

PUBLIC SPACE INVENTORY & ASSESSMENT

# NAIROBI CITY COUNTY | KENYA

RECLAIMING THE GREEN CITY IN THE SUN

DRAFT



**UN HABITAT**  
FOR A BETTER URBAN FUTURE

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The methodology used in this report is based on the UN-Habitat’s Global Public Space Programme City-wide public space inventory and assessment. UN-Habitat’s City Prosperity Initiative uses the City Prosperity Index which is a sampling methodology and there is a difference in the data reported. The data is also based on time and day of the survey and may vary due to weather condition and user perception.

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# NAIROBI

## PUBLIC SPACE INVENTORY AND ASSESSMENT

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Reclaiming the Green City in the Sun



## FOREWORD



The past few months have seen Nairobi City County make great strides in becoming a pioneer for safe, inclusive and accessible green and public spaces among African cities. Public spaces are one of the chief priorities for the city, and it is not difficult to fathom why. They provide myriad social, economic, environmental, and public health benefits. Additionally, safe public spaces make for safer cities. Public spaces are crucial to the wellbeing of a city's residents, and therefore to the city's success. They are the lungs of the city. They help us breathe, and scientifically, green environments make our built environment amenable and healthy. Green spaces help improve air quality and expunge toxins emitted by our environment. This is partly the reason why we are targeting at least 10 percent forest cover across the entire country by the year 2022. Within Nairobi, the restoration of Michuki Park, Uhuru Park, Jeevanjee Gardens, City Park, Central Park, Uhuru Gardens, Ngong' road Forest, Kamukunji Grounds, Jamhuri Park and the Arboretum is the first attempt at pushing this 'green renaissance'. By creating this park, we have started the process of re-birthing the soul of our great city of Nairobi.

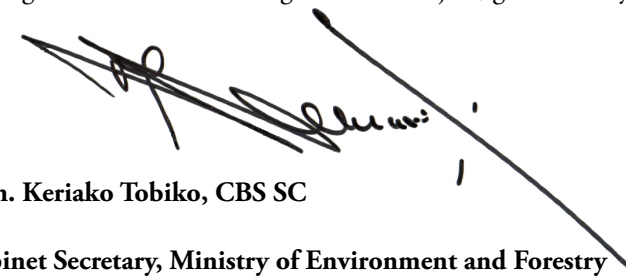
Urban green spaces have never been appreciated by the public as they are now in this period of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, Kenya Forest Service continues to register a huge influx of people visiting urban forests and green spaces, mainly for recreation and reconnecting with nature. However, their value can only be fully realised if they are widely available, adequately distributed and accessible to the general population. As expressed by Enrique Peñalosa, the former Mayor of Bogota, the provision of high-quality public spaces for the city's poor and most vulnerable signals true democracy at work.

As we lead the green renaissance, we will shift focus to neighbourhood level green, and public spaces to connect neighbourhoods and open up informal settlements, taking the co-benefits of green and public spaces where they are needed the most. The presence of neighbourhood green, and public spaces including neighbourhood parks, forests and sports fields are important, especially in high-density neighbourhoods. They are places where community comes alive, where children learn to ride bicycles and engage in active play, where bonds among neighbours are strengthened and where a sense of belonging is fostered. In informal settlements, they serve as critical risk-reducing infrastructure – reducing the risk of flooding and spread of fires. They provide opportunities for informal vending, growing food and for play, enabling children to access the sun and engage in active play, in turn reducing the risk of vitamin D deficiency and child obesity.

Today, climate crisis and its effect on global water cycles is becoming a defining factor of the 21st century and will significantly impact not only the natural environment but human civilization as we know it. Cities and communities in fragile environments such as arid areas face complex challenges such as water scarcity, inadequate infrastructure, rapidly growing populations, and impacts on public health from the effects of urban heat islands. The imperative to invest in green infrastructure and nature-based solutions in these environments is clear. The initiative to reclaim and restore green, and public spaces across the city, and the country is part of a multi-agency effort to conserve green, and public spaces including nature reserves and forests, and make them accessible for use by the general public, both for recreation, ecological and livelihood opportunities.

This inventory is the first of its kind for Nairobi City County. It addresses the deficiency of information regarding the exact number of green and public spaces, and the state they are in. With the results detailed in this report, the city county can now proceed 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'. Together with the Nairobi Integrated Urban Development Master Plan (NIUPLAN), this strategy will chart a way forward for Nairobi's green, and public spaces. Emphasis will be made on the equal distribution of high-quality green, and public open spaces. The Ministry of Environment and Forestry's commitment to improve green, and public spaces parallels the long overdue urban reform that Nairobi is currently undergoing.

As we grapple with old and new challenges in a rapidly urbanizing world, this timely report can help inform research, policy dialogue and action towards the restoration of green, and public spaces in Nairobi city county for years to come. I recommend its findings to all who are working to create the just, green and dynamic environments that Nairobi residents need to thrive.



**Hon. Keriako Tobiko, CBS SC**  
**Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forestry**

Global agreements including the Sustainable Development Goals and the New Urban Agenda and emphasize the strategic role of green, and public spaces as a connective matrix on which sustainable cities and communities must grow, embracing the essential requirements of being welcoming, vibrant, diverse, safe and accessible for everyone, and especially the most vulnerable members of the society. Goal 11.7 specifically calls on governments to provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, in particular, for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities by 2030.

Public space is a critical infrastructure in cities and human settlements, especially in the age of unprecedented crises, concentrated urban poverty, rising burden of disease, high inequalities and increasing civil unrests. Investing in green, and public spaces can help mitigate climate risks. The multiple benefits of public space in cities are well documented. They include improved mobility and access to basic services, safer and crime-free environment, stimulation of economic activity including urban tourism, and acting as catalysts of urban regeneration and social inclusion. By supporting walking and cycling, public space has a direct impact on the general health and wellbeing of the population. In low income communities and informal settlements, green and public spaces are shared living spaces - where civic programs for residents are hosted, livelihoods are conducted, young people showcase their skills and talents, women and youth sell household products, families grow their food, and children and young people engage in play, and active and healthy recreation. They are also an important symbol of identity, community and dignity, inspiring a sense of belonging and pride. All over the world, and in Nairobi in particular, we see more and more communities coming together to reclaim, upgrade and protect public spaces as a shared community asset.

Their multiple co-benefits notwithstanding, the value of green, and public spaces is often overlooked or underestimated, especially in fast-growing cities like Nairobi. This could be due in part to a lack of understanding of the value of public spaces and the absence of capacity to conduct city-wide public space assessments. Of course, these factors are compounded by competing policy priorities and shrinking public resources.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a timely reminder that public space is a basic risk-reducing infrastructure, an essential urban service, and an important 'third place', especially in times of crisis. These neutral venues are largely free from the domestic pressures of the home (first place) and the economic pressures of the office (second place). Overtime, they have served as essential building

blocks of community. The pandemic has exposed critical gaps in the accessibility, flexibility, design, management and maintenance, connectivity and equitable distribution of green and public spaces in Nairobi. The influx of people into such public spaces as Karura Forest, Michuki Memorial Park, and Arboretum is a manifestation of the demand for green, and public spaces and is also a wake-up call to improve the accessibility and distribution across the urban divide. These elements 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.

UN-Habitat works to support the recognition and enhancement of public space as critical urban asset since 2012. This landmark report on the state of public open spaces in Nairobi City County has been developed by our Global Public Space Programme as a first inventory to provide residents and decision maker with essential documentation. It 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'. The report calls for strategic and targeted actions including protecting and revitalizing existing green, and public spaces especially at the neighbourhood level as they are most at risk of illegal misappropriation, embracing innovative Public, Private and People Partnerships, enhancing institutional capacity and building competency on green and public spaces, and heightening public awareness on the need and importance of green and public spaces. Over and above, well designed public spaces not only provide citizens with respite from the pressures of urban living, they can be opportunities for city managers to make the city more attractive to investments and talent. I strongly urge the involvement of citizens in the development of public spaces to promote the 4Ps - public, private and people partnerships! Only then can these initiatives be sustainable and be truly inclusive.

I encourage practitioners, policy makers, civil society and community leaders across the city county to adopt and use the findings and recommendations contained in the report, to make Nairobi a destination of choice to work, play and invest.



Ms. Maimunah Mohd Sharif,

Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and Executive Director, UN-Habitat



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# OPERATIONAL DEFINITIONS

**Amenity Green Space**

Most commonly found in residential areas and as part of urban infrastructure such as arterial interchanges, amenity green spaces are open spaces, often landscaped, that make a positive contribution to the appearance of an area or improves the quality of the lives of people living or working within a locality. It often provides opportunities for informal recreation and can serve other purposes such as landscaping and reducing the noise from a busy road or providing shelter from prevailing winds.

**Built up area**

This is the contiguous part of a city occupied by buildings and other impervious surfaces. However, built up area as used in the indicator denominator means the same thing as the functional city area.

**Amenity zone**

A non-statutory land use zone for areas of incidental green space which are landscaped for amenity, visual or buffer purposes, but have no potential for recreation use.

**Mono-functional spaces**

Spaces that are limited to only one activity.

**Multi-functional spaces**

Spaces that are used for different types of activities at different times of the day.

**Perception of safety**

A generalized judgment about the chance of crime. Different times of day, and physical location may affect perceptions of safety.

**Pluri-funtional spaces**

Spaces with different kinds of activities at the same time.

**Public space**

All places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. UN-Habitat categorizes public spaces into streets, public open spaces, and public facilities.

**Semi-private open spaces**

Urban open spaces where accessibility and use are limited to a few people, and the general public is generally unwelcome. Classic examples include courtyards to house or flats, communal spaces and playgrounds in residential estates.

**Semi-public open spaces**

Urban open spaces that the general public have generally limited access, and might be expressly accessible to particular groups in society, and when open to the general public, the opening time may be limited. These include school playgrounds, golf courses, and membership sports clubs among others.

**Potential public space**

An open space that is used by the public or that can be used by the public for enjoyment but is not designated as such as at the time of the survey.

**Public open space**

Urban open spaces that all citizens regardless of socio-economic status, religion and gender have access to enjoy. This includes squares, playgrounds, parks, nature reserves, historically-significant cemeteries and urban forests.

**Riparian reserve**

A vegetated strip of land adjoining a water body.



# GLOSSARY

ArcGIS:	Arc Geographic Information System
BRT:	Bus Rapid Transit
CABE:	Commission for Architecture and Built Environment
CBO:	Community Based Organisation
CSO:	Civil Society Organisation
CPTED:	Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design
ETH Basel:	Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Basel
FBO:	Faith Based Organisation
GIS:	Geographic Information System
G.o.K:	Government of Kenya
GPS:	Global Positioning System
INGO:	International Non-Governmental Organisation
KDI:	Kounkuey Design Initiative
KFS:	Kenya Forest Service
KUR:	Kenya Uganda Railway
NCCG:	Nairobi City County Government
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIUPLAN:	Nairobi Integrated Urban Development Masterplan
NMC:	Nairobi Municipal Community
NMR:	Nairobi Metropolitan Region

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