



URBAN FABRIC
INITIATIVE WEEK

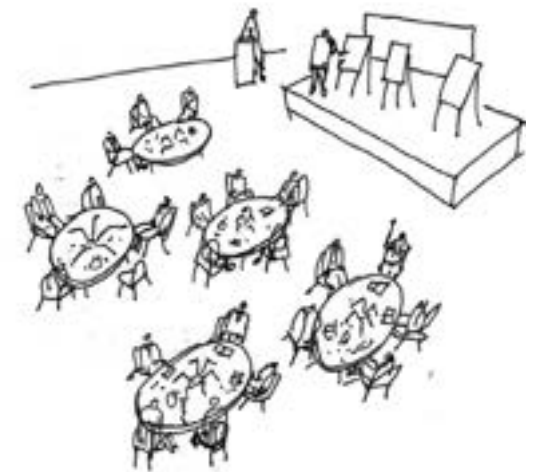
3-7 JUNE

NAIROBI, KENYA

Abidjan, Dakar, Ouagadougou, Antananarivo, Monrovia, Kigali, Nairobi, or Tunisia. These are all regions where Urban Fabric Initiatives, the experimental urban projects funded by the French Development Agency (AFD), aim to collaboratively develop public spaces or community facilities that complement major urban projects funded by AFD.

A WEEK OF EXCHANGES

It was in Nairobi where members of various teams, project implementers, public authorities, or funders met from June 3rd to 7th, 2024. This event brought together around thirty urban development and community dynamics professionals, to share and discuss experiences and issues from diverse contexts. Conversations alternated between French, English, and a bit of Swahili, with participants enthusiastically engaging in both field visits and indoor workshops over the five days. The goal was to collectively fine tune practices to better meet the needs of the residents and users of the zones where we work, and here we recount some key moments from the week.

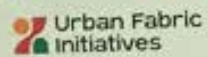


LA SEMAINE DES PÉPINIÈRES URBAINES

3-7 JUIN 2024

	lundi kofisi 9	mardi kibera	mercredi korogocho	jeudi kofisi 9	vendredi ufi / kofisi 9
9:00	accueil apprenons à nous connaître	départ 8:00 visite de Kibera Public Space Project	départ 8:00 visite avec Public Space Network - project Kombgreen & Mustard Seed Garden	atelier sur des outils d'urbanisme participatif	départ 8:00 visite de la Pépinière urbaine de Nairobi
12:30	D É J E U N E R				
14:00	caractériser les Pépinières urbaines	partage d'expériences sur la gestion des équipements et espaces publics	TEMPS LIBRE	entraînement mental débat mouvant la gouvernance des P.U.	debrief de la semaine, regard de la recherche avec Ayanda Raji & Ninon Ngondo Fandre
17:30					

LOTOS INN&SUITES, 19 Mpaka Road, Westlands / KOFISI 9, 9 West Building, 7th Floor



THE URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVES WEEK

3-7 JUNE 2024

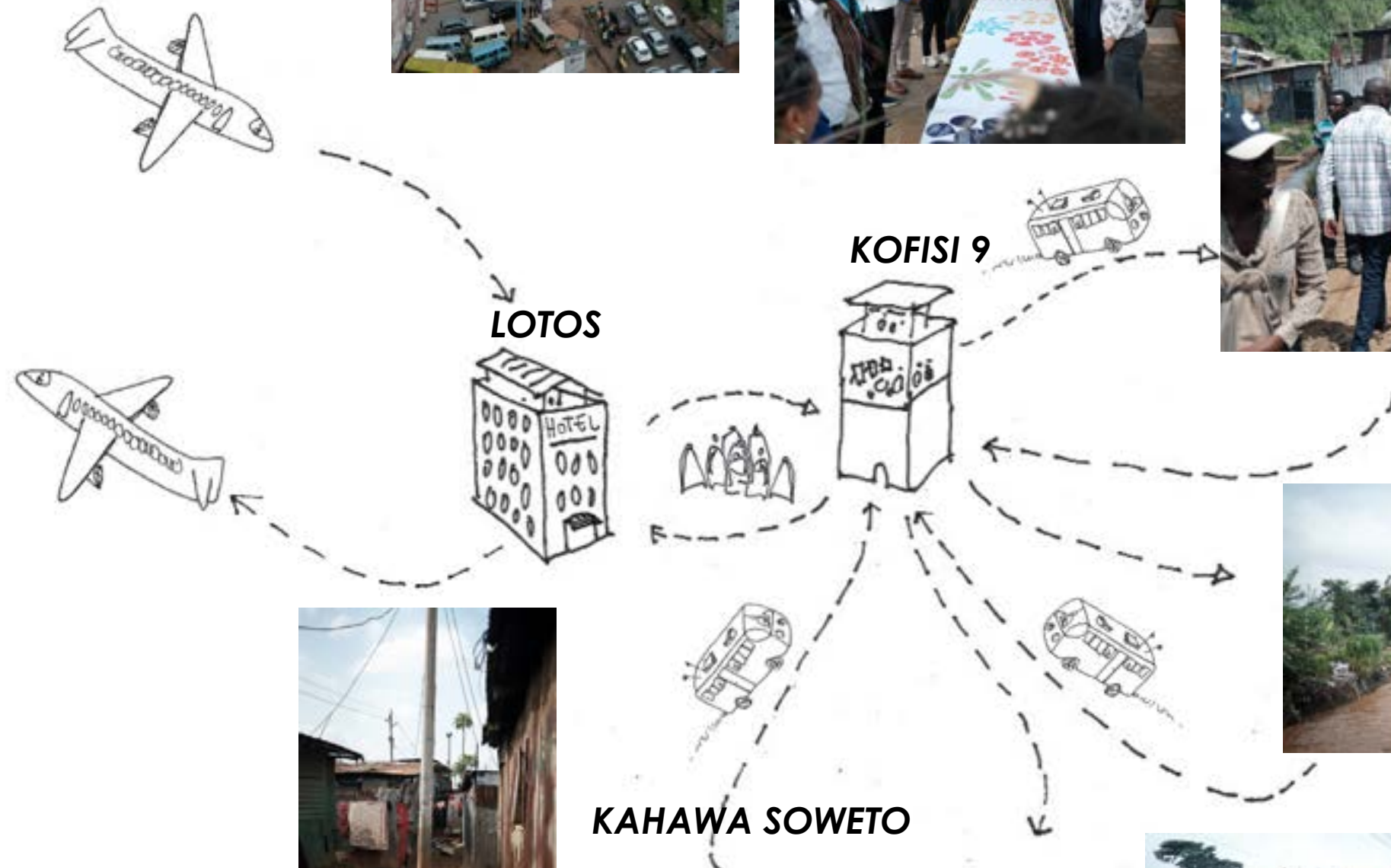
	monday kofisi 9	tuesday kibera	wednesday korogocho	thursday kofisi 9	friday ufi / kofisi 9
9:00	arrivals & settling in getting to know each other	departure 8:00 visit of Kibera Public Space Project	departure 8:00 visit with Public Space Network - project Kombgreen & Mustard Seed Garden	workshop on participative urbanism tools	departure 8:00 visit of the Nairobi Urban Fabric Initiative
12:30	L U N C H				
14:00	characterising the Urban Fabric Initiatives	sharing experience in managing public facilities and spaces	FREE TIME	mental training governance in the UFI	debrief of the week with analysis from participating researcher Ayanda Raji & Ninon Ngondo Fandre
17:30					

LOTOS INN&SUITES, 19 Mpaka Road, Westlands / KOFISI 9, 9 West Building, 7th Floor

WHERE WE WENT



KIBERA



KAHAWA SOWETO



KOROGOCHO & DANDORA





“I BELIEVE IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO STANDARDIZE THE URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVES AND THAT WE MUST INSTEAD EMBRACE THIS COMPLEXITY.”

Olivier Bedu, UFI Abidjan

Key terms for Urban Fabric Initiatives in local languages:

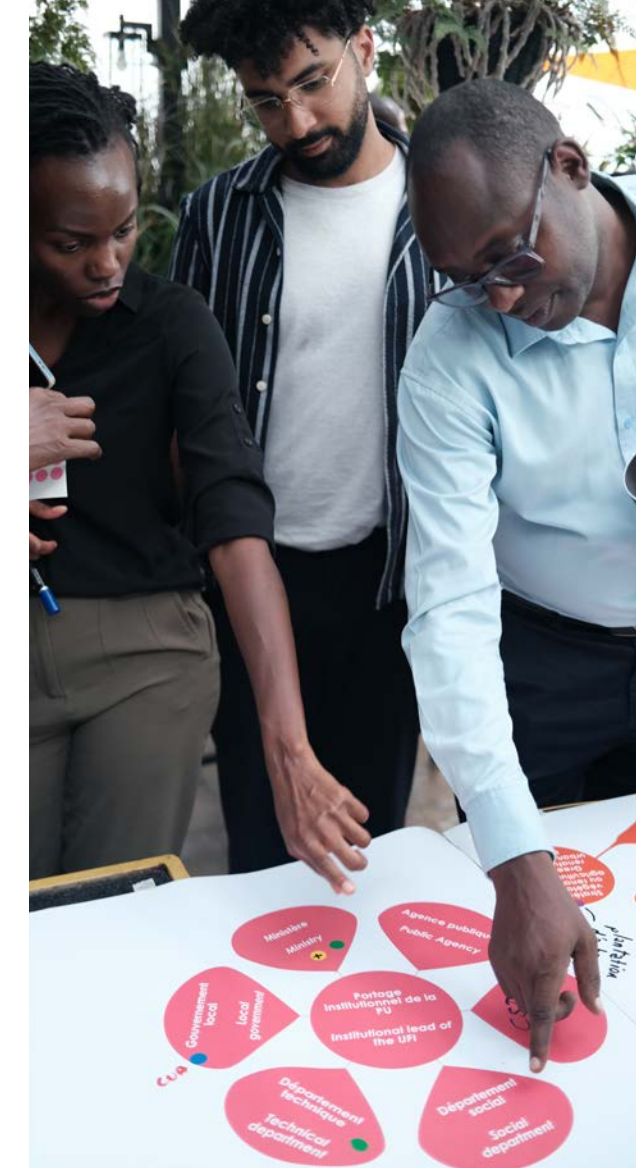
“The word **Zananantsika**: our city or our neighborhood or our place”
UFI Madagascar

“**The small project that comes before the big project**”
UFI Abidjan

“**An idea that is born, that sprouts, and becomes something bigger**”
UFI Ouagadougou

“We should add the notion of **‘small-scale project with a big impact’** to the term Urban Fabric Initiative”
UFI Kigali

“There are 16 tribes and the only common language is English, and we often use the term **‘community corners’**”
UFI Monrovia



To start the week: introductions! The Urban Fabric Initiatives program is currently implemented in eight African countries, and many of its members had yet to meet.

As an icebreaker, participants were grouped into international tables and invited to play a game recognizing clues (images, words, symbols) from Urban Fabric Initiatives in various countries.

Following this, each of the seven present Urban Fabric Initiatives (Tunisia was unable to attend), represented by a project implementer and a member of the contracting public authority, characterized their project by positioning it on a mural based on several aspects: themes targeted by their country’s Urban Fabric Initiative, spatial scale of implementation, institutional support, relationship with the major project (spatial, temporal, and interactions), type of construction (temporary or permanent), focus on environmental or gender issues, and engagement of future users or the community.



“AN URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVE IS AN IDEA THAT SPROUTS AND GROWS.”

Hervé Koné, UFI Ouagadougou

CHARACTERIZING URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVES

“AN URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVE IS THE COMMUNITY’S AND STAKEHOLDERS’ COMMITMENT TO IMPROVING INFRASTRUCTURE IN THE CITY OF KIGALI.”

Flavia Gwiza, UFI Kigali



VISIT TO KIBERA

Visits to the informal settlement of Kibera highlighted KDI's approach of supporting the development of **a network of public spaces designed and managed by local communities**, combining public services and facilities with landscaping solutions to address flooding issues. For example, the KPSP11 site in Makina Village, Kibera, was developed by a group of residents with KDI's support, based on **the concept of productive spaces**. The idea is to generate income while providing essential services to the community: public toilets, a water point, a daycare center, a playground, etc. Each of these activities is managed by a specific committee of about twenty members. The activities generate profits that are shared among them. Other productive activities have been developed nearby: a plastic recycling workshop and a brick factory using cement and plastic.



ON THE KEY ISSUE OF OPERATIONS & MANAGEMENT

“THIS ISSUE RAISES THE QUESTION OF WHAT KIND OF CITY WE WANT, WITH AN ULTRA-LIBERAL CITY ON ONE SIDE WHERE USERS PAY FOR THE MAINTENANCE OF A PLACE, AND AN ANARCHO-COMMUNITY SELF-MANAGED CITY ON THE OTHER...?”

Florent Chiappero, UFI Dakar



One session focused on the essential and delicate issue of managing the collective facilities and public spaces created within the framework of Urban Fabric Initiatives. To introduce the discussion, the teams from Dakar, Abidjan, and Ouagadougou, representing the first generation of Urban Fabric Initiatives, presented the dynamics initiated at their sites, notably through the establishment of Management Committees and the main challenges they face today.

“WE REALISE THERE IS A NEED FOR A HYBRID MODEL: AN ALL-PUBLIC APPROACH DOESN'T WORK, AND NEITHER DOES AN ALL-COMMUNITY APPROACH. HOW DO WE FIND THE BALANCE BETWEEN INVOLVING THE COMMUNITY WITHOUT DISENGAGING THE PUBLIC AUTHORITY?”

Julien Boglietto, AFD

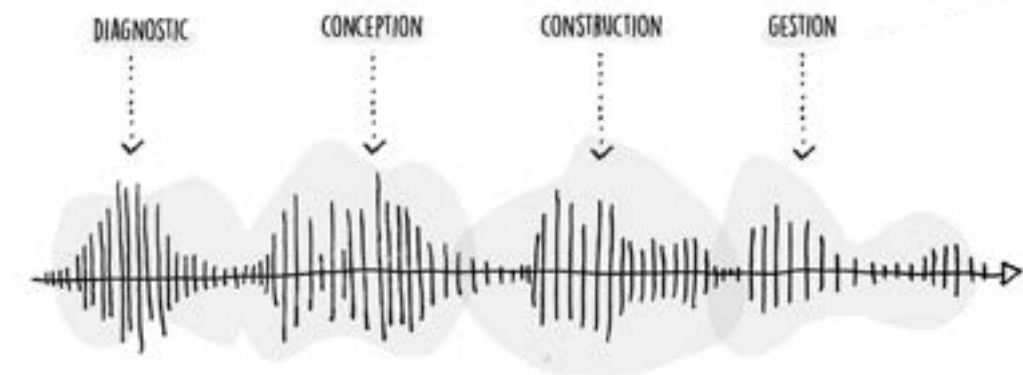


We can draw three key lessons:

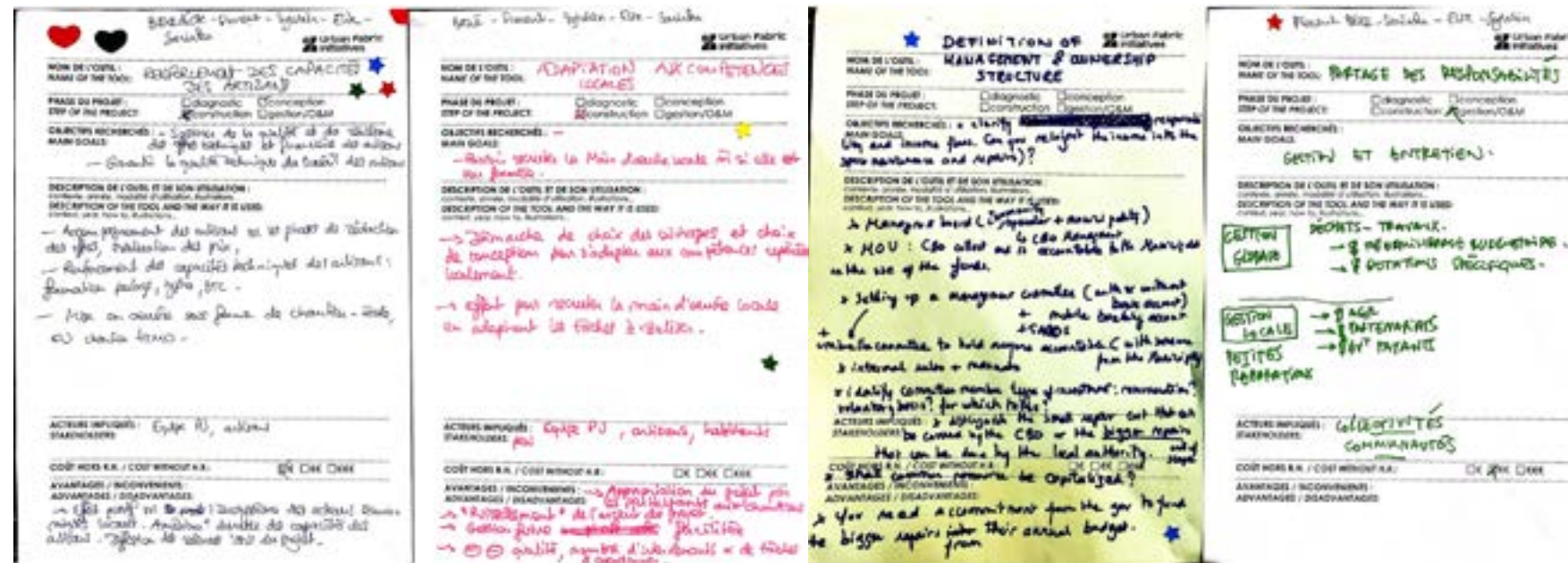
- First, it seems essential that the **operational modalities** of Management Committees, their representativeness, their own prerogatives, and their operational **economic models** are discussed and clearly defined **before the construction of facilities**. All these aspects can condition the choice of facilities to construct.
- Secondly, it is noted that management deficiencies mainly stem from the lack of involvement of local authorities or the contracting authority of the project. Indeed, it is necessary to **find a balance of responsibility and commitment** between what falls under community action on one side and the responsibility of public actors on the other.
- Finally, a last point raised concludes the need to strengthen the links between the Urban Fabric Initiative and the major urban project to which it is attached. It would then act as a **prototype** of future management modalities, namely the organization of activities, maintenance, repair, or transformation of developed spaces.

TOOLS FOR PARTICIPATION

While Urban Fabric Initiatives are centered on the involvement of residents and users, there are a multitude of tools to make this participation effective throughout the four major phases of a project:



During a workshop, the teams shared and discussed several of these tools used in Urban Fabric Initiatives or other projects. This work was done in groups and followed the project management cycle, producing more than fifty participation tool sheets corresponding to as many tools that can be mobilized in participatory urban projects.



Several categories of tools emerged:

- **Tools for producing knowledge** useful for analysis of sites and their usage, such as topographical surveys, literature reviews, quantitative counting, or observation..
- **Visualization tools** to elicit reactions, such as base maps, image banks, site models, kiosks, panels, and the "sentoukaye."
- **Approaches to organize discussions**, such as focus groups, workshops, individual interviews, and periodic general assemblies.

• **Devices to meet local actors**, such as the "mobile penc", the welcome office, or exploratory walks.

• **Methods for engaging private or associative actors**, such as design-build, community-based procurement, restricted consultation of artisans, participatory construction, LICW, or Community Management Committees.

• **Guiding principles**, such as eco-design, adaptation to local skills or the shared responsibilities grid.

Some of these tools will be selected to enhance the toolkit on the Urban Fabric Initiatives website and will undoubtedly find their place, once adapted and contextualized, in new Urban Fabric Initiatives!





VISIT TO DANDORA

In Dandora, the project initiated by Charles Gachanga and Public Space Network transformed dumpsites into green public spaces and playgrounds, contributing to reduced crime, corruption, and waste in the neighborhood. The group has gained national and international recognition for its achievements. These local initiatives have a positive impact on the environment, economy, and security of the communities involved, demonstrating the power of community engagement. This inspiring experience also shows that community organization, regular maintenance, and economic aspects of projects (diversity of activities and resources, rigorous financial management, job creation) are key points for the sustainability of initiatives. Charles' account of the project's history deeply impressed the group, as did the lunch shared on-site, making this visit a highlight of the week.



“What struck me the most in Kibera and Dandora was hearing about babies found buried when they developed the park and seeing people living in a hostile environment next to heaps of garbage. It really affected me. In Dandora, people really have a lot of resilience and mental strength because, with the high crime rate, drugs, and prostitution, if they manage to eradicate all these phenomena, it’s because they are very resilient, and it deeply impressed me. When Evans recounted that he was a former gang member who repented and now represents his neighborhood all over, that’s what I remember. All this compared to what we call precarious neighborhoods in Senegal makes me realize that the people in Nairobi’s precarious neighborhoods are in total and extreme vulnerability.”



Amadine Diagne, UFI Dakar

“I was very impressed by the way the community, in association with KDI and other stakeholders, came together to fight floods creatively. I was also impressed by the willingness to intervene in a small and complex space, the creativity in making the space more accessible and safer for communities through actions against crime and floods, or other climate change-related issues.”



Ayanda Roji, Centre on African Public Spaces

“What I remember most from the visit to Dandora with Public Space Network, beyond the undeniable charisma of Charles, is how operating as a network of public spaces allows for greater weight and strength in defending these public spaces.

When a real estate developer wants to seize a plot where children play, it’s not just the children who can defend the land, but also all the people who use the other public spaces who come to defend its public vocation. In dealings with the Counties, it’s the same; all public spaces are represented through a champion. This was made possible thanks to a showcase operation, a first site where a few people mobilized for the community’s interest. This moved the president and vice-president, who came with television cameras to highlight this dynamic.

So I take away two things: the importance of embodying an operation through a showcase example, and the effectiveness of operating as a network to better defend the interests of public space users.”

“ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING THINGS FOR ME IS HOW CO-DESIGN WAS ACHIEVED BECAUSE ALL SOLUTIONS ARE TRULY UNIQUE TO THE DIFFERENT COMMUNITIES, INDICATING THE AMOUNT OF THOUGHT PUT INTO THE PROCESS AND THE AMOUNT OF CONSULTATION DONE WITH THE COMMUNITY TO MAKE THESE PROJECTS USABLE SPACES FOR THE COMMUNITY. IT'S NOT ABOUT CONCEPTUALIZING PROJECTS AND DESIGN ACCORDING TO THE COMMUNITY BUT ENSURING THEIR FEEDBACK AND THE UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE OF EACH COMMUNITY ARE INTEGRATED, SHOWING HOW THIS WILL HELP FUTURE PROJECTS AND MAKE THEM EVEN BETTER. IT'S REALLY A REVELATION FOR US.”



Jacob Sambola, UFI Monrovia



Simon Nyam, AFD

VISIT TO KOROGOCHO

Korogocho is a neighborhood located along the Nairobi River. Komb Green Solutions is a community association of young people aiming to restore and renaturalize the highly polluted river and its banks. The association has developed green and recreational spaces, conducted awareness campaigns, and initiated community gardening or plastic recycling activities aimed at improving the environment. They also engage in income-generating activities like community baking and car washing.

The site has suffered significant damage due to recent floods, but Komb Green Solutions' social initiative persists despite the challenges.

“A PLACE CAN TRANSITION FROM BEING A TRASH DUMP TO A DYNAMIC EXAMPLE. IT’S A STORY OF HOPE, SHOWING THAT THINGS CAN POSITIVELY TRANSFORM. SMALL ACTIONS CAN SCALE UP TO THE CITY LEVEL.”

Ruth Waruguru, NCCG





BLOCKAGES AND SOLUTIONS

While Urban Fabric Initiative projects face several issues, together it is possible to find solutions!

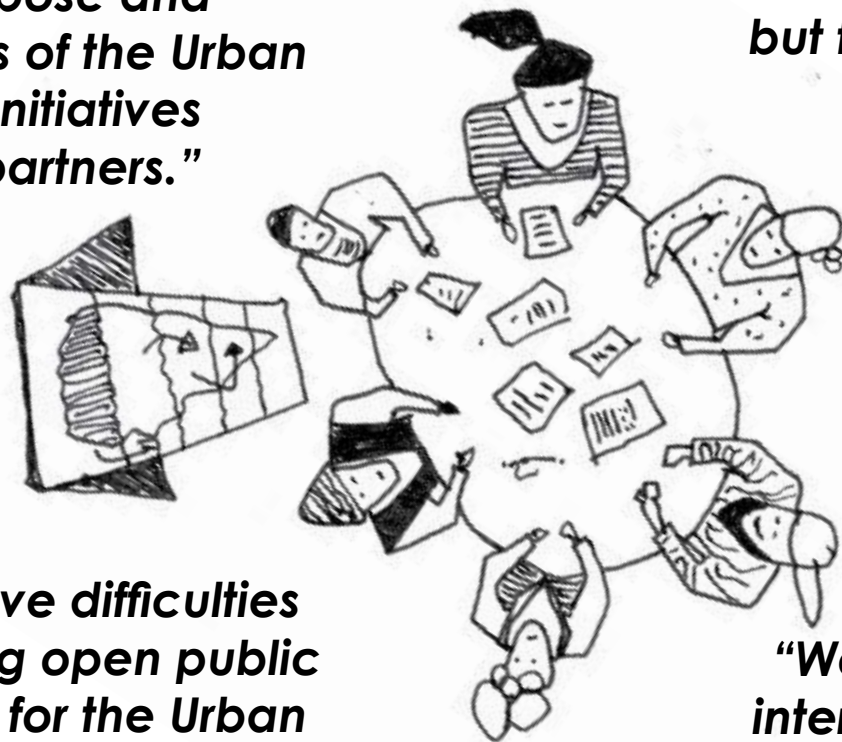
Through the “mental training” exercise, participants were invited to reflect on problems or blockages within their projects or structures. Six major problems were identified for in-depth analysis.

Thanks to collective intelligence, these unsatisfactory situations were dissected to analyze the underlying issues and causes, finally proposing solutions.



“We struggle to explain the purpose and benefits of the Urban Fabric Initiatives to our partners.”

AFD



“We have difficulties securing open public spaces for the Urban Fabric Initiative.”

UFI Nairobi

“We are dealing with a situation where public spaces are owned by the Municipality, but the community is expected to manage their use and upkeep.”

UFI Monrovia

“We lack an agile intervention model for management.”

UFI Abidjan

UNSATISFYING SITUATION

Urban Fabric Initiatives are funded by AFD and led by public authorities.

Generally, the AFD proposes the idea of setting up an Urban Fabric Initiative to complement a major urban project, but they struggle to explain its benefits to the public authorities. The Urban Fabric Initiative approach is abstract to Public authorities, who do not see the added value compared to existing practices.

UNDERLYING PROBLEMS

There is a lack of advocacy by the AFD and popularization of its tools early in the setup phase.

Public authorities' degree of openness to new practices must be better taken into account: they need to be confronted with concrete issues with their current practices that lead to low relevance and appropriation of facilities, in order to be made receptive to Urban fabric initiative approaches.

Changes in practices take time: Public authorities' technical and engineering profiles are less sensitive to social approaches.

There is a fear that Urban Fabric Initiatives will reduce the budget for major facilities while being unattractive as they are often presented as “small” and “temporary.”

Communication focuses too much on the facilities produced by Urban Fabric Initiatives, creating unmet expectations

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Simplify terminology and popularize Urban Fabric Initiative approaches.

Conduct more advocacy and identify reference persons within different government branches to promote these approaches and increase their acceptance.

Communicate more about the impacts of Urban Fabric Initiatives beyond the constructed facilities.

Present the Urban Fabric Initiative approach in various aspects and communicate on success stories of each aspect. This would allow public actors to adopt one or several components tailored to their needs, serving as entry points to the overall approach in a second phase.

Not really convinced as democracy is defined by local institutions,

The goal is not to change the institutions, Urban Fabric Initiatives remain at their scale of local projects.

Urban Fabric Initiatives contribute to the empowerment of civil society organizations, enabling them to hold authorities accountable.

IT'S THE MANAGEMENT WHERE WE FALL SHORT, AND WE MUST NOT STOP AT JUST PRODUCING FACILITIES.

In France, we talk about participatory democracy on very limited consultation topics, whereas here we go much further.

DEMOCRACY IS OF THE PEOPLE, FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE

CREATING URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVES IS ALSO A POLITICAL ACT.

It's still better than when choices are made top-down.

It's not mandatory, but it can be a hindrance not to have land secured in advance.

If the land is not available, we cannot proceed with works, but the acquisition process that accompanies it matters most.

The foundation is having land.

It is important to formalize all the paperwork before starting. We mobilize resources, and if settled, it will allow for smooth intervention.

IT'S BETTER TO FOCUS ON RESIDENTS' VOICES RATHER THAN LAND ACQUISITION.

It's part of the Urban Fabric Initiatives' responsibility to secure lands, as they also play a facilitator role and sometimes intervene on private lands.

What matters are the compromises, there are always ways to obtain land, as demonstrated by various Urban Fabric Initiatives. This encourages creative solutions.

NOT TO TRANSFORM, BUT TO IMPROVE.

MOVING DEBATE

At the end of the day, as the sun sets, the whole group gathers on Kofisi's rooftop to participate in a moving debate. Originating from popular education techniques, the moving debate aims to highlight major teachings or trends of the Urban Fabric Initiatives and submit them for discussion within the group.

Two divisive, affirmative statements related to governance are proposed. The entire group is invited to position themselves on an axis between "agree" and "disagree," then people are questioned about their positions, and a debate ensues.

URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVES STRENGTHEN LOCAL DEMOCRACY.
PUBLIC AUTHORITIES MUST SECURE LAND BEFORE LAUNCHING URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVES.
AGREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE?
DISAGREEEEEEEEEEEEEEEE?



VISITE TO UFI NAIROBI

On Friday morning the group visited a Nairobi UFI site. The visit began with a tour of the neighborhood of Kahawa Soweto, followed by a presentation of the project and approach. They explained how the project used a call for initiatives approach to incite community proposals for spaces or facilities. Each proposal is submitted by a locally implanted community group, who is then involved at all stages, right up to operations and maintenance. Local residents are also involved in design, construction and maintenance.

The group visited two spaces that will be upgraded by the UFI – a near obsolete sanitation block that will be transformed into a more attractive space, featuring a sitting area, a laundrette and a cybercafé, and a health centre, whose overflow car park and green area will become a space for the community and for patients including a shop, a meeting room and a restaurant (productive spaces that generate income) as well as a playground and breast feeding area, to compliment the maternity ward.

The facilities and designs were chosen by the community, using a “community as client” approach.



TWO EXTERNAL PERSPECTIVES

The closing session unfolded in two parts: presentations by two guests, Ninon Ndongo Fandre and Ayanda Roji, who accompanied the group throughout the week, followed by a discussion and collective synthesis of the week's ideas and highlights.

First, **Ninon Ndongo Fandre**, an urban planning student at the University of Geneva, emphasized the evolution of Urban Fabric Initiatives, notably the shift from temporary to permanent infrastructure. This raises questions about their relationship with major urban projects, as well as their identity preservation and true transformative capacity. She also mentioned the central role of land in the projects, the creativity of Urban Fabric Initiatives in finding solutions, and the importance of vocabulary and communication in project implementation.

Ayanda Roji, coordinator of the South African network Centre on African Public Spaces (CAPS), highlighted the role Urban Fabric Initiatives play in emphasizing the importance of public space in cities. She noted that these initiatives offer localized solutions but can embody universal values such as dignity, fighting social inequalities, and inclusion. She added two comments:

“LOCAL GOVERNMENTS TALK ABOUT PARTICIPATION BUT DON'T KNOW HOW TO IMPLEMENT IT CONCRETELY AND NEED TRAINING IN THESE METHODS AND TOOLS, WHICH URBAN FABRIC INITIATIVES COULD CONTRIBUTE TO.”

“THE AFD SHOULD ADVOCATE FOR PUBLIC SPACES AND ENCOURAGE OTHER FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS TO PRIORITIZE PUBLIC SPACE IN LOANS AND GRANTS TO AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS.”

During the ensuing debate, several characteristics of Urban Fabric Initiatives emerged:

- Their practice and expertise in citizen participation methods, which should be more widely disseminated through platforms or networks like CAPS, or training for local elected officials and technicians.
- The creation of public, sports, or cultural facilities, with experimentation in management, maintenance, and upkeep, based on shared governance between civil society and public actors, support for social and solidarity entrepreneurship, and capacity building for actors.
- The activation of neglected urban spaces through various mechanisms, strengthening public authorities by demonstrating their ability to take positive action.
- The transformative ambition of projects and the evolution of practices.
- A complementarity with major urban projects by prototyping or testing things that can be incorporated into final developments.
- The necessary autonomy from the major urban project to guarantee the right to experiment, take risks, and make mistakes, essential for innovation.
- Their frugal, creative, targeted, and flexible nature, allowing solutions in very constrained contexts but also making them somewhat fragile.





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