



## **Envisioning Nairobi Streets of the Future** **Twitter Space Report 2022**

### **Preliminaries**

The session was held on Twitter Spaces and adopted the form of a panel discussion followed by a plenary session held on Wednesday, 26 October 2022 at 8:00 PM. It had a total of 330 attendees and 569 replays. The space was opened by Oloo Adhiambo, Advocacy Officer at the Architectural Association of Kenya, and Naserian Saruni, Programs and Research Officer at the Public Space Network in Kenya who also set the agenda for the session.

### **Introduction**

The topic for the session was “Envisioning Nairobi Streets of the Future” which was adopted from the PlaceMaking Week 2022 theme. The Nairobi Placemaking Network is a group of individuals and organizations that voluntarily collaborate in celebrating the opportunities and addressing the challenges of life, work, and leisure in Nairobi as a fast-growing city. The Nairobi network is part of a larger movement of global placemaking networks across cities in more than 85 countries. The ultimate goal of the network is to create a cleaner, greener, safer and people-centered city of Nairobi.

PMW is part of the global United Nations month of Urban October. It is a weeklong set of activities and events by the Network members that mark the end of Urban October. This year’s event represented the 6th year of PWN events in Nairobi. It is the largest “exhibition” by urban enthusiasts celebrating the opportunities and addressing challenges of life, work, and leisure in cities. This year’s theme was “Nairobi Streets of the Future” and ran from October 23rd to 30th.

### **Panel Session**

#### **Session Moderator: Naserian Saruni**

Arch. Florence Nyole - Architect and vice president of the Architectural Association of Kenya. Is passionate about public spaces and public planning. On a good day with good weather, she enjoys taking a walk from home to the office to experience the streets of Nairobi.

*The role of Built Environment professionals in ensuring a sustainable Nairobi city*

- Professionals need to work together as a team in making Nairobi better.  
For instance,



1. The Expressway, which is a major highway in Nairobi from Westlands to Kitengela, was basically built by engineers and did not have the involvement of other professionals in the sector. The involvement of landscape architects would have been important to green the expressway as this needed to be integrated not only on the upper part where we are seeing a lot of planters but also on the lower part to create parks and so on and so forth and greenery that is both sustainable and long-lasting going forward.
  2. The street paving at Kenyatta Avenue done during the COVID-19 period should have had professional input. Suitable paving material should have been used to enhance the walkability of the space.
  3. How we treat different streets is very important: Shop on streets and those that offer a buffer to the shops.
  4. Streets are also open spaces and the open spaces need to be shared to reflect the different uses involving different professionals working on greening the space by landscape architects, street furniture by architects, engineers for the hard landscape on the streets, and architects for the shops.
- All streets need to be designed guided by a master plan of a city which is done involving all professionals. This means all professionals coming together and thinking futuristically of the type of streets we want Nairobi to morph into and the capacity in the streets of Nairobi - today people are walking and for the future, we need to factor in electric mobility.
  - Preparation of manuals and or guidelines that inform street design. AAK partnered with ITDP in preparing a street manual that guides professionals on how to design these spaces and streets that are in congested areas such as those in Nairobi.

#### *The role of Built Environment professional organizations in ensuring a sustainable Nairobi city*

- Advocate for cleaner, greener, and more inclusive streets.
- Collaborate among organizations to advocate for cleaner, greener, and more inclusive streets.
- Engage national and county governments on opportunities to enhance the look of the city.
- Mapping and researching in the city to find out the needs and the gaps of the city and designing the streets to accommodate the needs of the city.
- Lobby for the implementation of designs to make the city better.



Eric Manya - A visual artist and visual arts creator at TICAH. Enjoys creating art in public spaces and making spaces beautiful, interactive and peaceful.

### *The role of art and culture in ensuring Nairobi Streets of the Future*

- Artworks to counter the Nairobi Facade - Almost 90% of Nairobi city has been commercialized. Comparing this with other countries which use art in the cities' streets such as Columbia and Bangkok, the cities act as tourist attractions and make art a national conversation.
- Increases user experience.
- Creates iconisms in spaces and elevates them by having art pieces around them.
- Improves the livability of space.
- Activates and programmes our streets - makes them active and lively.
- Taps into our history.
- Creates the third place - the place that is not home and is not work that one can relax and enjoy.
- Taps into the bump theory and creates a community as people bump more into each other and bond over shared experiences and interests.

Humphrey Otieno - A believer in making it happen

### *How the government can work with stakeholders to jointly build the Nairobi streets of the future*

- Learning from and adopting new stakeholder-led approaches
- Open to stakeholder engagement.
- Open door policy - Meeting the governor does not solve the issue. We need to start working with and engaging the low-level officers and work to the top.
- New policies and principles are coming up to engage the government.

### *What Nairobi streets of the future mean from a government standpoint*

- New principles that drive how we want to envision the future of the city - looking at the issue of safety and security. If the city is safe and secure for a child or PLWD it is safe for all.
- Connected streets - How are different spaces connected eliminating discontinued spaces?



Working with partners has contributed to improving the streets of Nairobi, increasing pathways, improving corridors etc. The hope for the future is that this will not only be done by the government but also by the different stakeholders involved.

Mark Ojal - An Urban Designer and researcher. The fun thing about him is that he just realized that he is actually growing old.

*Placemaking Week - What is it, why do you host it and how can more people participate in it?*

PMW enables the collective reimagining of the city with people at the center. It creates a seed for long-term transformative change. It is also a collaborative process to not only reimagine public spaces but also the governance aspect of it. It is a process of collectively reimagining a shared future, and shared aspirations, highlighting challenges, and also co-creating solutions. Finally, PMW is very much concerned with changing the narrative around public space

We need to challenge narratives by mainstream media that public places are jobless corners. We need to see public spaces as spaces for celebration, a place to see and be seen, and a place for artistic expression. This, therefore, changes the narrative and we become ambassadors of high-quality built environments.

PMW aims;

- a. to activate public spaces through low-cost high-impact interventions.
- b. to not only celebrate public spaces but also low-cost high-impact interventions led by the community. Also to heighten awareness of the work of the community and how they can get supported through urban development policy.
- c. to promote cross-sector dialogues and collaborations - in different thematic areas such as slum upgrading, health, mobility, infrastructure planning, and design, etc. Fostering partnerships is at the heart of placemaking week.

PMW advocates for healthy, safe, inclusive, walkable, and clean streets as public spaces. It sans from grassroots-level activism and aims for high-level policy and seeks to sell the agenda of rethinking the built environment.

## **Plenary Session**

1. Why are nonurban planners being asked to plan and where are the planners?

- PMW is not planning the city, it is the community being brought forward to have a say in the end look and use of the city as they are the end users - he who wears the shoe knows where it pinches most.



- The question can also be viewed as a challenge for people in the built environment. With capitalism at its peak, many people including professionals are more interested in making money. This is why PMW is offering a space for urban enthusiasts to volunteer and contribute to solutions to make a mark in our cities. The question then becomes, what are we doing for our cities and now what our cities are doing for us?
  - The solutions are not by one person, we all have a role to play in our cities, and we should all see how and when to play it.
  - PMW works to demystify planning and encourage varied voices to address our ever-changing cities and interests.
2. TARDA is the government body in charge of the entire riverfront. AAK was invited and given the mandate to bring on board professionals for design and project management. To date, this has not happened. When we ask for a project and not show up, then what are we saying?
- One of the Governor's legacy projects is the Nairobi River Life Project and is working on establishing a commission that will look at all rivers in Nairobi. What the County Government of Nairobi is currently working on behind the scenes is a framework of how the commission will be constituted. All stakeholders are encouraged to prepare an engagement plan for the governor on how we would love our cities to look and include Nairobi River Life.
  - There is a need to understand that even though the government is intentional in engaging professionals and professional organizations, at times they move at a sluggish pace and take time to come to fruition. The last 3 years have also seen pandemics, national general elections, conflict, etc slowing down processes further.
  - Public spaces and Nairobi river life regeneration - we should begin to ask for what we want to see.
3. Mukuru SPA worked to demolish houses and evict people during the pandemic. Does this mean that this was not well planned?
- This was a miscalculation and wrongly executed. We need the voice of built environment professionals regarding the SPAs.
  - AAK spoke up on the issue of the dignity of persons regarding public spaces and open spaces including the streets of Nairobi, where the government is trying to create certain corridors in order to pass some services. AAK also spoke up on the dignity of those living in informal settlements and the need to ensure that the process of relocating those that have been evicted is dignified, or at least follows due process and due procedure as stipulated in the law and ratified regional and



international mechanisms. No professional is proud of evictions and AAK will continue to engage and have joint discussions around this.

- AAK is part of the PMW and the whole idea around this is to bring forth the issues, find out how different stakeholders can work together and partner with professional associations, and leverage the professional's input and expertise. This enables joint collaboration and joint ways forward not only as urban enthusiasts but also professionals for better and sustainable Nairobi streets.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, our streets belong to all of us, and everyone's input is necessary to make the streets work for all users. Everyone has a part to play and they need to play it to improve our streets and make them livable and lovable. Art and culture are important to activate our streets and create a sense of ownership and community. Lastly, professionals and professional organizations in the built and natural environment need to work together as a team to improve Nairobi streets and also work with the government to ensure we have a city that works for all. The Nairobi PMW offers such a platform and encourages all interested persons and organizations to join in.

The session ended at 9.30 PM.

**Rapporteur: Oloo Adhiambo, Advocacy Officer at the Architectural Association of Kenya**