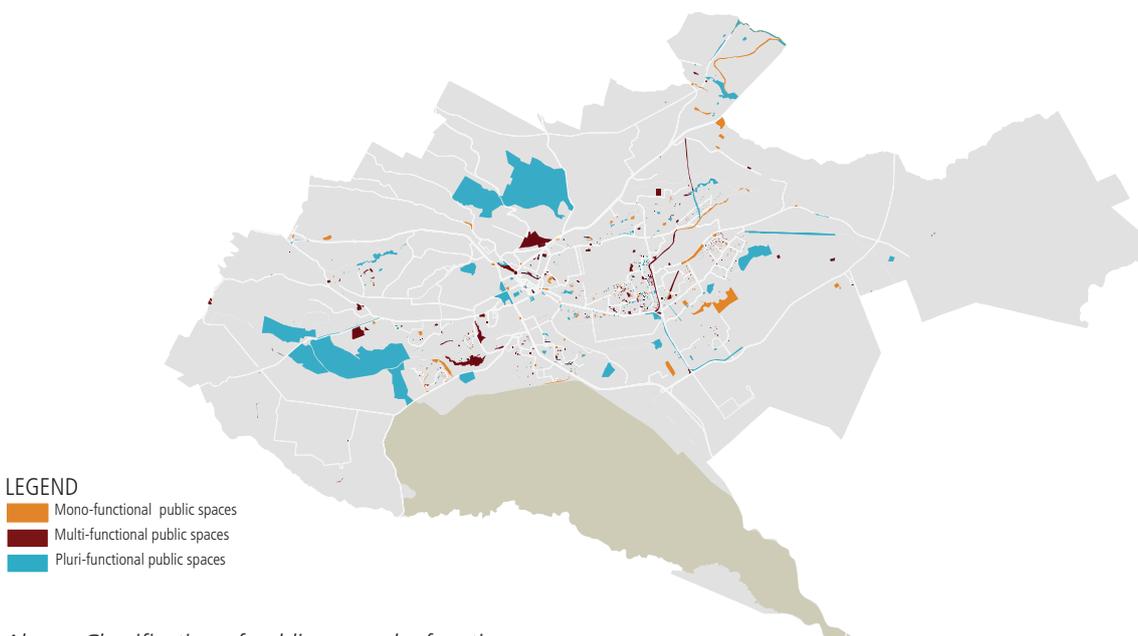
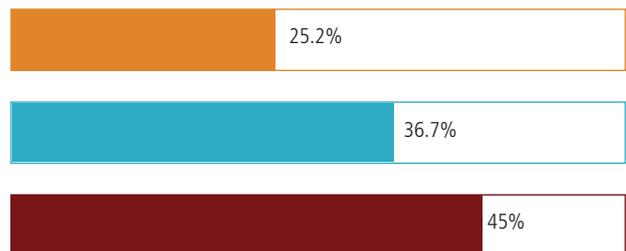


## NAIROBI'S PUBLIC OPEN SPACES ARE A CONFLUENCE OF ACTIVITIES

Great places are attractive, not just by design but also the diversity of activities and uses therein. They are places where celebrations are held, social and economic exchanges occur, where strangers meet other strangers, where friends run into one another, and where people from different walks of life meet as civic equals - where ethnic, social and economic tensions are overlooked and disparate sectors of society blend harmoniously.

Main activities in public open spaces across the city include leisure, sports and livelihood related activities. Whilst a number of activities are compatible with the function of the spaces, other activities like car repair need to be managed to maintain the use of public open spaces as places of enjoyment. Further, there is still minimal practice of social programming in the city's public open spaces. As such, majority of the spaces are empty, and have fallen into the hands of 'undesirables'.

The survey found that 25.2 percent of the public spaces are mono-functional, used for a singular function while 36.7 percent of the public spaces are pluri-functional, spaces used for multiple activities at the same time Nairobi. On the other hand, 45 percent of the public spaces are multi-functional - used for different functions at different times of day and week. An example is the Sunken Car Park which is used for different activities on different days of the week. During the week, the space is used as a public parking lot while on Sundays, it is used as a skating rink.

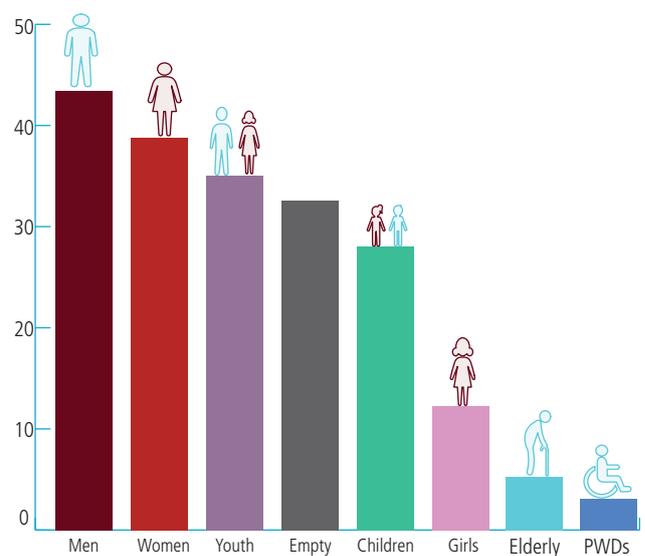


Above: Classification of public spaces by function

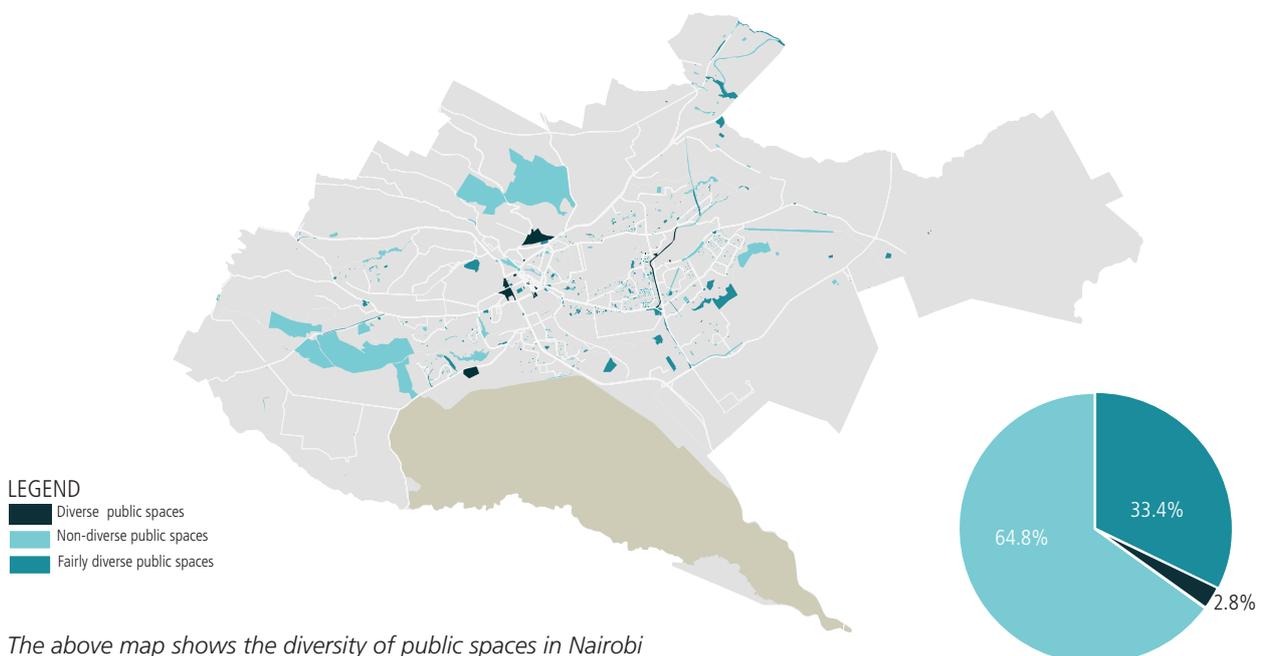
## THE CITY'S PUBLIC SPACES LACK DIVERSITY

Successful public spaces are welcoming and accessible to everyone regardless of their age, race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic status and sexual orientation. These spaces offer lots of things to do and see, and a multiplicity of activities to engage in. In addition, they are accommodating and welcoming to both men and women, children, teenagers, the elderly and persons with disabilities.

The assessment revealed that public open spaces in Nairobi are not diverse. Persons with disabilities were found in just 26 of the public spaces. This suggests that public spaces in the city may not be welcoming for persons living with disabilities. Women and girls were found in 322 and 102 public spaces respectively, while children's presence was observed in 233 public spaces. It is noteworthy that the assessment was taken on a weekday. However, inadequate diversity across public spaces suggests inadequate social opportunities, and lack of amenities and facilities.



Diversity of users in public open spaces



The above map shows the diversity of public spaces in Nairobi

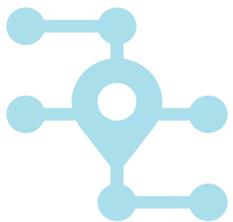
# RECOMMENDATIONS



REC: 1

## PROTECT AND REVITALISE PUBLIC SPACES

- The government should adopt a multi-pronged approach such as enforcement of laws, partnerships and collaborations with civil society groups, residents associations and state departments to ensure that public spaces are protected from illegal allocation to private entities, change of use, and destruction by mega infrastructure projects and conserved for future generations to use and enjoy.
- Embrace social programming and innovative design solutions to transform inactive public spaces into inclusive, welcoming and safe destinations. When public spaces are vibrant and welcoming, they not only build civic pride and cultivate a sense of ownership amongst the general public but they also protect them from misappropriation.
- Embrace and support low-cost placemaking interventions to revitalise and improve the quality of public spaces. This would not only ensure sustainability and perpetuity of the public spaces but will also help create ownership and place-attachment among city residents.



REC: 2

## CREATE MORE PUBLIC SPACES TO MEET THE EVER INCREASING NEED

- Anchor public space in the urban planning of the city in order to create more public spaces in a sustainable and systematic way. Leverage urban planning tools such as land readjustment, urban renewal and land value sharing to create more public spaces.
- Expand the public space system by creating and promoting incentives and programs to encourage private open spaces like schools, sports clubs, golf courses and public institutions to open their open spaces for public use and enjoyment on days of the week.
- Create and or strengthen and enforce regulations that compel property developers to surrender a portion of their developable land to the city for use and experience as public open space.
- The Nairobi Metropolitan Services and relevant state departments should allocate resources for the creation of new public spaces, the protection and management and maintenance of existing ones.



REC: 3

## **FACILITATE ACCESSIBILITY, INCLUSIVENESS AND SAFETY OF PUBLIC SPACES**

- Through an elaborate legal framework, policies and partnerships with various actors, promote governance and management models that foster social inclusion, universal accessibility and safety of public spaces while maintaining sustainability of the quality of the services therein.
- Explore innovative funding mechanisms including developing themed spaces within public spaces, ring fencing, events, tax assessments of properties in close proximity, rents, value sharing with motorists, corporate sponsorships, and charging for particular uses like parking and weddings in order to raise money for maintenance and management of public spaces.
- Integrate Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) principles in the improvement of comfort levels by improving the general environmental quality particularly solid waste management.



REC: 4

## **HEIGHTEN PUBLIC AWARENESS ON THE CO-BENEFITS OF PUBLIC SPACES**

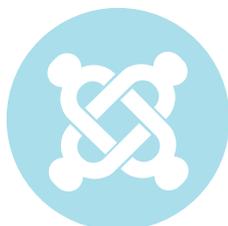
- Ensure that public space is an integral part of the city's normative programs, implementation of the NIUPLAN, urban regeneration and any other future road-map.
- Popularize public spaces among Nairobians. Some policy directions could include:
  - Promoting outdoor programs or physical activities in public spaces.
  - Promoting public space activation events like street festivals, Placemaking Week Nairobi, Live Love Nairobi festival, open air concerts and the Nairobi River Marathon among others to raise awareness of the importance of green, and public space.
  - Lobbying television and radio broadcasters to provide as much airtime time for promoting the use and benefits of public space as they give to promoting their programs and commercial advertisements.



REC: 5

## PROMOTE PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS AROUND PUBLIC SPACE

- Strengthen partnerships and collaborations with the academia, professional bodies, research institutions and the private sector among others to provide design, management and programming solutions for the city's public spaces by incorporating the public space agenda in their curricula.
- Embrace innovative Public Private People Partnership approaches including 'adopt a park' and challenge-driven public space transformations such as Changing Faces Competition to mobilise the public around public spaces.
- Create and publicise incentive schemes and programs inviting and encouraging the private sector and community groups to invest in upgrading and maintaining public spaces.



REC: 6

## ENHANCE INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY AND KNOWLEDGE ON PUBLIC SPACE

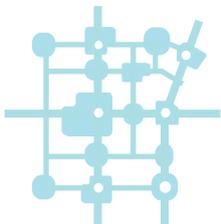
- Strengthen the capacity of the directorate of urban design and open space management both financially and institutionally in order to break silos and consolidate all public space related programs, initiatives, projects and activities. As such, widen the scope of the directorate to include research on new innovations, design and implementation of public space reclamation and revitalisation interventions, monitoring and reporting on the state of public spaces, and management of public open spaces.
- Develop a public space strategy, policy and bill to ensure adequate protection and revitalization, flexible, inclusive and sustainable management, and equitable distribution of public spaces across the urban divide, especially at the neighbourhood level



REC: 7

## RECLAIM AND RECOVER ALL LAND THAT WAS SET ASIDE AS PUBLIC SPACE

- In collaboration with the national government agencies such as the National Lands Commission, initiate an in-depth audit of all public land within the city county and the wider Nairobi Metropolitan Area to establish the ownership and use of all public land and public spaces. Initiate and speed up recovery of all land that was initially designated as public open space.



REC: 8

## RESTORE AND STRENGTHEN THE CITYWIDE NETWORK OF GREEN, AND PUBLIC SPACES

- Through targeted and strategic approaches, plan, design and implement public space interventions as a system. Connect public spaces and other destinations through such elements as green belts, riparian reserves, infrastructure Rights of Ways, pedestrian-priority streets, sidewalks and bike lanes to form a citywide network.
- In collaboration with key stakeholders like the Kenya Railways, KPLC, and Kenya Pipeline Company, design and implement non-traditional public spaces such as electricity way leaves, railway reserves and arterial interchanges among others as amenity green spaces. This could be an innovation for protecting infrastructure rights-of-way, flight paths and the dangerous open fields like electricity and pipeline way leaves from territorial encroachment.





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