

# PROJECT

## Long Breath in Democratic Design!

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Urbanization like elsewhere in Africa took a firm root in Kenya. Over the last decades, not only the capital Nairobi tripled its population, but also the many smaller urban centers doubled or tripled in size. At the end of the previous century, the Kenyan Government embarked on 5-year development plans for each town and urban center to help planning for such unprecedented urban growth. Many towns focused on infrastructure and services, among others, the construction of markets and slaughterhouses. The protection of natural resources, such as springs, and fertile land for food production were insufficiently addressed. The Kenyan government acknowledged this and initiated the Green Towns Project together with Wageningen University, The Netherlands. This project entailed a large variety of activities and projects, here I present you how we, together with the local community designed and implemented the renovation of the regional market of Kisii town while respecting natural resources and existing conditions.

### A START – DEVELOPING STRATEGIES KISII

The design of the market was preceded by the development of a landscape development plan for Kisii Town. Even though data was not readily available, the design of the plan that would guide urban growth in an environmentally sensitive way was relatively easy. The major challenge lay in how to plan for urban growth with insufficient public land to expand, extremely limited budgets to purchase land, and a restricted say on the use of freehold land. We thought out a three-pronged strategy:

- Low-cost solutions and low-maintenance interventions
- Interventions were structured in coherent programs
- Incentives for private urban initiatives, such as, the provision of all-weather roads as stimuli for urban development in areas designated for urbanization
- Incentives for private rural initiatives, by taking

care those farmers do well so that they safeguard natural resources.

The renovation of the Daraja Mbili market was part of the development plan. Although the renovation of the market was one of the municipalities priorities, the municipality portrayed a somewhat "wait and see" attitude. We decided that the design of the Daraja Mbili market had to be truly participatory to guarantee the long-term care and maintenance of the market. It was also our task to show that an environmentally sensitive, landscapebased design (Illustration 1) would contribute to a more affordably built, more beautiful, and durable market.

Illustration 1: To create public awareness for environment sensitive design. The Green Towns Project distributed twenty thousand posters with cartoon-like illustrations of possible futures. Here, the artist impression of a well designed market.

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### DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION, DARAJA MBILI MARKET

In 1992, the actual implementation of the Daraja Mbili market took off with a charrette to mobilize all stakeholders and clarify responsibilities. Participants included government officials, teachers, NGO staff, businessmen and women, and market sellers. After a field trip, the participants, placed the market in a wider watershed context (Illustration 2) and decided that protective soil-conservation measures were needed (Illustrations 3 and 4). The market itself had to be terraced (Illustration 5) and trees were to improve the micro-climate. In addition, the participants indicated the need for toilet facilities. The participants listed their own local and district resources with regard to knowledge, labor, materials, finances and the support they required from the Green Towns Project. At the closure of the charrette, the participants elected an action group (Kisii Green Towns Action Group) who was to facilitate the implementation of the market.

The action group together with the town engineer administered a survey. We helped with the design. The action group organized the implementation

of trash lines at the head of the catchment area. In collaboration with a local training school, they produced culverts while the Green Towns Project provided the cement. The town engineer set out the road alignments and volunteers dug the drains. Simultaneously, the action group carried out the construction of a Zambian toilet and started up a tree nursery.

The construction of the market itself was contracted out and financed by the overall Green Towns

Illustration 2: Bird's eye view of the Daraja Mbili Market (old situation). The image shows the location of the market at the foot of the Nyanchwa hill. Storm-water run-off causes serious erosion.

Illustration 3 and 4: Images show the old eroded side of the market before and after the construction of the new drain. The pictures are taken at more or less the same position.

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Illustration 5: The newly constructed market just before the official opening.

Illustration 6: The market photographed by Janneke van de Wetering in 2006. Janneke visited Kisii unannounced to monitor the condition of the market. The market was well used and in an unexpectedly good condition.

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Project. The terraces and the retaining walls were made from stones taken from a nearby quarry. The red colored murrum of the terrace floor and the stones gave the market a distinct "Kisii" character (Illustration 5). The action group never lost its motivation even though, they had to deal with slacking surveyors, volunteers, and complications with the contractor. They had to manage conflict with local residents as the newly dug drains prohibited easy access to their houses and with councilors who wanted their share. In 1995, the action group organized an official opening by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Local Government, other senior-most government officers and the

Royal Netherlands Ambassador. Important to note, is that with this official opening, the Kenyan government showed its commitment to a community-based landscape approach. The work of the action group was filmed and aired on television and featured in training programs.

### CONCLUSIONS

Notwithstanding the earlier mentioned difficulties, the road and market project was well appreciated by the community. New shops were established alongside the improved road, the retaining walls of the terraces functioned as a clean space to exhibit the market products; the income (for the municipality) of the market tripled and erosion remained under control. In 1996, the Kisii action group initiated a composting group that recycled the green waste from the market. The Kisii action group took up the initiative to spread the Green Towns' word and started new action groups in neighboring villages. Illustration 6 shows the market 10 years after the opening. Did the market develop as we had envisioned? Yes and no! We (as professional landscape architects) can see shortcomings. Is it a success – yes! Nothing is for eternity. 10 years of success is a great survival rate for such fast growing and changing environments. The Kisii people are proud of their market. To them, the market became a beautiful and efficient place. The action group became a guide to many other groups. Congratulations, Kisii Green Towns Action Group, for a job well done!

### LITERATURE

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## IFLA Student Landscape Architecture Design Competition

Creative Landscapes Transforming Lives,  
5-7 September 2012

### BACKGROUND

The transformative power of landscape design in cities has raised the awareness of the value of landscape architecture in creating living environments which satisfy a wide spectrum of the qualities needed for meaningful urban living.

This student landscape architecture competition aims to achieve the following:

- Generate new ideas about how creative landscape design significantly transforms lives in a variety of ways (directly and / or indirectly)
- Increase the awareness of the various benefits that innovative and strategic landscape design holds for cities and towns

### ASSIGNMENT:

Identify a problematic area in your city or town (or any city or town of your choice) with rich social and cultural heritage which presents opportunities for transformation. Design the transformation of the area through the creative and strategic application of landscape systems and / or landscape infrastructure for the purpose of not only improving peoples' lives, but simultaneously maximizing the development of cultural identity. The social and visual aspects are of particular note, in the way that service delivery can be utilized as a catalyst for transforming environments into vibrant, meaningful and delightful urban places.

The design should respond to, embrace or express the following:

- The social and cultural facets of landscape not only reside in the tangible, but to a great degree the intangible. The comprehensive transformation of lives through landscape systems and / or infrastructural interventions involves understanding the possibilities of the social and cultural effects of such interventions.
- Social and cultural phenomena (as well as strategic, creative landscape interventions) often require innovation in representation techniques for effective

communication (especially to people who are not necessarily designers).

- Regarding