



nairobi  
ufi  
urban  
fabric  
initiative

AAK Basco Duracoat Awards of Excellence In Architecture 2026  
UFI\_Kahawa Soweto Project

Client  
Architect  
Landscape Architect  
Quantity Surveyor  
Engineers  
Contractor  
Project Partners

Kounkuey Design Initiative(KDI)  
Nicholas Simwichi (Lead Consultant), Marina Santin  
Kounkuey Design Initiative(KDI)  
Metron Consultants Ltd.  
Sigma Consulting & Services Engineering Ltd.  
Transwork Construction & Supplies Ltd.  
French Development Agency(AFD), Nairobi City County Government(NCCG), Kenya Informal Settlements Improvement Programme(KISIP), Slum Dwellers International Kenya(SDI), Akiba Mashinani Trust(AMT)

INTRODUCTION

UFI are small public space upgrading and community infrastructure projects codesigned and coproduced by citizens, government and other urban stakeholders. These projects are implemented in line with other large scale urban programmes such as the World Bank funded KISIP Programme. UFI are a direct response to informal settlements housing more than 70% of Nairobi's residents while residents face overcrowding, inadequate infrastructure, and insecure land tenure, challenges that limit mobility, safety and access to opportunity.



Process

First step of the project is community mobilization to identify and prioritise needs. co-design with residents, technical experts and government partners follows in order to make context-specific improvements.

For long-term sustenance, a shared management model involving the public administration, development implementing partners and the Community Based Organization is established through an MOU defining roles and commitments. Notably, a Service Level Agreement formalizes how the local government and the community jointly manage the facilities after construction. This tool provides a clear, replicable framework to ensure the public spaces remain safe, inclusive and well maintained after handover.

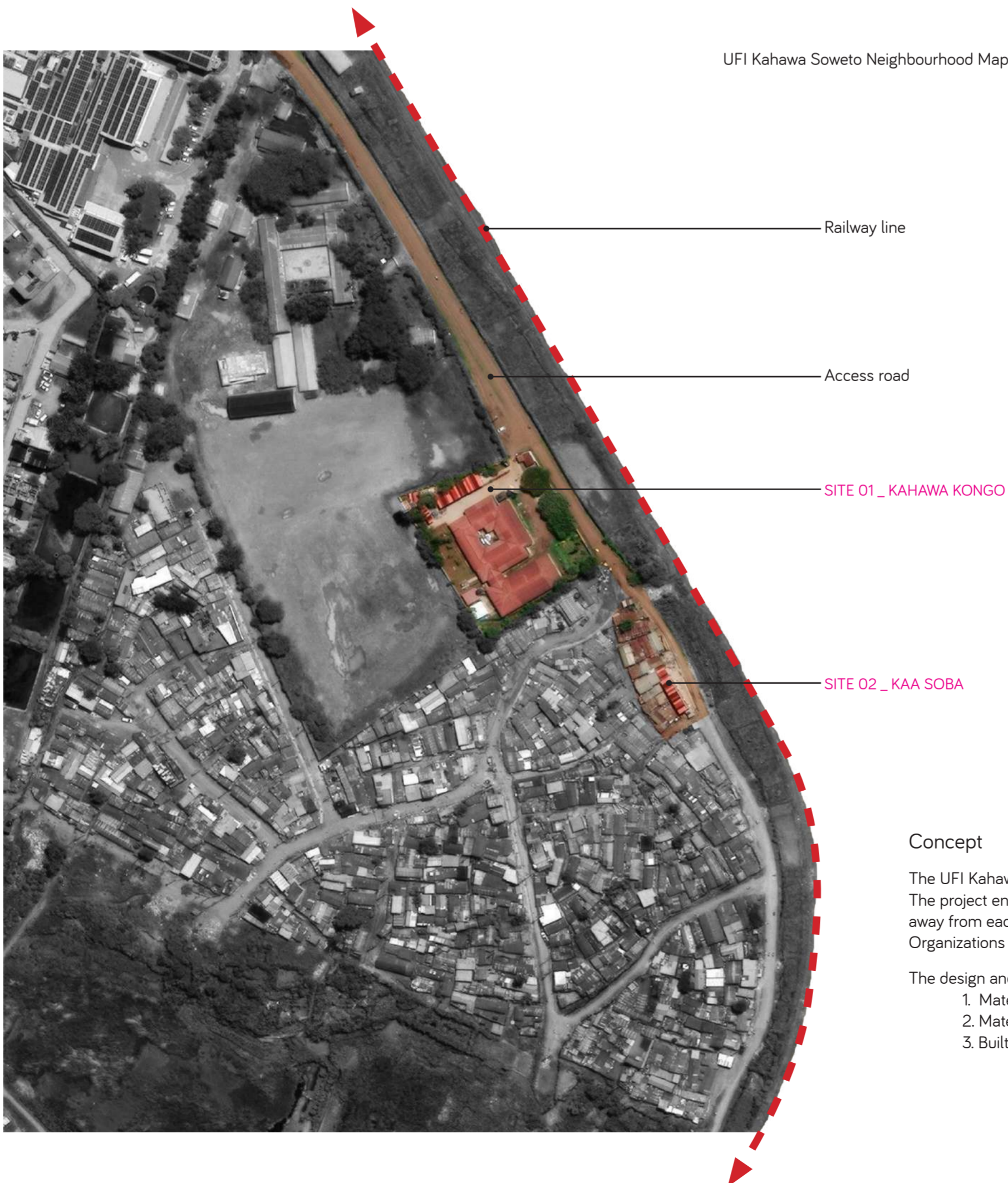
Solution

Led by communities, UFI delivers small-scale, high-impact interventions, such as playgrounds, green and shaded gathering spaces, paths and access, freshwater and stormwater infrastructure, and sanitation facilities, each co-designed with the community from concept to completion. Projects are tailored to address real, everyday challenges while promoting climate resilience, gender inclusion, and disaster preparedness. Every space is designed not only as an amenity, but as a catalyst for long-term social, economic, and environmental benefit.

Impact

UFI strengthens collective governance, builds community capacity, and helps embed local knowledge into policy and practice. This project engaged 2 CBOs and the residents from Kahawa Soweto settlement in Nairobi through participatory design and construction activities. The benefits have been real through direct paid co-construction and the impact from the operation of the completed projects.

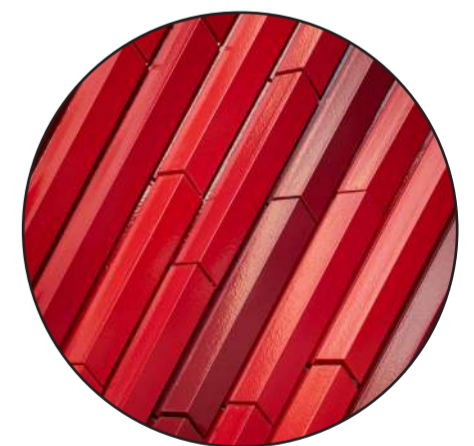
By bridging the gap between grassroots innovation and formal upgrading programs, UFI is helping to shape more inclusive, connected, and liveable communities; where residents are active partners in creating and managing their neighborhoods.



Sense of place,  
familiarity & belonging



Vibrancy, energy, play,  
curiosity through color



Durability, buildability &  
ease of maintenance

Concept

The UFI Kahawa Soweto is domiciled in the Kahawa Soweto Kongo informal settlement in Kahawa, Nairobi. The project encompasses 2 very distinct built forms with the same overarching UFI objectives and 200m away from each other. The sites have very unique needs and are run by two different Community Based Organizations emphasizing the concept of similar disimilars.

The design and material selection concept is unified under three core ideas:

1. Materials that enhance a sense of belonging
2. Materials and colors that enhance play, energy and curiosity among children
3. Built forms that are durable, buildable and easy to maintain

# UFI SITE 1 \_ KONGO

UFI Kahawa Kongo is domiciled within the Kahawa Health Centre. It is a **1254sqm.** facility aimed at enhancing the wellness experience of the community visiting the health centre. The site context called for a demountable structure to allow for future expansion of the hospital building. This premise influenced the design direction and material selection.

The program to be accommodated is:

- Gendered sanitation facilities
- Convenience shop
- Canteen with kitchen and seating area
- Community group office
- Community hall
- Lactation shed
- Children's playspace
- Connection to metered electricity and improved water supply

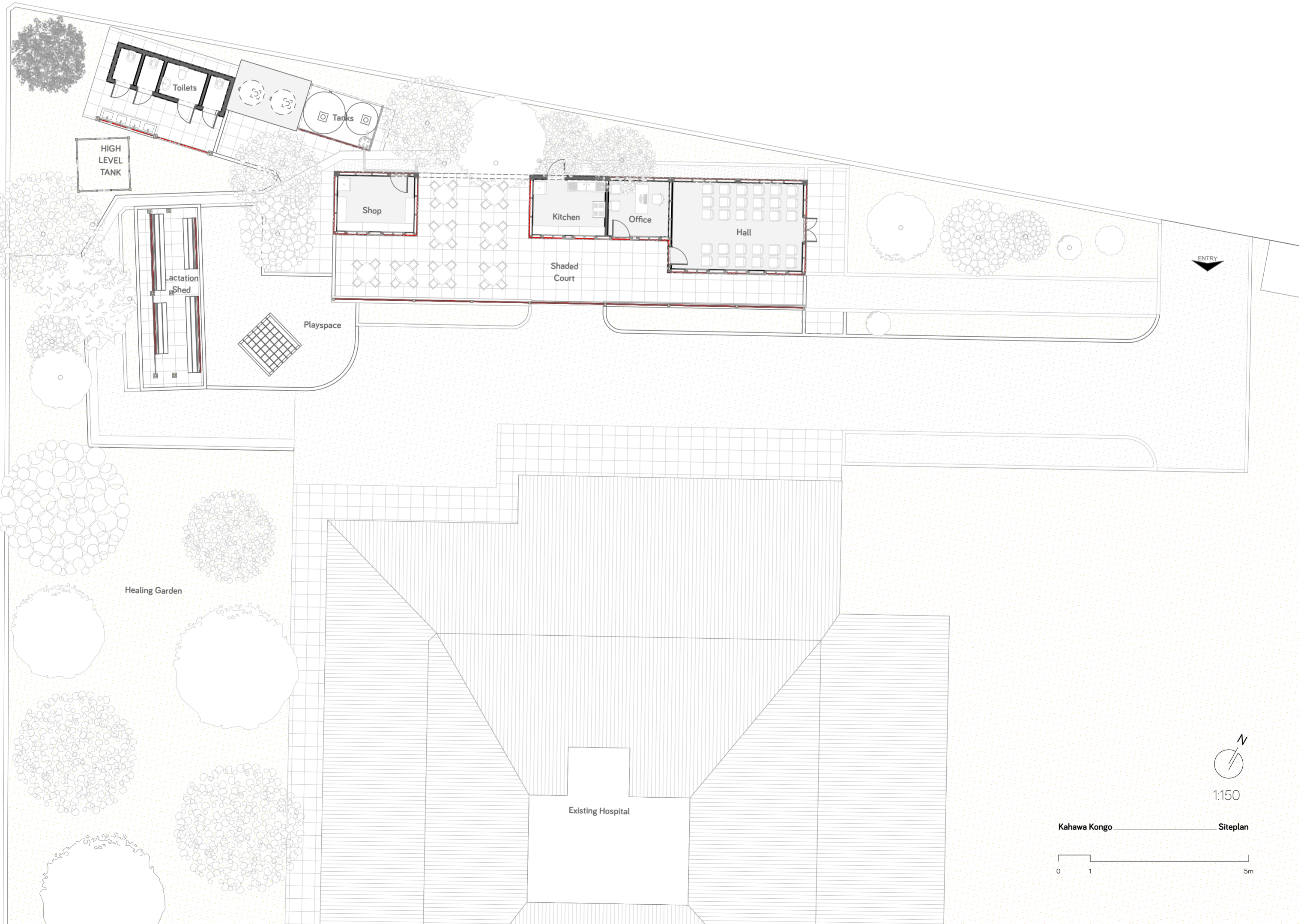
Design issues:

- Perennial rainy season flooding
- Access to dignified sanitation
- Design for demountability and ephemerality
- Durability and ease of maintenance

before



after



# MATERIALITY

## Lactation Shed:

Steel sun-shade system color and pattern matched to other structures

Steel structure bolt fixed for demountability

Gabion bench finished in timber planks and grille to match sunshades



Existing tree designed into circulation layout

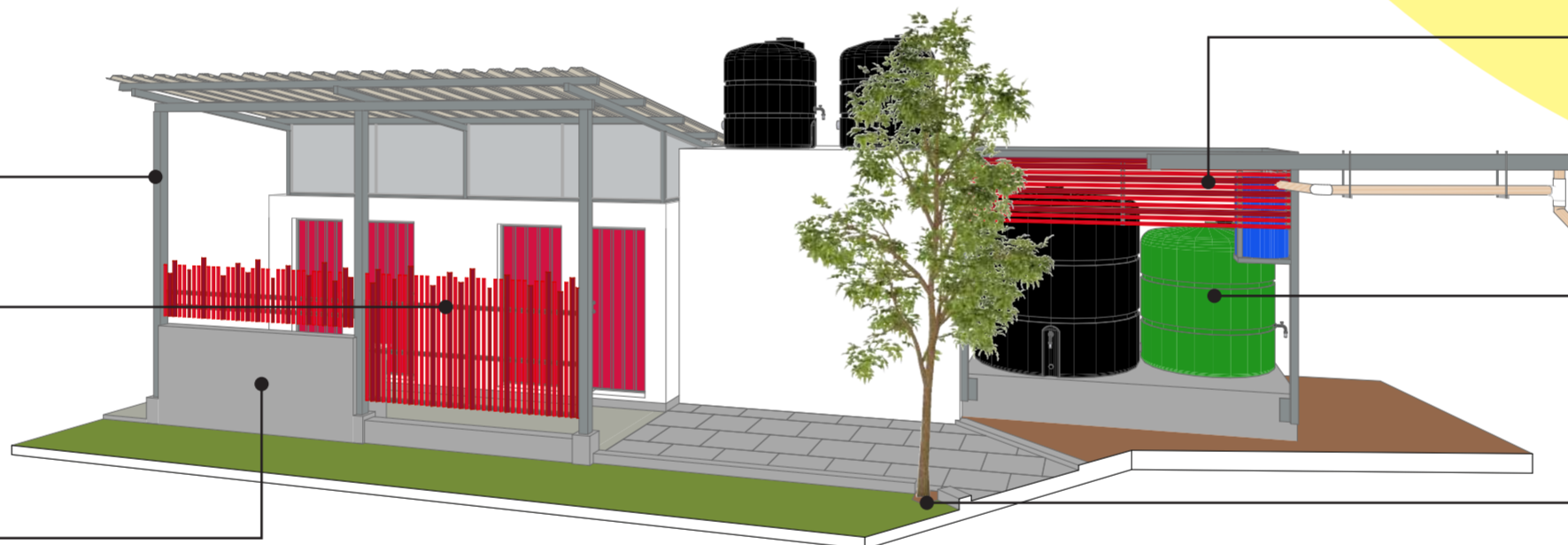
Pumice lined children's playspace

## Washrooms:

Steel structure bolt fixed for demountability

Steel privacy screen system color and pattern matched to other structures

Wash hand basin system



Steel sun-shade system color and pattern matched to other structures

3000l hybrid rainwater harvesting system

Existing tree designed into circulation layout

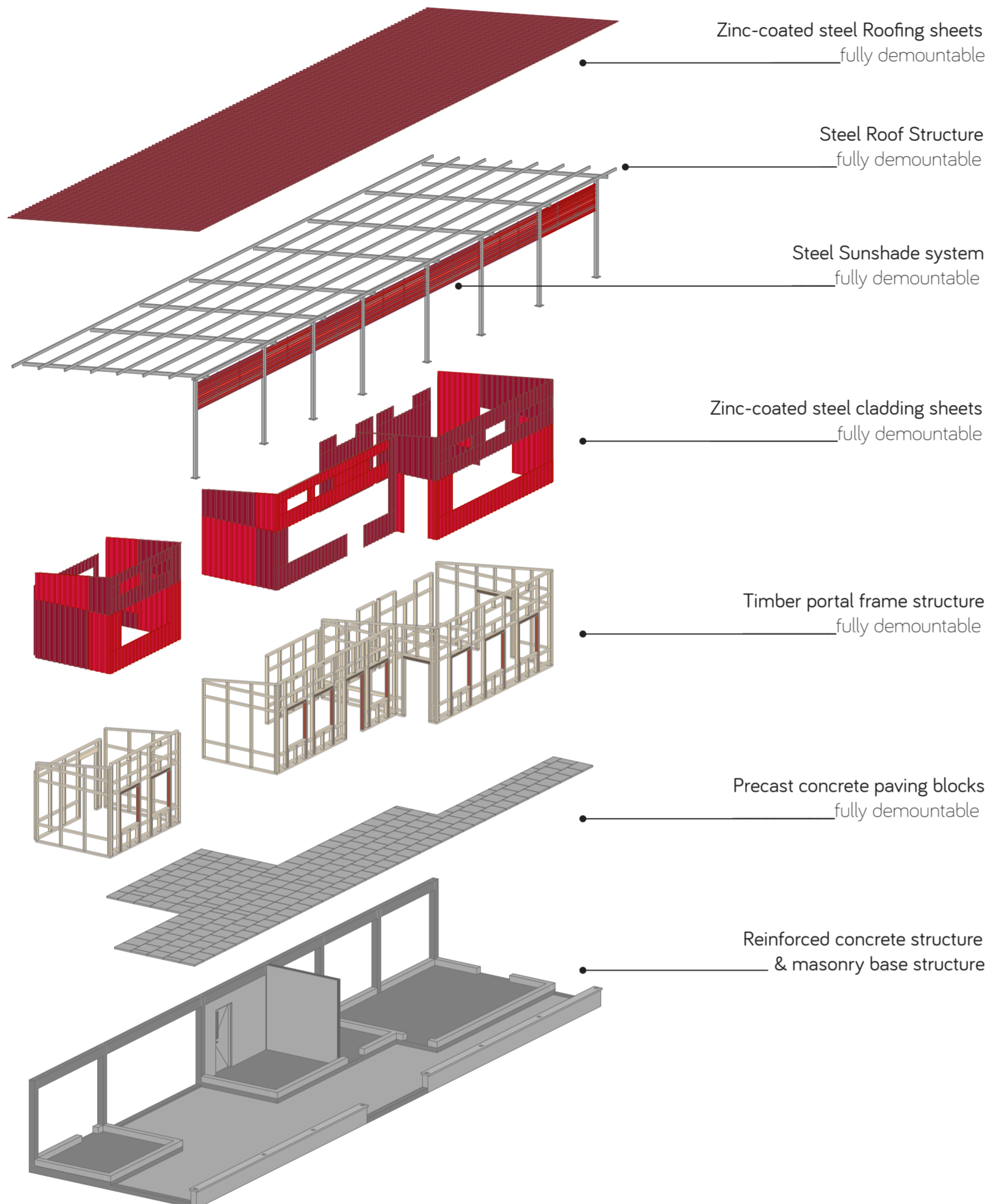


3D Model of the canteen structures in context

# SUSTAINABILITY

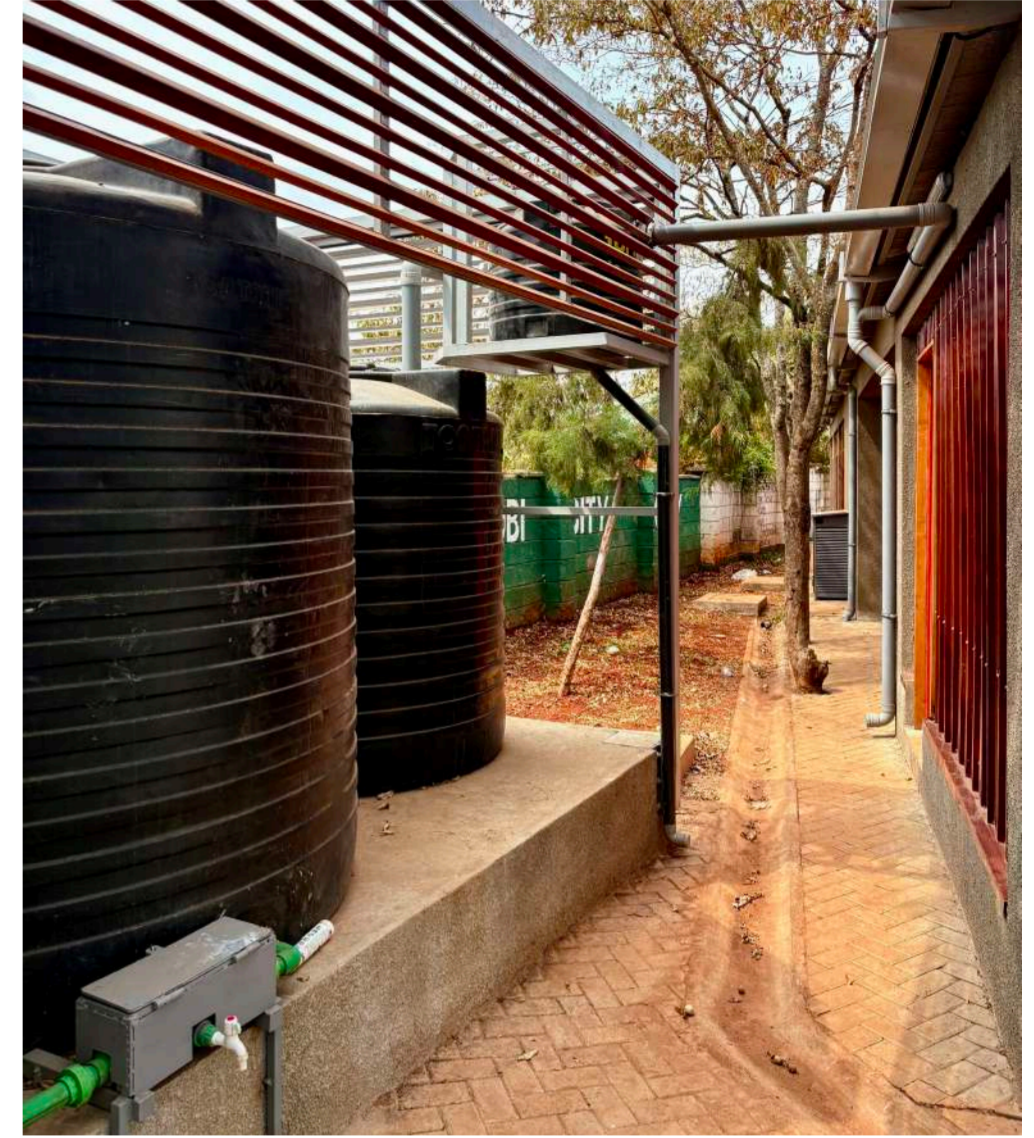
## 1. Design for demountability and reuse

This site put emphasis on design for demountability due to the possibility that the health centre will be upgraded to a hospital in the near future. 75% of the building elements on this site are demountable and reusable with the use of screw/bolt joints where applicable.



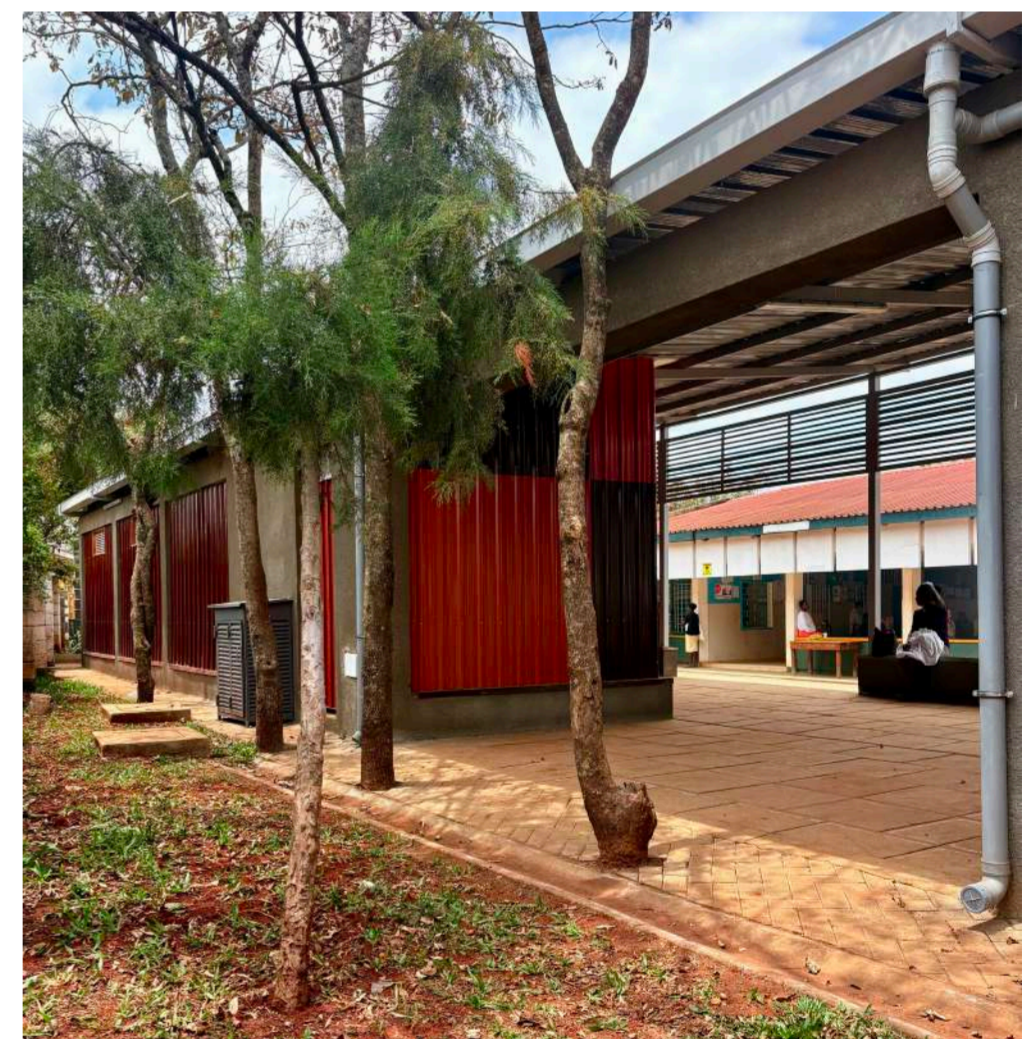
## 2. Rainwater harvesting

A 3000l rainwater harvesting system is installed to address water supply and flooding issues. The system reduces rainwater reaching the surface drainage with harvested water being used for cleaning the toilets and watering the vegetated areas.



## 3. Vegetation Conservation

The project was carefully designed around existing trees ensuring all trees on site were protected. More tree seedlings were planted in the healing garden as part of the landscape design scope



Longitudinal Elevation\_\_Canteen & Toilets (1:100)



# UFI SITE 2 \_ KAA SOBA

Project needs called for a permanent structure therefore influencing the design direction & material selection. The resultant built form is a 155 sqm. multi use development codesigned and developed with the community

The program to be accommodated is:

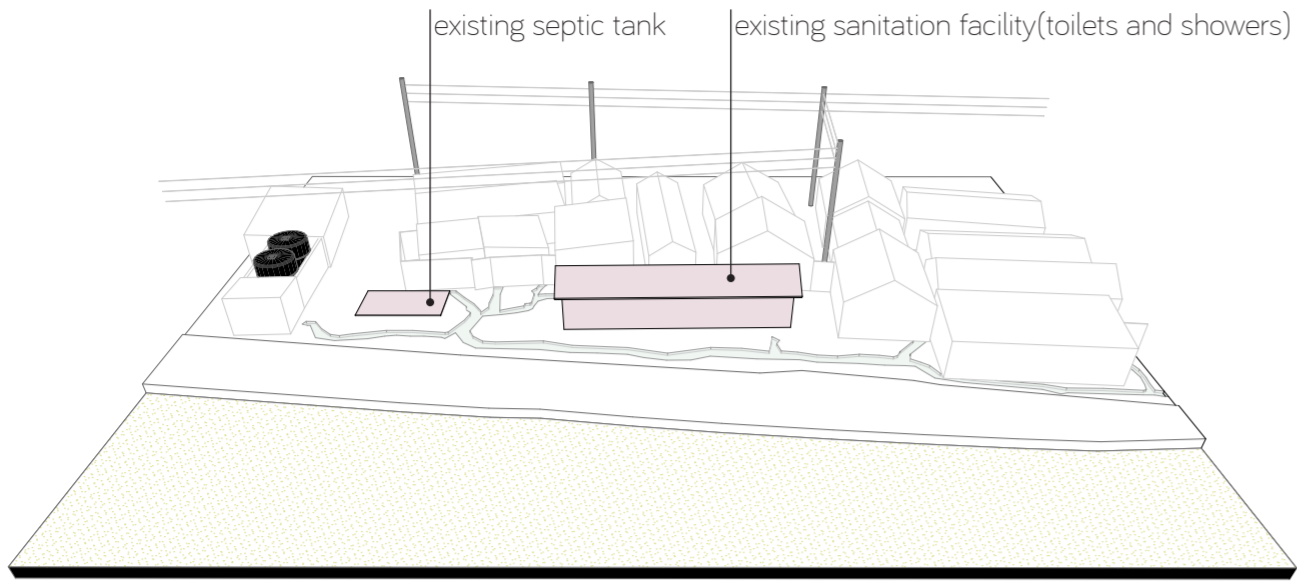
- Gendered sanitation facilities
- Laundrette with a drying yard
- Cyber cafe
- Convenience shop
- Children's playspace
- Community meeting space

Design issues:

- Perennial rainy season flooding
- Access to dignified sanitation
- Design for durability and ease of maintenance
- Statutory adherence to mitigate against future demolitions by statutory authorities



# PHASING STRATEGY



1

## EXISTING STRUCTURES

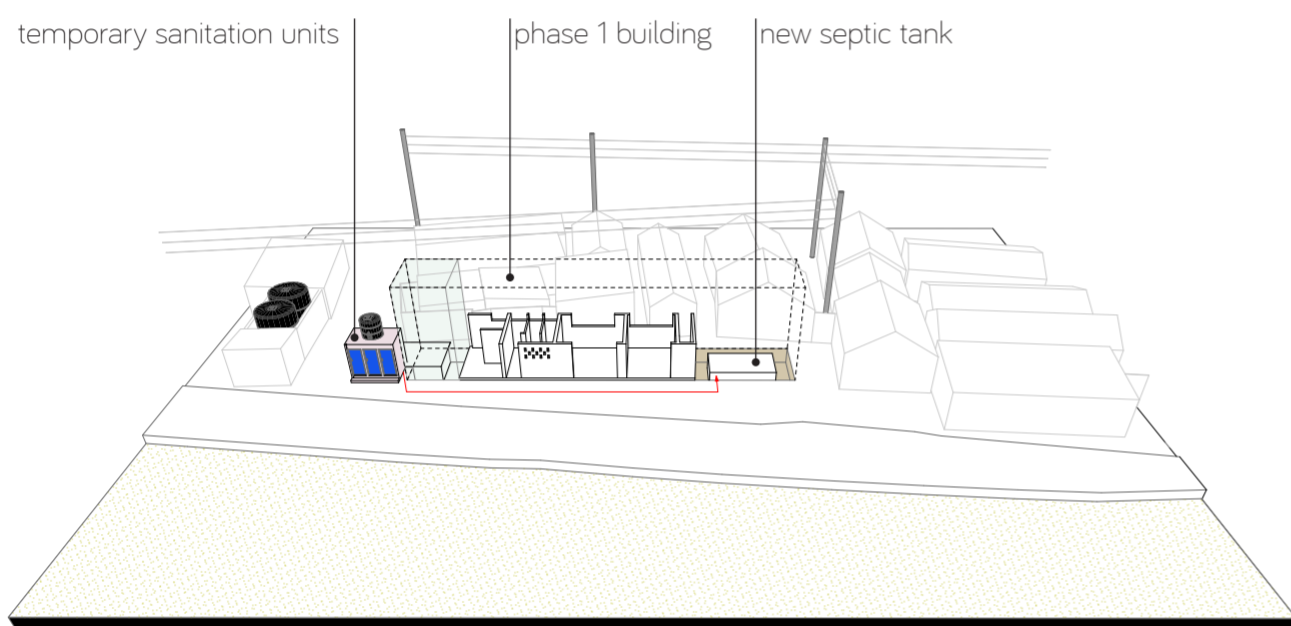
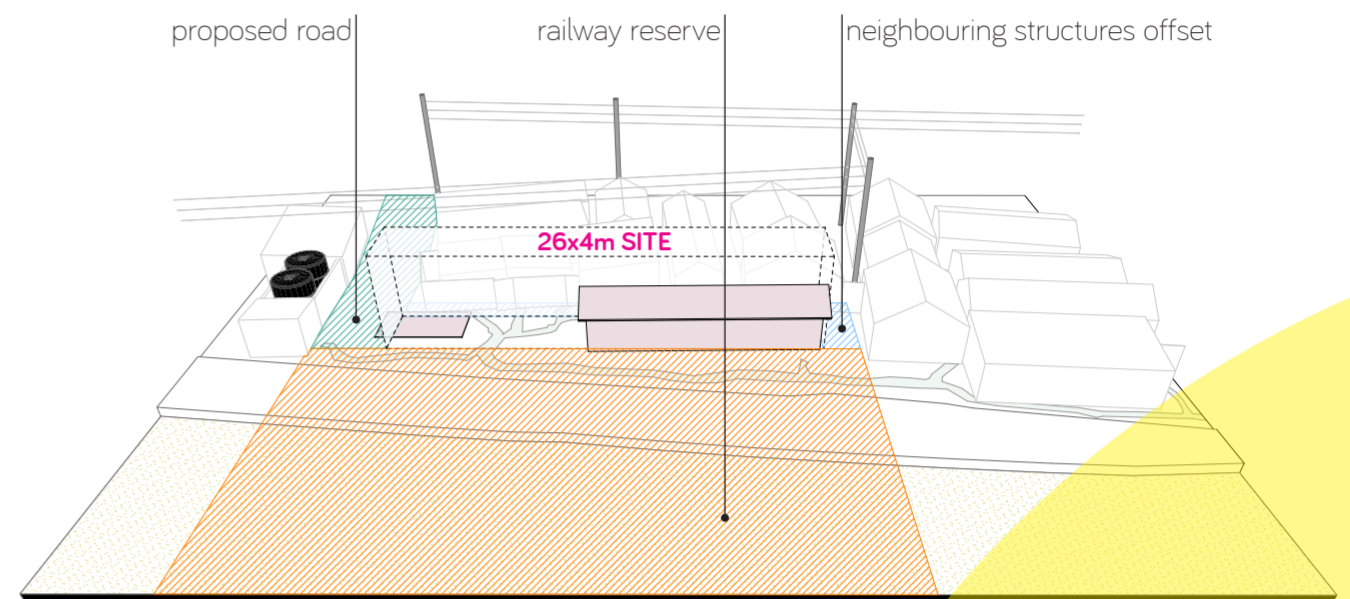
The site is framed by an access road, a septic tank and existing residences. An existing sanitation facility provides the departure point for defining upgrading for the community.

## STATUTORY DEFINITIONS

Statutory definitions strongly demarcate the action area. These include a 60m railway line reserve, a 4.5m proposed road and a 15m offset from adjacent properties.

The result is a 26x4m action area to fit all programmatic activities.

2



3

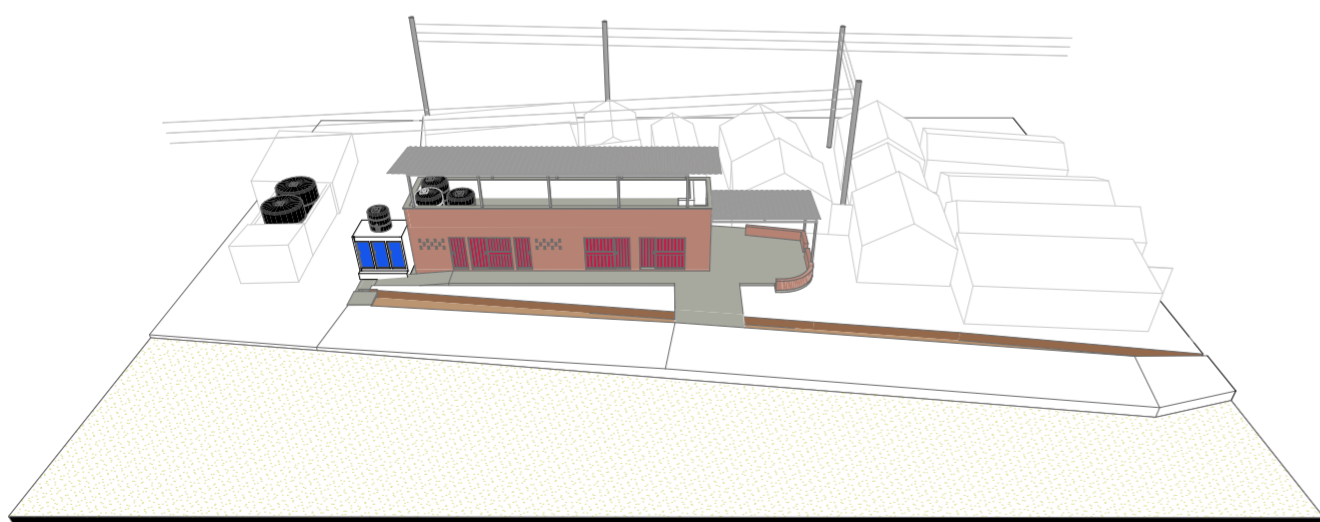
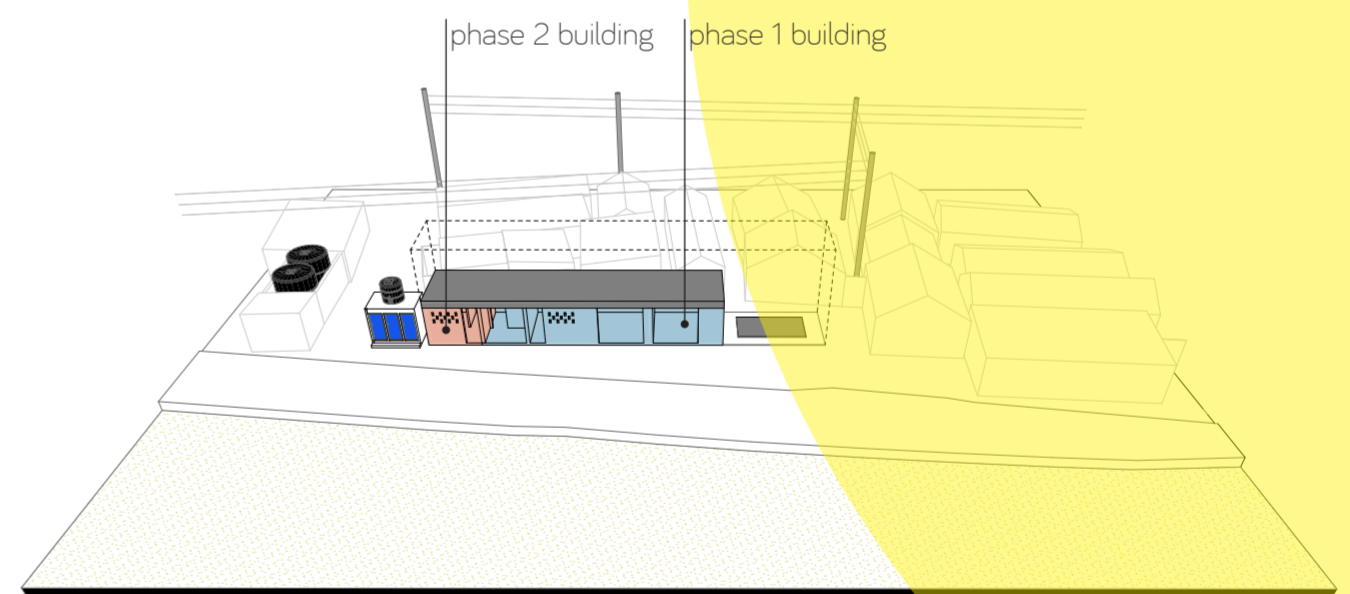
## PHASING STRATEGY

Build a temporary sanitation facility for the community  
Connect the temporary sanitation facility to the existing septic tank  
Demolish the existing sanitation facility  
Build a new septic tank and Phase 1 of the new sanitation facility  
Connect the temporary toilets to the new septic tank to allow for demolition of the old septic tank

## PHASING STRATEGY

Decommission existing septic tank  
Build phase 2 of ground floor build  
Structurally tie the two phases using the ring beam and first floor slab

4



5

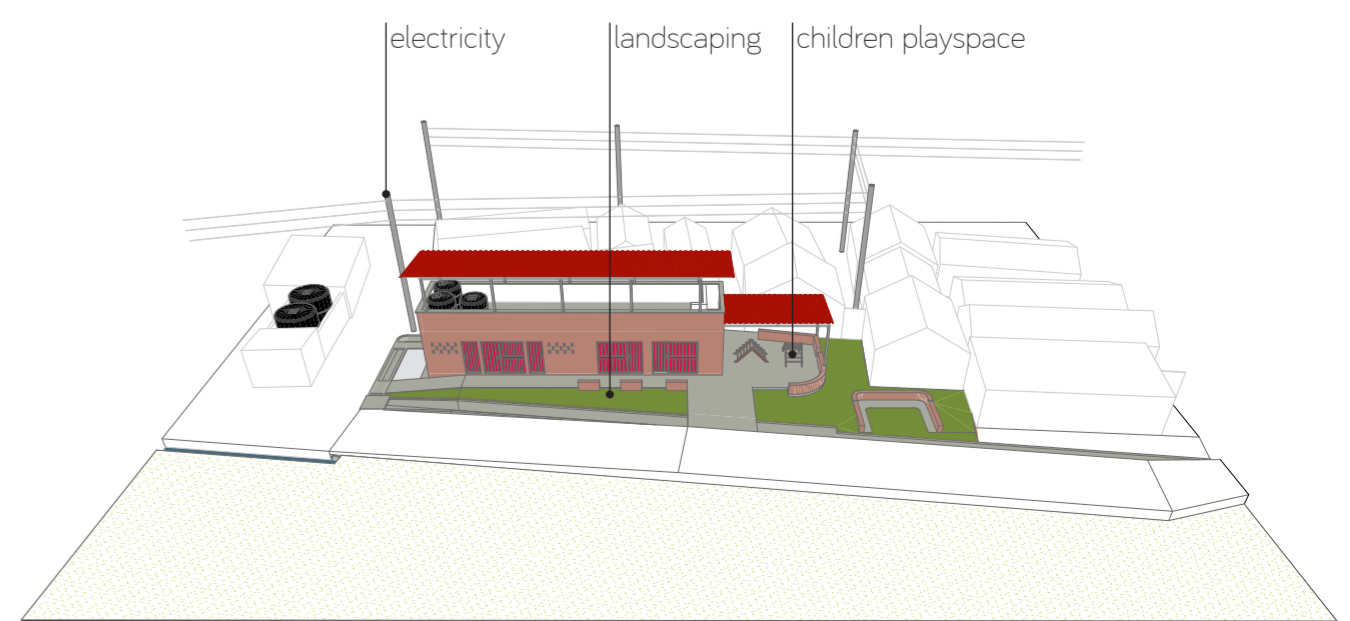
## PHASING

Complete building works  
Install building service lines and conduits  
Commence drainage and landscaping works

## ACTIVATION

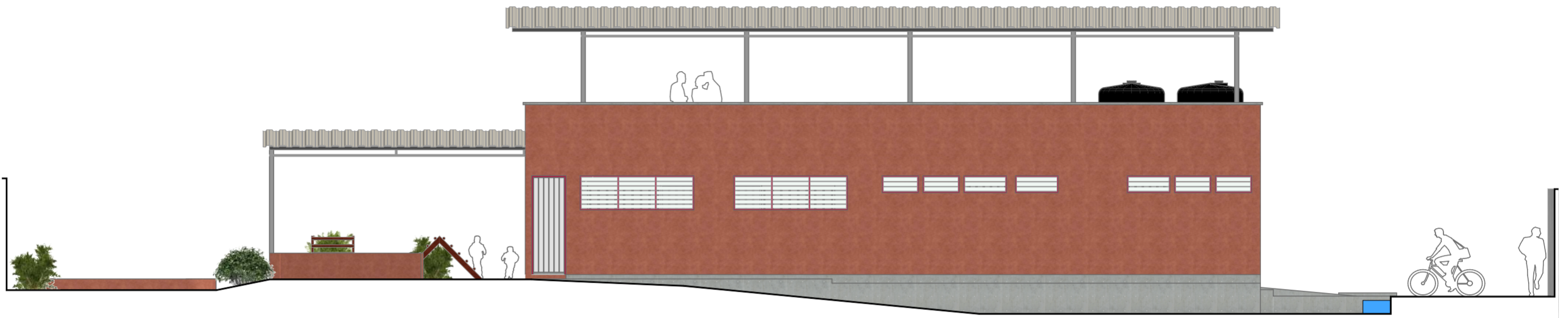
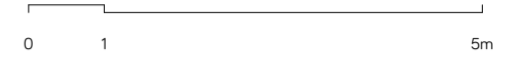
Commission landscaping works including flood mitigation strategies  
Neighbourhood drain installation  
Children playspace installation  
Metered infrastructure connection(electricity & water)  
Decommission temporary sanitation units

6

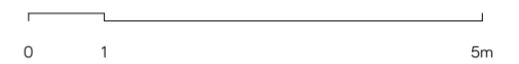


# MATERIALITY

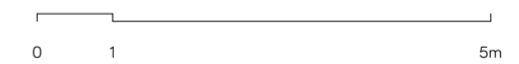
Kaeni Soba Elevation(1:100)



Kaeni Soba Elevation(1:100)



Kaeni Soba Section(1:100)



# PLACE MAKING

## 1. PLAYSACES

Both sites feature designated play-spaces for the children visiting the hospital or living in the community. Benches are located in close proximity for guardian supervised play where necessary.



Kongo - Children's playspace



Kaa Soba - Children's playspace

## 2. MULTI-USE SPACES

The rooftop area at Kaa Soba site avails a multipurpose space for potable water tanks, laundry drying area and a meeting space for community groups



Kaa Soba - Rooftop tank storage



Kaa Soba - Rooftop meeting space

## 3. GREENERY

A landscaped memorial garden is provided for at Kongo site and is targeted for use by visiting hospital clients. The vegetation and pads at Soba are used as aesthetic enhancements for the site and also act as a flood mitigation strategy for the site and neighbourhood



Kaa Soba - Urban Greenery



Kongo - Healing garden

## 4. ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Tactical urbanism with activities that allow for contextual income generation allowing for project self sufficiency and economic sustainability



Kaa Soba - Cyber



Kongo - Canteen kitchen

# PLACE MAKING

## 5. DIGNIFIED SPACES

Dignified spaces as a result of co-design and co-construction with project stakeholders



Kongo - Lactation shed



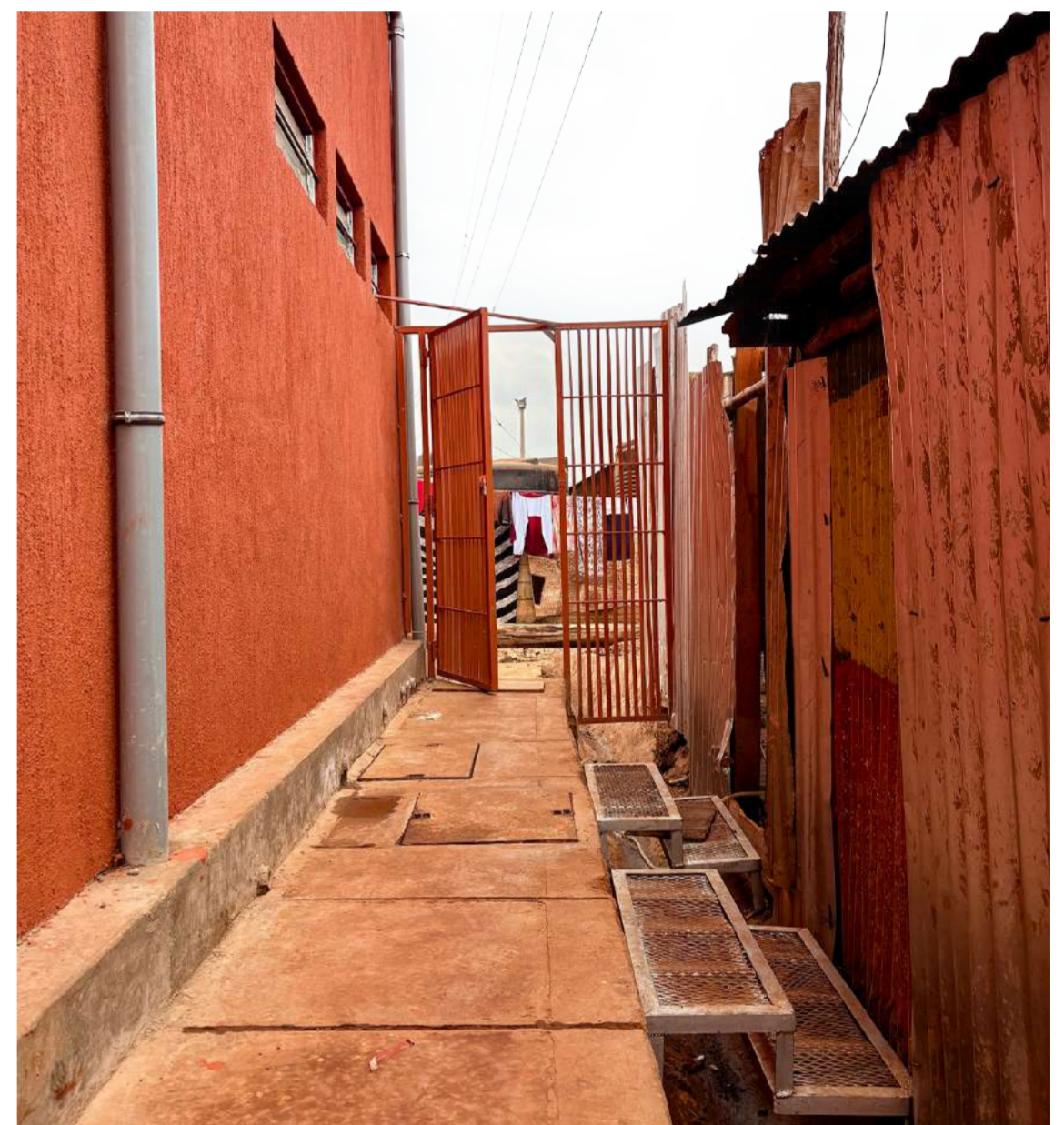
Kongo - Toilet Facility

## 6. FLOOD MITIGATION

Using flood modelling, it was possible to build storm water drains that arrests storm water at critical points and channels it to a neighbouring marsh thus reducing flooding events previously experienced.



Kaa Soba - Neighbourhood drainage



Kaa Soba - Neighbouring structures access

## 7. IMPROVED SECURITY

Solar powered security lighting installed on both sites. This improves on community security and also contributes to safely extending activities into the night especially at Kaa Soba site



Kongo - Solar high mast lighting



Kaa Soba - Solar security lighting