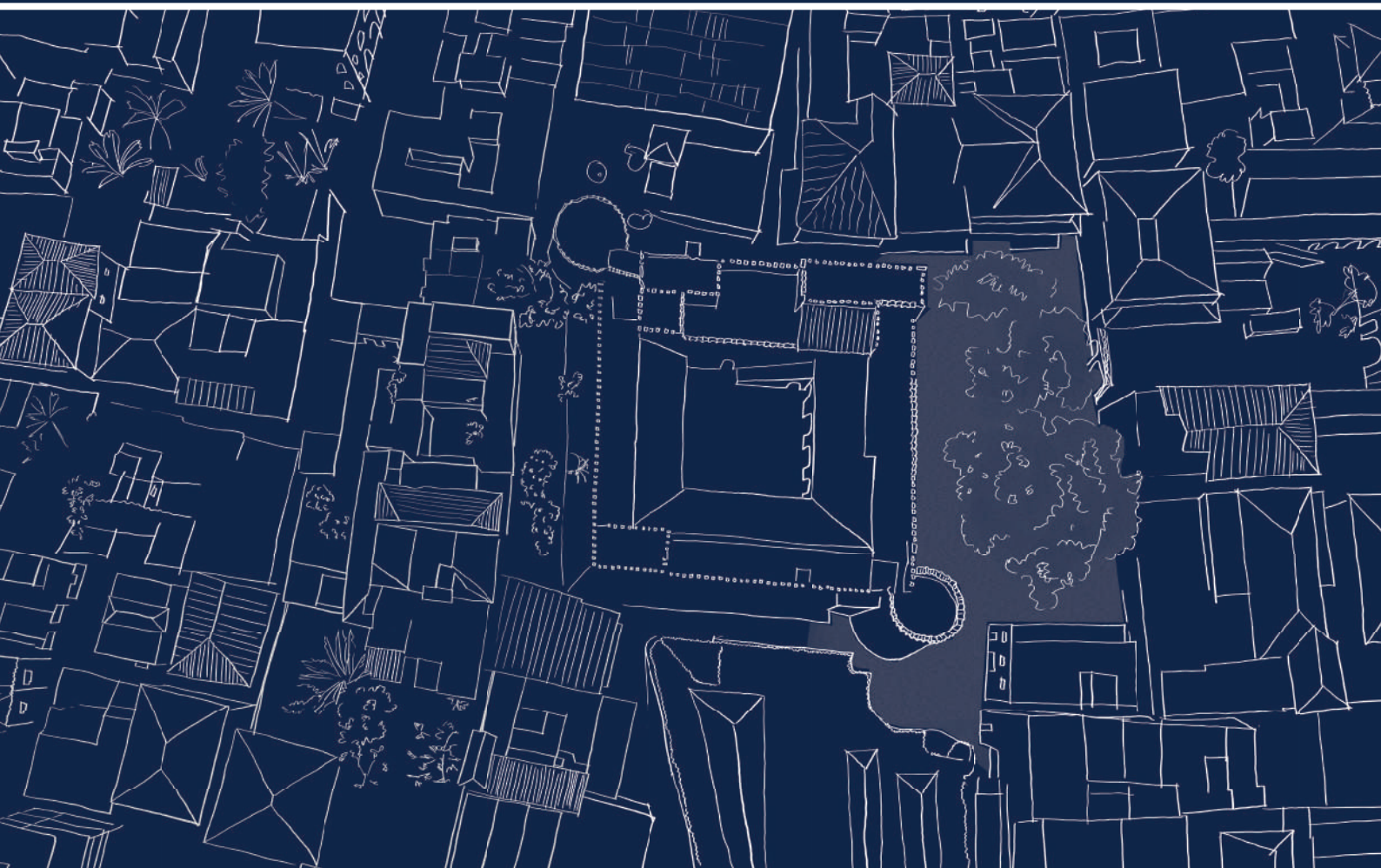


# Amu Fakhri Yangu

Manual for activating public  
open spaces in heritage  
settings



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# Preamble

This manual was created as part of the Amu Fakhri Yangu: Kawanda La Ustawi project (Amu My Pride: Space for Prosperity), which was implemented from June to February 2024. The project aimed to promote the role of heritage and community participation in public space activation.

In August 2024, we conducted a series of activities that culminated in the activation of Lamu's main public open space – Mkunguni Square. We focused our efforts on a space that was in principle already functioning well. However, our goal was to explore various ways to engage the community in a process centred on urban heritage, highlighting its values and importance for potential improvements to the space itself.

Over the course of three weeks, we explored urban heritage from the community's perspective, conducted training in traditional crafts, and discussed the challenges of growth within the context of a World Heritage Site alongside various stakeholders. Prior to engaging in the activation of the public space, we conducted a series of preparatory steps to better understand the needs of the community and the open space.

These steps, along with the lessons learned from the process, have been encapsulated in this manual and presented in an exhibition at Lamu Fort. While we dedicate this manual to the community of Lamu, we also hope it serves as a valuable resource for professionals and communities in other areas facing similar challenges.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude to everyone who contributed to this process, and especially to the Creative Industries Fund for their generous grant, which made this project possible.



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# 01

## Introduction

### **What is this manual?**

This manual is a simple guide to understanding what public open spaces are, why they matter, and how they can be activated within the context of heritage sites.

### **What is meant by activation of public open spaces?**

We understand activation of public spaces as an ongoing process that involves various steps and serves to enhance the use, vibrancy, and community engagement in public areas. Activation aims at transforming public spaces into lively, functional environments where people feel welcome and motivated to gather, interact, and participate in various activities.

### **Who is this manual intended for?**

We can all play a part when it comes to activation of public open spaces. This manual is intended to support individuals, organizations, and authorities who wish to enhance their surroundings, explore opportunities for community engagement, or simply wish to better understand the role and features of public spaces. While working on this manual we had in mind community leaders, authorities and governing bodies, project managers, members of NGOs, and students, among others.

### **How does this manual work?**

The first part of the Manual provides an overview of definitions and explanations of the terms we use and the approaches we follow. In the second part, you will find an overview of “Steps to Activate Public Open Spaces”. Each step is explained in detail and followed by a practical example from activities undertaken in Lamu Old Town.



**Figure 1** Amu Fakhri Yangu Heritage Activities.

# Definitions and Explanations

## What are public open spaces?

People have different understandings of what public spaces are. Although the specific characteristics of what defines a public space may vary depending on the context, there are universal definitions that facilitate a shared understanding. In this manual, we'll use definitions from UN-Habitat and UNESCO to guide us:

*UN-Habitat defines public spaces, including streets, as "multi-functional areas for social interaction, economic exchange and cultural expression among a wide diversity of people".<sup>1</sup>*

*UNESCO defines public spaces as "important components of urban spaces that are accessible and open to all, where communities can gather and engage in activities that strengthen social cohesion and foster a sense of belonging".<sup>2</sup>*

## Why are public open spaces important?

Public spaces play a crucial role in promoting social interaction, fostering community ties, and enhancing urban liveability. They also play an important role in sustainable urban development. Well-designed and maintained streets and open public spaces can help lower rates of crime and violence, create space for formal and informal economic activities, and make services and opportunities available to a diversity of users. This is particularly true in East Africa where public space often functions as a 'communal living room', important for recreation, social, cultural and economic development.

## What are the key attributes of high-quality public spaces?

High-quality public spaces are safe, inclusive, accessible, and clean.

## What is the link between public open spaces and heritage?

Public spaces are centres of cultural expression; they are the beating heart of urban environments<sup>3</sup>. Existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic, and environmental factors, along with local community values, all converge in public spaces. This convergence enriches the character of the space and reflects the socio-economic and environmental contexts in which they exist, and are thus part of local heritage.

## What is the Historic Urban Landscape approach?

"The Historic Urban Landscape approach moves beyond the preservation of the physical environment and focuses on the entire human environment with all of its tangible and intangible qualities. It seeks to increase the sustainability of planning and design interventions by taking into account the existing built environment, intangible heritage, cultural diversity, socio-economic and environmental factors along with local community values."<sup>4</sup>

## Why layers of public open spaces?

The historic urban landscape is the result of the layering and intertwining of cultural and natural values over time. In this manual, we propose to approach public open spaces through the notion of layers, instead of focusing solely on their attributes and technicalities. We believe this to be a good way of doing justice to the complexities of these public open spaces, properly understanding their role and place in the greater urban fabric and their meaning for the community.

1. United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat). (2019). Global public space toolkit: From global principles to local practices, p. 4.  
 2. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "Historic Urban Landscape Approach Explained." Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1026>.  
 3. World Urban Forum. "Space for All." Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://wuf.unhabitat.org/event/wuf12/space-all>.  
 4. UNESCO World Heritage Centre. "Historic Urban Landscape Approach Explained." Accessed January 29, 2025. <https://whc.unesco.org/en/news/1026>.

# 03

## Steps to Activate Public Space

This section provides an overview of the various steps involved in activating public open spaces. The steps (which will be explained in more detail in the following chapters) provide a guideline and an overview of the different activities involved. Please keep in mind that each space is unique and possesses its own characteristics. Different activities will be necessary to address these variations, which will lead to distinct outcomes based on the specific needs identified.

### 1. Understanding the wider context & selecting a space

Before starting work on a public open space, it is crucial to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the context in which the space exists. Although public open spaces share common characteristics, their uses, types, and related challenges and opportunities can vary significantly from one location to another. Familiarity with the following key features will help you establish a more effective process:

- a. Context
- b. Public open space typologies
- c. Identifying key challenges and opportunities
- d. Selecting the public open space (involving community)

*Note: If you already know what open space you will be working with you can skip point d) Selecting the space and proceed to Step 2. If not, you may need to consider a list of pre-selected open spaces provided by local authorities or a private investor. If you have multiple options to choose from, it is important to involve the community in the final selection process.*

### 2. Understanding and assessing what is needed

After selecting an open space that you wish to activate, the first thing you should do is to assess the needs of the open space:

- a. Identifying and assessing the different layers
- b. Understanding community needs and wishes

### 3. Defining interventions and their priority

Based on the information you have collected, decide what type of interventions the open space requires, define what the priorities are, and in what order you will carry out the interventions:

- a. Suggesting interventions and prioritizing
- b. Executing selected interventions

### 4. Evaluating and defining next steps

Once you have implemented your interventions it is good to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives – observe and gather feedback from users and use this information to make improvements and adapt programs as needed:

- a. Observation
- b. Collecting feedback from community
- c. Improving and/or revising next steps (if needed)

# Step 1

## Understanding the wider context & selecting a space

Public open spaces carry different meanings across various cultural contexts. To understand these meanings, it is crucial to develop a deeper insight into their history, perceptions, the various types of open spaces that exist, and key challenges and opportunities related to their activation. You may begin by conducting desk research, followed by an inventory of open spaces. The desk research will provide you with valuable information about historical changes, legal contexts, and other relevant background details. By contrast, the inventory will help you identify the types of open spaces, their primary features and functions, and the activities that take place within them. This groundwork will establish a baseline for your subsequent activities, allowing you to dive deeper into the elements that particularly interest you.

### 1. Context

Collect existing reports, studies, or data. Look for historical data, previous surveys, or any available documentation that can provide background information. Once you have finalized the study, write a summary of your findings that describes your key findings.

For a better understanding of the wider context consider looking in particular at:

- Contemporary and historical maps and plans
- Policies and guidelines
- Previous reports and research

*Note: a comparison of historical and contemporary maps and plans will allow you to see whether the number of open spaces has increased or decreased over the years. This is an important indication of the prevailing trends and can tell you whether open spaces are under threat. The analysis of maps will help you to get an initial idea of the number of open spaces and their location. This will provide input for the inventory. It is important to always crosscheck the desk information with field observations.*



**Figure 2** Aerial view of Mkunguni Square and the surrounding neighbourhoods.

## Public Open Spaces in Lamu Old Town

According to town maps, there are over 20 public open spaces in Lamu Town, each playing a significant role based on its location and size, with many situated around or near mosques. The public open spaces in Lamu not only contribute to the town's social and economic vitality, but also embody moral values for the community, setting them apart in a unique way.

In Lamu Old Town, open spaces and public life are informally and organically integrated into the urban fabric, reflecting the town's traditional layout and social practices. Historically, communal activities have taken place in areas near mosques, domestic courtyards, and other spaces with similar functions. This aligns with Jeffrey Fleisher's observation that open spaces in Swahili towns often include locations near town walls and central congregational mosques, those close to entrances and the north-facing mihrab in particular, all framed by domestic architecture.

These public spaces encourage close-knit communities, emphasizing family as the foundation and fostering strong relationships with neighbours. They create a welcoming atmosphere for strangers and visitors, reflecting the community's values of openness and generosity while balancing the ideals of privacy and modesty in local social interactions.

However, as with public open spaces in many different towns and cities, Lamu faces significant challenges due to population growth. The demand for land for various initiatives has led to the privatization of areas that were once public, resulting in the construction of new structures that diminish the values of both the space and the surrounding neighbourhood. The necessity for new services, such as solid waste management, coupled with the local government's failure to implement effective solutions, has transformed some public open spaces into dumpsites and disposal areas.

The encroachment on public open spaces has also contributed to insecurity, leading to a decline in tourist visits and a downturn in tourism-related businesses in the town. These challenges have intensified since Lamu Old Town was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2001.



**Figure 3** Mkunguni Square as an example of public open space.

## 2. Types of public open space

Conduct an inventory of public open spaces and define their key characteristics and uses. This is a task that may take a long time to complete and be quite resource intensive. For your own project you may, for instance, want to focus on the area that you are working in. Whatever you decide to focus on, the tasks will be similar: observation and analysis.

Public open spaces take many forms depending on their context, yet there are common characteristics that facilitate a broad categorization. Below is an overview of the widely accepted categories of public spaces.

	Public	Private
Natural	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greenways/Green corridors</li> <li>• Wildlife Corridors</li> <li>• Parks</li> <li>• National Parks</li> <li>• Gardens</li> <li>• Waterfronts/Waterways</li> <li>• Beaches</li> <li>• Trails</li> <li>• Heritage Sites</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Golf courses</li> <li>• Greenspaces (on private properties)</li> <li>• Institutional places (such as private campuses or estates)</li> <li>• Residential parks (parklets, mini parks)</li> <li>• Schoolgrounds</li> </ul>
Built	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Plazas: Civic plazas; Street plazas</li> <li>• Streets: Shared Streets; Lane-ways; Alleyways;</li> <li>• Recreation and sports facilities; Arenas</li> <li>• Institutional buildings: Schools; Municipal buildings; Community centres</li> <li>• Public transit hubs/bus shelters</li> <li>• Playgrounds</li> <li>• Public markets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Privately owned public spaces (POPS)</li> <li>• Restaurants</li> <li>• Stores</li> <li>• Shopping malls</li> <li>• Theatres</li> <li>• Parking lots</li> <li>• Utility corridors</li> </ul>

**Figure 4** Source: Evergreen. "Building Better Public Spaces: A Toolkit to Create a Public Space Inventory."

## Types of public open space in Lamu Old Town

No.	Type	Description
1	<b>Streets and Alleys (Baraza Spaces)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Examples:</b> Narrow streets and shaded alleys often double as informal public spaces.</li> <li><b>Characteristic features:</b> Baraza benches – stone benches built along the walls of houses serve as extensions of the public realm, facilitating social interaction and community gatherings.</li> <li><b>Community Activities:</b> Spaces where residents gather, socialize, and conduct small-scale economic activities.</li> </ul>
2	<b>Seafront (Waterfront Areas)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Examples:</b> The waterfront, particularly near the jetty and dhow-building areas, serves as an informal open space.</li> <li><b>Characteristic features:</b> Benches, boat docking area, pedestrian walkway.</li> <li><b>Community Activities:</b> Fishing-related activities, boat repairs, and celebrations such as weddings often take place here, reflecting the maritime culture of Lamu. Residents and visitors frequently gather along the seafront for leisure, enjoying the cooling sea breeze.</li> </ul>
3	<b>Mosques and Religious Institutions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Examples:</b> Courtyards adjacent to mosques. These serve as semi-public spaces where people meet after prayers or during religious ceremonies.</li> <li><b>Characteristic features:</b> Large open spaces located adjacent to mosques used for gathering before or after prayers.</li> <li><b>Community Activities:</b> Open spaces play a key role in community life, serve for religious and social activities.</li> </ul>
4	<b>Open Spaces for Seasonal or Temporary Uses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Examples:</b> Spaces that are temporarily cleared or left undeveloped.</li> <li><b>Characteristic features:</b> Open land without facilities. This can include parking lots or school grounds.</li> <li><b>Community Activities:</b> Spaces may be used for festivals, rituals, and community gatherings. Examples include areas used during Maulidi celebrations or other cultural festivals.</li> </ul>
5	<b>Contemporary Public Spaces</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Examples:</b> Open spaces that were designed and designated as public spaces in the past 40 years.</li> <li><b>Characteristic features:</b> Characteristics depend on the designated use.</li> <li><b>Community Activities:</b> Meeting places for community and visitors alike, serve various purposes including socializing, economic activities, and leisure.</li> </ul>
6	<b>Informal Meeting Spots</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Examples:</b> Small open areas near prominent structures or road intersections are often used as informal gathering points.</li> <li><b>Characteristic features:</b> Typically shaded by large trees, providing natural shelter and a sense of enclosure for communal use. Seating areas may be connected to surrounding buildings.</li> <li><b>Community Activities:</b> Meeting places for socializing and informal economic activities.</li> </ul>



Figure 5 Seafront (Waterfront Areas)



Figure 6 Mosques and Religious Institutions



Figure 7 Mosques and Religious Institutions

### 3. Identifying key challenges and opportunities

It is important to understand what the key challenges and opportunities of public open spaces are. Overall, the challenges related to public open spaces may be similar across various locations, and will include concerns related to safety, maintenance, or community ownership. On the other hand, the opportunities for activation may be more context-specific. Take some time to get a proper understanding of both, this will be key in defining the next steps that you take. In order to do that, you may want to consult previous studies, make a field trip, and organize a community meeting to gather input from residents.

#### Key Challenges in Lamu Old Town

**Lack of Formal Recognition:** Public open spaces are frequently overlooked in urban planning processes, leaving them prone to unregulated development and diminishing their potential benefits to the community.

**Encroachment:** The expansion of modern construction and urbanization has significantly reduced the availability of open spaces, as buildings and infrastructure encroach upon open areas, limiting public access.

**Safety Concerns:** Open spaces are often regarded as unsafe due to reported incidents of crime, including muggings and assaults. This atmosphere of insecurity deters public use and undermines the social value of these areas.

**Poor Maintenance:** Problems such as littering, inadequate lighting, and deteriorating infrastructure – such as broken stormwater drains – contribute to making public areas, particularly along the waterfront, uninviting and unpleasant.

**Lack of Community Ownership:** Residents lack the feeling of ownership and responsibility for shared open spaces.

**Environmental Pressures:** Rising sea levels and increased flooding pose significant threats to waterfront areas and informal open spaces, increasing their vulnerability and necessitating proactive management and adaptation strategies.



**Figure 8** Examples of poor maintenance of open spaces.

## Key Opportunities in Lamu Old Town

**Reviving baraza culture:** Promote the use of baraza spaces by incorporating them into conservation and community development plans, fostering a deeper appreciation for these traditional gathering places.

**Community participation:** Actively engage residents in the identification and management of informal open spaces, ensuring these areas are utilized sustainably and reflect the needs and desires of the community.

**Integrating heritage management:** Acknowledge the historical and cultural significance of open public spaces in planning and management initiatives, ensuring that these heritage elements are preserved and celebrated within the town's development framework.

**Improving basic facilities:** To enhance the use of public open spaces, basic facilities such as lighting, seating areas, shading (by trees), pathways, drainage, and a water supply will make the spaces safer and more accessible for various age and gender groups.



**Figure 9** Example of reviving baraza culture – an opportunity for improvement of public open spaces.



**Figure 10** Example of existing empty sites in Lamu that can be revitalized.

## 4. Selecting the public open space

Once the characteristics and the key challenges of the location have been identified, you need to select the right public open space. Keep in mind, not all open space may be suitable for the activation. It is therefore good to start with a pre-selection of potential sites.

### Helpful questions to guide the pre-selection process:

- Is the public open space owned by the local government? Or is the owner in agreement with the project?

*If a space is not owned by the project implementers, or does not hold formal local approval, there may be challenges in the future.*

- Is the public open space currently being used by community members?

*When a space is not currently being used, it may be due to unfavourable conditions (distance, site conditions, safety issues, local dispute). Once upgraded, it may need a lot of convincing to have people use the space. This may lead to a vacant, brand new public space.*

- Is the public open space less than 10 minutes' walking distance from the community and surrounding neighbourhood?

*In order for a public open space to be used frequently, it is important that its target group is nearby the intended location.*

- Are there any community champions associated with the space?

*Having a supporter from within the current user group may significantly fast-track the decision-making processes and approval within the community.*

- Does the public open space have any links to history or local culture?

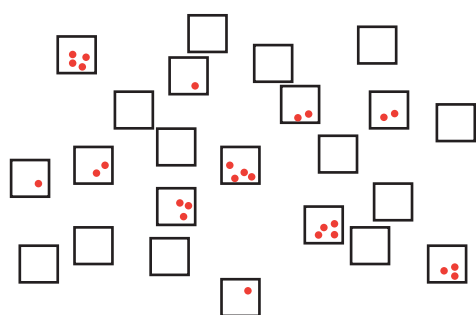
*Having a strong connection with the local context and its history may strengthen relationships between people.*

- Are the basic site conditions suitable for upgrading and within the aimed timeline and budget?

*For example, a site might have issues of flooding requiring proper drainage, which the budget might not be able to cover; or there may be existing structures to be removed, which may exceed the intended timeline. Alternatively, a site might already have most required elements and therefore other sites may be in higher demand of upgrading.*

After a pre-selection of potential public open spaces, it is important to involve stakeholders and/or the community in the final selection of the space. This can be done with a public event, or by invitation-only meeting sessions. Various decision-making tools that can be used to make a selection are available online. A number of those are outlined below.

## Overview of selected decision-making tools



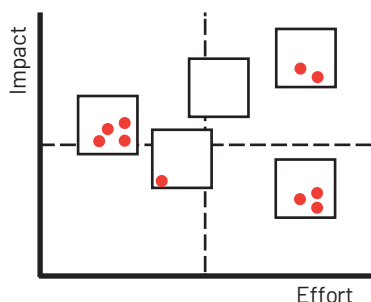
### Dot voting

Materials required:

- Print-outs with pictures, maps or names of the sites
- Sticky notes
- Timer

Aim:

Narrowing down the site for discussion by letting participants select their priority locations.



### Effort – impact diagram

Materials required:

- Whiteboard or large A1/A0 paper
- Sticky notes
- Pens

Aim:

Categorizing sites by their level of impact and the effort/amount of upgrading that is required

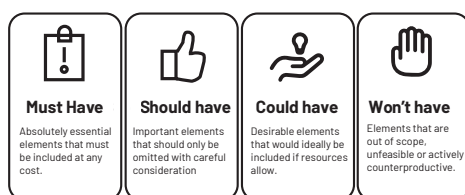
### MoSCoW – Must-Have, Should-Have, Could-Have, and Won't-Have

Materials required:

- Large piece of paper or whiteboard with the MoSCoW circles written on them
- Selection
- Pens

Aim:

Brainstorming on what would be required for the site, for a number of spaces. By seeing the requirements for each site, a further selection may be created.



**Figure 11** Diagrams inspired by information from: <https://www.workshopper.com/post/decision-making-exercises> and <https://fibery.io/blog/product-management/best-prioritization-activities-for-product-teams/>

## Examples from Lamu



**Figure 12** Meetings with community members during the selection process .

## Case Study - Mkunguni Square

**Type of public open space:** contemporary public pace

**Users:** community members, visitors, tourists

**Previous uses:** landing site, market place

**Current uses:** festivals, public rallies, screenings

**Key activities:** leisure, trade, meeting place

*A normal day in Mkunguni Square...*

*"The square comes to life at fajr prayer with residents gathering for traditional Swahili coffee, a long-standing custom that strengthens community bonds and facilitates the exchange of knowledge. By 9 AM, the square becomes a hub of activity, with discussion groups around the benches. The crowds temporarily disperse at dhuhr, reconvene after asr, and stay until maghreb. The national 7 PM news is screened daily, keeping Lamu residents updated on national events."*



**Figure 13** View of Mkunguni square.

**Figure 14** Aerial map Lamu. Source: google maps



# Step 2

## Understanding and assessing what is needed

Before you start the activation process it is important that you properly understand the open space that you are working with. Based on this understanding you will be able to assess the needs of the open space. You may also find that the space already functions well, and what it needs is a simple clean-up and a few bins. Alternatively, you may find that the key challenge of the space is lack of community ownership, which will require a series of community workshops focusing, for example, on awareness-building.

### 1. Identifying and assessing the different layers

This section outlines the various layers to consider in the process of activating public open spaces. You will learn about the key characteristics of each layer, how to identify them, and what resources you will need for the task. In addition to the explanations, each layer is accompanied by practical examples from Lamu Old Town. This section also includes helpful tips and best practices to assist you.

The different layers considered are:

- Change through time (History)
- Buildings and physical elements
- People and activities
- Broader perspective (Context)



**Figure 15** Cadastral map of Lamu Town. Source: National Museums of Kenya, Lamu Museum

## Change through time (History)

Urban environments are constantly changing. This flux is influenced by economic shifts, changes in population, technological advances, and social trends. The transformations are visible in the physical landscape, in people's everyday lives, and in cultural activities. When trying to understand this layer, consider what the different functions are that the open space has performed over time. What are the different ways in which people have used the space? How has the meaning of space changed for people? You can also consider the adjacent buildings and structures: which ones are new, which ones are old, what is their history and how has their use changed – all of this has had an impact on the open space. Similarly, consider the old and new physical elements that are part of the space, when they were brought in and for what reason.

### Why is it important?

Investigating this layer will help you understand what the changes that the space has undergone over time are, and how this is reflected in its physical appearance and the way people use and interact in the space. This will inform your present assessments and allow for comparisons over time. It can also reveal trends regarding usage patterns, community engagement, and emerging issues. In simple terms, knowing what has worked in the past and what didn't work and why will help you avoid similar mistakes in the future.

### What to do?

Collect existing reports, studies, or data on the space. Look for historical data, previous surveys, or any available documentation that can provide background information.

### Helpful questions to guide your research:

- What are the different functions the open space has performed over time?
- What are the different ways in which people have used the space?
- How has the meaning of the space changed for people?
- What type of buildings surround the space? Have their use and meaning changed over time?
- What features of the space are old and what are new?

### Keep in mind that:

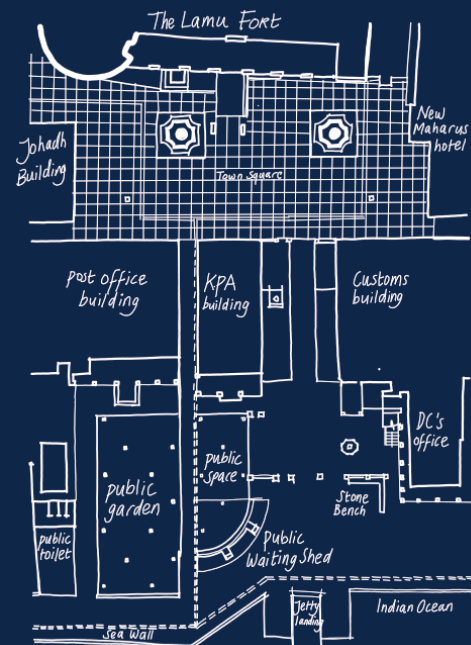
Familiarizing oneself with past documents can provide talking points and relevant information to engage the community during consultations or workshops, fostering more meaningful discussions based on historical context.

## Change through time - Mkunguni Square

### Baada ya Ngome ya Kale

#### After the Lamu Fort

Kawanda la Mkunguni lilianzishwa wakati wa ujenzi wa Ngome ya Lamu mwanzoni mwa karne ya 19, pamoja na majengo ya maduka na varanda ya pwani. Wakati huo, lilijulikana sana miongoni mwawafanyabiashara wa hapa kama sehemu ya kupakia na kupakua bidhaa, kufunga mazao ya kilimo, na kuhifadhi na kupakia mikoko.



Proposed upgrading of the seafront and courtesy of Jan Wittenberg.

Mkunguni Square was created during the construction of Lamu Fort in the early 19th century with the stone verandas and shopfronts along the seafront. Around that time, it became well-known among local traders to load and unload goods, pack agricultural produce, and store and load mangroves.

### Kabla ya ngome ya Lamu

#### Before the Lamu Fort

Kabla ya karne ya 14, kulikuwa na makazi mawili katika Lamu: Tundani upande wa kaskazini na Hidabo upande wa kusini. Makaazi haya mawili yaliyoshindana kwa mizozo kwa hakika yaliambia kuanzisha makazi mapya, yakianzisha Mji wa Lamu katika eneo la Pangahari-Kivundoni.

Before the 14th century there were two settlements in Lamu: Tundani to the north and Hidabo to the south. These two competing and conflicting settlements eventually decided to establish a new settlement, founding Lamu Town in the area around Pangahari-Kivundoni.



Seafront, ca. 1892 images by Adolph Jacob Hertz, courtesy Jan Wittenberg.



Lamu fort, ca. 1892 images by Adolph Jacob Hertz, courtesy Jan Wittenberg.

Ifikapo karne ya 18, mji ulikuwa umekua kuelekea kusini na magharibi na ulijumuisha maeneo ya leo ya Mtaamwini na Teremkoni. Wakati huo, eneo la Mkunguni lilikuwa ardhi tupu ya ufukweni. Hadithi za kienyeji zinaonyesha kuwa eneo hili lilitumika kama mahali pa kutia nanga na kurekebisha boti. Lakini pia ilikuwa eneo la hatari kwa ajili ya kushambuliwa Amu, hivyo mnamo mwaka wa 1813 Liwali (Gavana) Zahid Ngumi alianza kujenga ngome.



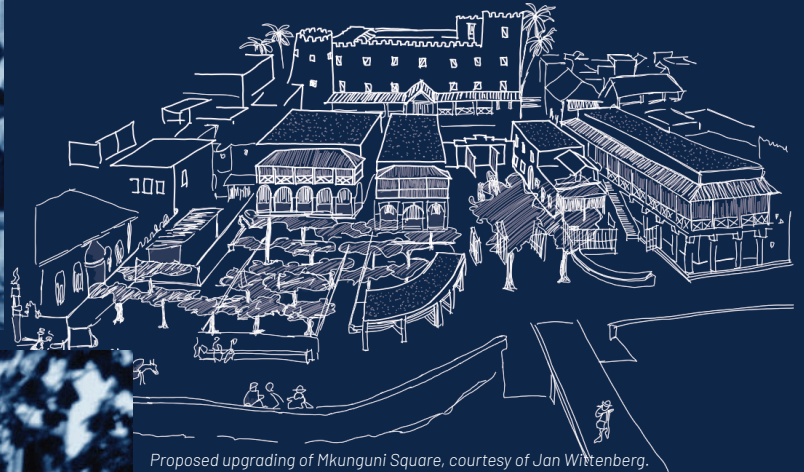
By the 18th century, the town had grown to the south and west and included today's neighbourhoods of Mtaamwini and Teremkoni. At that time, Mkunguni was an empty waterfront area. Some stories say that this area was used as a landing and boat-repair site. But it was also the most vulnerable point for attacks on Lamu, so in 1813 Liwali (Governor) Zahid Ngumi began constructing a fort.

Katika karne ya 20, Lamu ilipokuwa kituo cha utawala wa kanda kwa Waingereza, Kawanda la Mkunguni ilikuwa soko la wazi. Bidhaa kutoka makaazi mengine ya Waswahili zililetwa na kuuzwa mbele ya ngome. Waingereza walijenga ofisi za gavana, uhamiaji, forodha, na huduma za bandari, na kuifanya sehemu kuu ya kuingilia mjini. Ilikuwa kiungo kati ya lango la mji na gati kuu la Lamu.

In the 20th century, when Lamu became a regional British administrative center, Mkunguni Square was as an open-air market. Goods from other Swahili settlements were brought and sold in front of the fort. The British built offices for the governor, immigration, customs, and port services, making the square the town's main entry point. It connected the town entrance to the main Lamu Jetty.



1988



Proposed upgrading of Mkunguni Square, courtesy of Jan Wittenberg.



## Baada ya 1980 After 1980s

Kuanzia miaka ya 1960 hadi 1980, Kawanda la Mkunguni lilikuwa eneo kuu la biashara la Lamu. Mwaka 1986, soko jipya lilijengwa kusini mwa ngome, na wafanyabiashara walihamishiwa hapo 1989. Hii iliruhusu kuboreshwa kwa Kawanda la Mkunguni, na kuwa kitovu cha shughuli za kijamii, kisiasa, na kitamaduni za Lamu.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, Mkunguni Square was Lamu's main trading area. In 1986, a new market was built south of the fort, and traders moved there in 1989. This allowed for the restoration of Mkunguni Square, making it the epi-center of Lamu's social, political, and cultural activities.



Upgrading of Mkunguni Square, ca.1987, courtesy of National Museums of Kenya, Lamu Museums.

Mkunguni Square 1970s and 1980s, author unknown, courtesy of National Museums of Kenya, Lamu Museums.

## Buildings and physical elements

This layer encompasses the tangible structures and features that define the open space – meaning all the elements that you can see, touch, and measure. While assessing this layer, consider what elements contribute to creating the unique shape of the open space and defining its boundaries: the adjacent buildings, walls, gates, etc. What are the physical components that facilitate daily activities, such as benches, lights, tables, and water taps? Another important element of this layer is infrastructure. Consider what elements of infrastructure are present in the space and what impact they have: drainage, electricity, pathways.

### Why is it important?

Investigating this layer will give you a proper understanding of the tangible elements defining the space. Each element plays a role in the functionality of the public open space.

### What to do?

Visit the space and assess its physical condition, layout, accessibility, and existing amenities. Take detailed notes and photographs to document observations.

### Helpful questions to guide your research:

- What elements define the boundaries of the open space? What type of buildings surround it?
- What fixed and movable features do you find in the open space? (Check for seating, lighting, signage.)
- What is the condition of the space, is it clean, is it littered? Where is waste stored?
- What elements of infrastructure do you find in the open space?
- What natural features exist in the open space?
- What are the access points?
- How do the adjacent buildings and structures interact with the open space? Do they enhance or detract from its usability?

### Materials and tools needed:

- Observation checklists for site visits
- Maps of the area (for overlaying data)
- Sketching tools (for layout ideas)
- Camera/smartphone for pictures



**Figure 16** Project team examining condition of the public space.

## Buildings and physical elements - Mkunguni Square

Msikiti wa Pwani ni moja ya misikiti 21 katika Mji Mkongwe wa Lamu. Kwa ujumla, Lamu ina misikiti 29, ambayo ni miongoni mwa mikoa yenye msongamano mkubwa wa misikiti kwenye mwambao wa pwani wa Uswahilini. Misikiti ni taasisi muhimu katika jamii za Kiswahili, ikihudumu kama sehemu za sala na za kujifunza.

Pwani Mosque is one of 21 mosques in Lamu Old Town. Lamu has a total of 29 mosques, one of the highest concentrations on the Swahili coast. Mosques are important in Swahili communities, serving as places for prayer and learning.



### Majengo ya jadi ya Kiswahili Traditional Swahili houses

Majengo ya jadi ya Kiswahili hazikukabili moja kwa moja kawanda, lakini zinatoa tabia ya kipekee kwa Mji Mkongwe wa Lamu. Majengo haya mara nyingi yamepangwa kuzunguka uwanja wa katikati, na mfululizo wa milia za sambamba zinazounda maeneo ya kuishi kwenye viwango tofauti. Katika ghorofa za chini yana maeneo ya kijamii kama vile madaka.

Traditional Swahili houses do not directly face the square, but give Lamu Old Town its unique character. The individual buildings are generally arranged around a central courtyard, with a series of parallel galleries that create living spaces on different levels. On the ground floors the buildings have social spaces such as porches (known as daka).



### Soko la Lamu Lamu Market

Soko la Lamu ni jengo la kisasa lililojengwa katika miaka ya 1980. Kutokana na jengo hili jipya, soko la Kawanda la Mkunguni lilihamishiwa ndani. Jengo hili ni mfano mzuri wa majengo mapya yanayojengwa Lamu wakati mji unavyozidi kukua.

Lamu Market is a modern building built in the 1980s. Because of the new building, the market at Mkunguni square was moved indoors. The building is a good example of the many new structures that are built in Lamu as the town grows.





## Ngome ya Lamu

### Lamu Fort

Ngome ya Lamu ina historia tangu mwaka wa 1821. Awali, ilikuwa hifadhi kwa ajili ya wanajeshi wa Baluchi waliotumwa na Sultani wa Oman kusaidia kuuhami mji. Kuanzia mwaka wa 1910 hadi 1984, ilikuwa gereza kwa utawala wa kikoloni wa Waingereza na serikali ya Kenya. Kisha, mnamo mwaka wa 1984, ngome ilikabidhiwa kuwa Makavazi ya Kitaifa ya Kenya. Leo, ngome inahudumikia kama kituo cha jamii kwa wakaazi wa Lamu. Uwanja wake unatumika kwa ajili ya harusi, mikutano na uzalishaji wa tamaduni. Ngome pia inahifadhi ofisi za Makavazi ya Kitaifa ya Kenya, maktaba, na maeneo ya warsha, na ni makaazi ya Kitovu cha Kitamaduni ya Kijumwa. Ngome ni jengo la kipekee katika muktadha wa Lamu, lakini linafanana na ngome nyingine za mitindo ya kiOmani katika Afrika Mashariki kama vile Ngome ya Siu au Ngome ya Lamu katika Zanzibar.

Lamu Fort dates back to 1821. Originally, it was a garrison for Baluchi soldiers sent by the Sultan of Oman. From 1910 to 1984, it served as a prison for both the British colonial regime and the Kenyan government. Then in 1984, the fort was handed over to the National Museums of Kenya. Today, the fort serves as a community centre for Lamu residents. The courtyard is available for weddings, meetings and theatre productions. The fort also hosts the offices of the National Museum of Kenya, a library, and workshop spaces, and is home to the Kijumwa Heritage Hub. The Fort is a unique building in the context of Lamu, but shares similarities with other Omani style fortifications across East Africa such as the Siu Fort or Old Fort in Zanzibar.

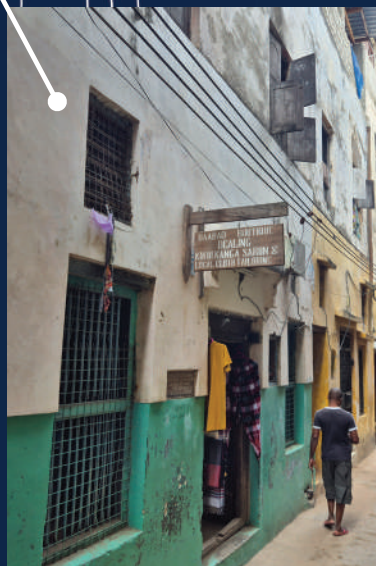


## Makavazi ya Lamu

### Lamu Museum

Makavazi ya Lamu ni jengo la kawaida la verandah za jiwe, lilioathiriwa na muundo wa Kiulaya, na linatoka mwanzoni mwa karne ya 20. Majengo haya yalijengwa kwa ajili ya shughuli za utawala za serikali ya kikoloni. Mengi yao yapo kando ya Usita wa Pwani. Jengo hili lilikuwa na Ofisi ya Kamishna wa Wilaya, na leo linahifadhi Makavazi ya Lamu.

Lamu Museum is a typical stone veranda building, influenced by European design, and dates back to the early 20th century. These buildings were built for colonial government administration and many are found along the seafront. The building once housed the District Commissioner's Office. Today it is home to the Lamu Museum.



## Majengo ya maduka

### Shopfront buildings

Majengo ya maduka yanahusishwa na wafanyabiashara wa Asia waliokuja kufanya biashara Lamu katika karne ya 19. Yanapatikana kote mjini na katika miji mingine ya Kiswahili. Sakafu za chini hutumika kama maduka na maghala, huku maeneo ya makazi yakiwa juu.

Shopfront buildings are linked to Asian merchants who arrived to trade in Lamu in the 19th century. They are seen throughout the town and across other Swahili cities. The ground-floors are used as shop and storage while residential quarters are located on the floors above.

## Infrastructure - Mkunguni Square



### Umeme Na Mwanga

Umeme uliletwa Lamu muda mfupi baada ya Kenya kupata uhuru mwaka 1963. Nyaya za umeme ni nyuzi zinazofunguka kutoka jengo hadi jengo na zimeunganishwa na masanduku kwenye kuta za nje za nyumba.

Taa zinacheza jukumu muhimu katika usalama wa makawanda ya umma. Kwa kuangaza barabara na maeneo mengine ya umma, tunapunguza hatari za ajali, majeraha na uhalifu. Bahati mbaya, hakuna taa nyingi za umma katika mitaa ya Lamu. Hata hivyo, maduka na nyumba hutoa mwanga, yakiongoza watu wakati wa usiku.

### Electricity and Lighting

Electricity was introduced into Lamu shortly after Kenyan independence in 1963. The electricity cables are wires that loop from building to building and are connected to brackets on the outside walls of houses.

Lights play an important role in the safety of public spaces. By illuminating roads, parks and other public spaces, we reduce the risks of accidents, injuries and crime. Unfortunately, there are not many public lights in the streets of Lamu. However, the shops and houses give off lights, guiding people during the night.



### Uondoaji Wa Maji Ya Jiji

Mienda maji ya wazi ya Mji wa Kale wa Lamu ilijengwa mwaka 1956 wakati barabara zilipochongwa kwa simenti. Mienda maji hii hupeleka maji ya mvua na maji taka hadi bandarini ikifuata mteremko wa dune kutoka magharibi kwenda mashariki. Maeneo mapya hayana Mienda maji, na husababisha mafuriko barabarani wakati wa mvua kubwa. Katika Kawanda la Mkunguni, Mienda maji imefunikwa na mawe ya kupambia kuzuia ajali.

### Urban Water Drainage

Lamu Old Town's open gutters were built in 1956 when the streets were paved with cement. They channel rainwater and wastewater down to the harbor following the slope of the sand dune underneath from west to east. Newer neighborhoods don't have any drainage, causing flooding of roads during heavy rains. At Mkunguni Square, the drains are covered with paving stones preventing from accidents.



### Utupaji Wa Takataka

Utupaji taka ovyo ni tatizo sugu katika Lamu, na ukosefu wa madebe ya takataka unachangia tatizo hili. Bila madebe yaliyo bora, takataka hutupwa tu kwenye makawanda ya wazi na magofu ya nyumba na kuishia kutengeneza machafuko njiani. Kukabiliana na hali hii, Serikali ya Kaunti pamoja na Makavazi ya Lamu waligawa maeneo yaliyotengwa katika mji kwa ajili ya kutupa taka ngumu. Pia walihimiza jamii kutambua umuhimu wa kudumisha usafi wa mazingira, na athari za kutupa taka baharini. Vivyo hivyo, matumizi ya plastiki za mara moja yaliharamishwa, na faini kuanzishwa kwa wale wanaovunja sheria.

### Waste disposal

Littering is a key issue in Lamu, and the lack of waste containers contributes to the problem. Without proper containers, waste is simply dumped on doorsteps and ends up littering the streets. In response, the County Government together with Lamu Museum allocated spots around the town for dumping solid waste. They also encouraged the community to consider the importance of keeping the environment clean, and on the effects of dumping waste in the ocean. Likewise, single use plastic was banned, and fines set up for law breakers.



### Barabara na njia

Mji Mkongwe wa Lamu una njia nyembamba ambazo ni baridi na za kufurahisha. Njia hizi zinakaliwa kivuli na majengo marefu na kupolewa na upepo mzuri wa baharini. Magari haya ruhusiwi ndani ya Mji Mkongwe wa Lamu, hivyo wakazi hutembea, kupanda punda, au kutumia boti kwa usafiri.

### Roads and pathways

Lamu Old Town has narrow alleyways that are cool and pleasant. They are shaded by tall buildings and cooled by a gentle ocean breeze. Cars are not allowed in Lamu Old Town, so residents walk, ride donkeys, or take boats to get around.

## Other defining elements - Mkunguni Square

### Miti ya Mkunguni

Miti ya Mkunguni, pia inajulikana kama *Terminalia Catappa*. Miti hii inatoa jina kwa kawanda. Inatoa kivuli kwa watu, ikileta mazingira ya kupumzika na ya kupendeza.

### Mkunguni Trees

Mkunguni Trees, also known as *Terminalia catappa*. The trees give their name to the square. They provide shade to people, creating a relaxing and pleasant environment.



### Bango la Taarifa

Bango la taarifa linatumika kwa matangazo yanayohusu jamii.

### Information board

The information board is used for announcements concerning the community.



### Mitungi ya maji

Mitungi ya maji ni chanzo cha maji ya kunywa na mfano wa ukarimu, maadili na turathi ya kudumu wa ufundi wa waswahili.

### Water pot

The water pot is a source of drinking-water and a symbol of generosity, hospitality, and the enduring legacy of Swahili craftsmanship.

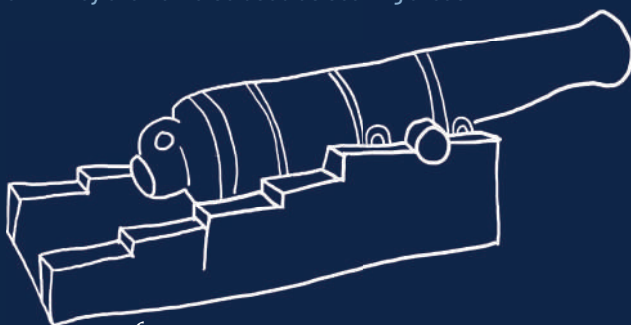


### Mizinga

Mizinga ni mabaki ya historia ya kikoloni, na inaweza kupatikana kote mjini, hasa katika usita wa pwani. Sasa pia inatumika kama maeneo ya kukalia.

### Canons

Canons are remnants of the colonial past, and can be found throughout the town, particularly along the seafont. They are now also used as seating areas.



### Jukwaa

Jukwaa linatoa nafasi kwa aina mbalimbali za maonyesho na hotuba.

### Stage

The stage provides space for various types of performances and speeches.



### Lango

Lango linawakaribisha wageni na wakaazi wa Mji wa Kale wa Lamu na linaashiria mahali rasmi pa kuingia na kutokea kwa watembea kwa miguu, ikirahisisha usafiri kwenda na kutoka kwenye miji na vijiji vingine.

### Gate

The gate welcomes visitors and residents to Lamu Old Town and marks the official entry and exit point for pedestrian traffic, facilitating travel to and from other towns and villages.

## Mabango na michoro

Mabango na michoro wa matangazo ya huduma, maduka, na mazao yanaweza kupatikana kila mahali katika mji na yamekuwa kipengele cha kudumu katika muonekano wa mitaa.



## Signboards and graffiti

Signboards and graffiti advertising services, shops, and produce can be found all around the town and have become a permanent feature of the streetscape.



## Baraza

Baraza zinapeana nafasi ya kupumzika na kuzungumza. Ni maeneo muhimu kwa ajili ya mwingiliano wa kijamii.

## Benches

Benches provide space to rest and interact. They are important locations for social interaction.

## Jicho la Lamu

Jicho la Lamu ni alama ya jadi kutoka Visiwa vya Lamu, inayohusishwa na ulinzi, mafanikio, na bahati nzuri. Jicho hili linaaminika kuzuia roho mbaya na matatizo. Huwekwa katika pande mbili za mbele za kila jahazi na mashua za Lamu.

## Lamu Eye

Lamu eye is a traditional symbol from the Lamu Archipelago, associated with protection, prosperity, and good fortune. The eye is believed to ward off evil spirits and misfortune.



## People and Activities

Open spaces have various uses as well as users throughout the day. This layer looks at who these users are, how they use the space, and what values they bring with them. It is important to keep in mind that one space can be used in different ways and one use does not necessarily exclude the other. For instance, in Lamu open spaces are settings for social, recreational, and economic activity, but also many important cultural happenings. They provide spaces for display of traditional handcrafts, and for holding cultural events and festivities, and as such play a significant role in maintaining local customs and traditions.

### Why is it important?

Investigating this layer will give you a proper understanding of the people that use the space and ways in which it is used. This will be crucial for creating an effective, vibrant, and inclusive public open space that meets the needs of the communities it serves.

### What to do?

Visit the space and observe how it is used, what type of activities take place in the open space, at what hours and who are the users. Take detailed notes and photographs to document observations.

### Helpful questions to guide your research:

- What are the activities taking place in the space?
- Who are the users? How do they interact in space?
- Do you notice a difference in the ways the different users are using the space?
- At what hours is the space used and in what ways?
- What are the physical elements supporting the various uses?
- What historical events or cultural narratives are associated with the area and the open space?
- Are there community traditions or practices that take place in or around the open space?

### Materials and tools needed:

- Observation checklists for site visits
- Maps of the area (for overlaying data)
- Sketching tools (for layout ideas)
- Camera/smartphone for pictures

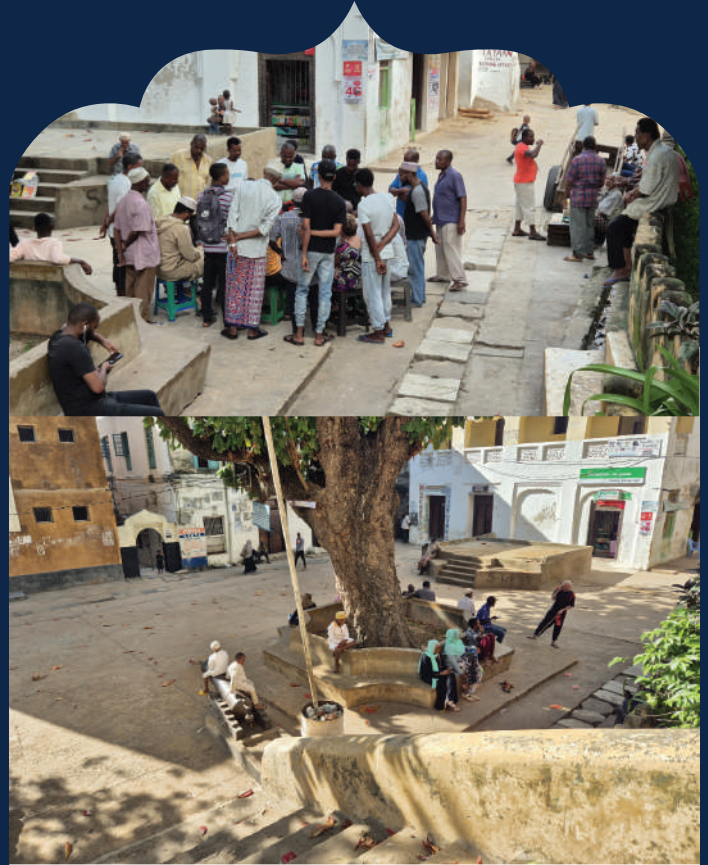


**Figure 17** Training in traditional crafts - rope-making from coconut fibers.

## People and activities - Mkunguni Square

*Vipengele vya kimwili vya kawanda vinaweka mazingira ya shughuli zinazofanyika hapo. Fikiria ni vipi eneo hili lingekuwa bila watu wanaolitumia na kulipa maana halisi.*

*The physical elements of the square set the scene for the activities that take place there. Imagine what this space would be without the people who use it and give it its true meaning.*



### Maisha ya Kila Siku

Watu hushiriki katika shughuli mbalimbali za kijamii na za kiuchumi ikiwemo kupumzika na mazungumzo, kucheza michezo, kutizama habari za kila siku ya saa moja usiku, kufanya biashara na ubadilishanaji wa bidhaa

### Everyday Life

People engage in various social and economic activities including rest and conversations, playing games, watching the daily 7 o'clock news, trade and exchange of goods.



### Shughuli za Utamaduni na Umma

Watu hushiriki katika shughuli mbalimbali za kitamaduni na za umma zikiwemo sherehe na mikutano ya kisiasa.

#### Cultural and Public Activities

People engage in various cultural and public activities including festivals and political rallies.



### Kazi za Mikono

Mifano ya sanaa za jadi katika na zinazolizunguka Kawanda la Mkunguni ni pamoja na kuchonga mbao, kazi za mikono za majani ya mkoma, na vifaa vya ujenzi wa kiasili.

#### Handicrafts

Examples of traditional crafts in and around the Mkunguni Square include among others wooden carvings, palm leaf handicrafts and traditional building materials and finishes.

## Broader Perspective (context)

Urban landscapes consist of many different tangible and intangible layers. They are all connected and influence each other in various ways. Open spaces do not exist in solitude; they form part of an intricate urban fabric. Understanding the broader setting of the open space, how it connects with its surroundings, what the flow of people and goods is, and how the topography shapes the layout allows a better understanding of the use and role of the open space.

### Why is it important?

Investigating this layer will help you understand how the open space is related to its surroundings, and how it interacts with adjacent areas, including its relationship with nearby infrastructure, buildings, and other public spaces. Investigating the broader context can uncover existing challenges, such as safety concerns, accessibility issues, or environmental pressures. It may also reveal opportunities for enhancement, collaboration, and future development. In simple terms, understanding interconnections helps to understand how the space fits into the larger urban fabric.

### What to do?

Visit the space and analyse existing maps and plans. Take detailed notes and photographs to document observations.

### Helpful questions to guide your research:

- What is the overall character of the surrounding area?
- How do people access the open space? Are there convenient pathways, pavements, etc.?
- Does the open space connect well with other public spaces or amenities in the area?
- What natural features (e.g., water bodies, trees, wildlife) exist in the context of the open space? How do they impact its character and use?
- Are there environmental challenges in the area, such as pollution, flooding, or erosion that affect the open space?
- Where do the users of the open space come from? Do they live nearby or do they cross town to use the space?

### Materials and tools needed:

- Observation checklists for site visits
- Maps of the area (for overlaying data)
- Sketching tools (for layout ideas)
- Camera/smartphone for pictures



**Figure 18** Sharing of project results with the broader public.

## Buildings and physical elements - Mkunguni Square

### Watu

Kawanda la Mkunguni ni mahali pa mkusanyiko iliyopo Lamu, ambapo watu wa rika na asili tofauti hukutana kila siku. Ni kitovu cha kijamii kinachounganisha wakazi na kuimarisha mshikamano kati ya vitongoji mbalimbali.

### People

Mkunguni Square is a central gathering place in Lamu, bringing together people of all ages and backgrounds. It serves as a social hub where residents meet daily, strengthening community bonds across different neighborhoods.



### Bidhaa

Kawanda la Mkunguni ni eneo muhimu la biashara ambapo watu hubadilishana ufundi, vifaa vya ujenzi, mimea ya dawa, na mazao kutoka Lamu na vijiji vya jirani. Inachukua nafasi kubwa katika uchumi wa mji, ikiunganisha uzalishaji wa ndani na usambazaji katika mtandao wa visiwa.

### Goods

Mkunguni Square is an important trading spot where people exchange crafts, building materials, herbs, and farm produce from Lamu and nearby villages. It plays a key role in the town's economy, connecting local production and distribution in the network of islands.



### Tamaduni na desturi

Kawanda la Mkunguni na Ngome ya Lamu hutumika kama maeneo ya sherehe, harusi, na matukio ya kijamii. Hii inaonyesha umuhimu wa kawanda katika kuhifadhi tamaduni na desturi za wenyeji. Matukio haya yanawaleta pamoja watu kutoka sehemu mbalimbali za mji, yakiongeza mshikamano na hisia ya utambulisho wa pamoja.

### Traditions and Customs

Mkunguni Square and Lamu Fort are used as venues for festivals, weddings, and community events. It shows the importance of the square in maintaining the local culture and customs. The events bring together people from across the town, strengthening social bonds and promoting a sense of collective identity.



## Vipengele vya asili

Jiografia ya kipekee ya visiwa vya Lamu, ikiwemo bahari, dune za mchanga, na mikoko, imeathiri mpangilio wa mji na square kwa njia mbalimbali. Mitaa imesanifiwa kuruhusu upepo wa bahari kupita, dune zimeathiri mfumo wa maji, miti hutoa kivuli, na mikoko inachangia hali ya hewa. Mchanganyiko huu wa usanifu wa binadamu na maumbile unadhihirika katika kawanda.



### Natural features

The Lamu archipelago's unique geography, which includes the ocean, sand dunes and mangroves, has influenced the layout of the town and the square in various ways. The streets are designed to allow for the ocean breeze to go through, the dunes influenced the drainage system, the trees provide shading and the mangroves contribute to the overall climate. This interplay between human design and forces of nature come together at the square.



## Barabara na njia

Muunganiko tata wa njia na barabara za Lamu ni miundombinu muhimu inayounganisha mitaa yake mbalimbali na maeneo. Njia hizi si za kazi tu; zinaandika mwingiliano wa kijamii na kurahisisha shughuli za kiuchumi. Kuanzia vichochoro vya mitaa ya Kale hadi barabara pana za mitaa mipya, njia hizi zinawezesha mtiririko endelevu wa watu, bidhaa, na hadithi, zikikutanisha kwenye Kawanda la Mkunguni na kuvuka hapo

### Paths and Routes

Lamu's intricate network of pathways and routes forms a vital infrastructure connecting its diverse neighbourhoods and spaces. These routes are not simply functional; they shape social interactions and facilitate economic activity. From the narrow alleyways of the Old Town to the broader streets of the newer neighbourhoods, these pathways enable the constant flow of people, goods, and stories, converging at and crossing Mkunguni Square.



## Viwanja vya wazi

Kawanda la Mkunguni si ya kipekee katika kazi yake bali ni sehemu ya mtandao mkubwa wa maeneo ya wazi yaliyopo Lamu. Mji wa Kale wa Lamu una takriban maeneo 12 ya wazi, mawili yakiwa yamesajiliwa rasmi. Kila eneo lina upekee wake, si tu kwa muundo wake wa kimwili, bali pia kwa jukumu lake katika jamii inayoyatumia kwa shughuli mbalimbali kila siku.

### Open spaces

Mkunguni Square is not unique in its function but is part of a bigger network of open spaces found across Lamu. Lamu Old Town has approximately 12 open spaces, of which two are gazetted. Each open space is unique not only by its physical elements, but also the role they have in the community who use it for various activities throughout the day.

## 2. Understanding community needs and wishes

Before you start the activation process it is important that you properly understand the open space that you are working with. Based on this understanding you will be able to assess the needs of the open space. You may also find that the space already functions well, and what it needs is a simple clean-up and a few bins. Alternatively, you may find that the key challenge of the space is lack of community ownership, which will require a series of community workshops focusing, for example, on awareness-building.

### Why is it important?

The information you will receive by involving the community will lay a foundation for your subsequent activities. It will also provide an additional layer to the information that you gather through your research and observations.

### What to do?

There are multiple ways of involving the community at this stage of the process. Consider what type of information you are looking for, what resources you have at hand, and what time you have. Ideally, you would want to combine different ways of engaging the community so that you reflect the views of various groups (i.e., men, women, children, youth, elders). Commit some time to thinking through what your objectives are!

**Note:** Community engagement is an ongoing process, not everything needs to be done at once. If you feel that there is some missing information, or that there is a theme you would like to explore in more depth you can repeat an activity, or approach people/groups with follow-up questions.

### Ways of engaging community members:

- workshops
- photo-walks
- focus groups
- questionnaire
- individual interviews

### Useful tips and best practices

- Be flexible, don't worry if the workshop doesn't go according to your script, but make sure not to lose sight of your aim.
- Ask the group to present what they have been working on and what their key takeaways are. If you have multiple groups working on various subjects or the same one, it is good practice to ask each group to select one person to present their conclusions/ideas.
- It is good practice to ask one person from the group to be an additional notetaker.
- Respect people's time.
- Once you have completed the activity, wrap up together with the group and define main points of the conversation!

**Note:** It is a good practice to organize debriefs with your team after each activity to make sure that you reflect on the outcomes, discuss what worked well, identify areas for improvement, and share insights gained during the process.

Once you have completed community engagement, collect the information and analyse it. Find out what the key takeaways are – this will be important for the next step of the activation process.

## Examples from Lamu Old Town



**Figure 19** Examples of various community engagement activities, including workshops and focus meetings.

*Workshops* are a good way to engage people to better understand what bothers them, what they like, and what their needs and wishes are. Be creative and playful. Adjust the workshop to your target group. You can, for instance, ask people to indicate or sketch problematic issues on maps of the open space, indicate what the activities that take place in the space are, and where they occur, or ask them to imagine how a perfect open space could look.

*Photo-walks and storytelling* are great ways to engage with the community and explore its values and perspectives on different topics. Invite participants to take photographs of elements in their surroundings related to the matter you are curious about. After the walk, gather everyone together to share their photos. Encourage participants to talk about what their pictures mean to them and why they chose those particular things to photograph. The images can spark helpful conversations and help uncover stories, memories, and experiences from the community. You can use the photographs as reference and inspiration for your subsequent activities. You can also choose to make a small exhibition using the images.

*Focus groups* are in principle a more structured way of engaging identified groups of people who can help you understand the subject that interests you. Invite people to a meeting, make sure that the meeting takes place in a comfortable environment. Prepare your questions beforehand so that you can guide the conversation. Take your own notes. Use post-its and ask people to note down their answers and reflections. A questionnaire is a good way to kick off the process and gather structured information, understand community needs and preferences and assess their perceptions of the public space.

A *questionnaire* is a good way to kick off the process and gather structured information, understand community needs and preferences and assess their perceptions of the public space.

*Individual interviews* are a good way to get in-depth information on a specific issue related to the open space, its history, or the context. You may want to interview a professional, a community leader, or a representative of the local authorities depending on your objectives.

# Step 3

## Defining interventions and their priority

Based on the collected information, decide what type of interventions the open space requires, define what the priorities are, and in what order you will carry out the interventions.

### 1. Suggesting interventions and prioritizing

To activate public open spaces, you will need to consider both hard and soft interventions. The combination of physical upgrading with non-physical upgrading will bring long-term improvement and interest to the community. It is important to partner with local governments and NGOs to make the space alive.

#### What to do?

Below is a non-extensive list of the types of interventions that you may consider in the process.

In order to come up with the type of interventions a space might need, a basemap drawing of the site can be used. Participants may draw on the map what they would like to see. This is an alternative for regular brainstorming on a white paper or blackboard. In this case, all ideas will be noted. In a similar fashion to Step 1 - Selecting the space, participants can prioritize proposed interventions using sticky notes.

#### Physical Interventions

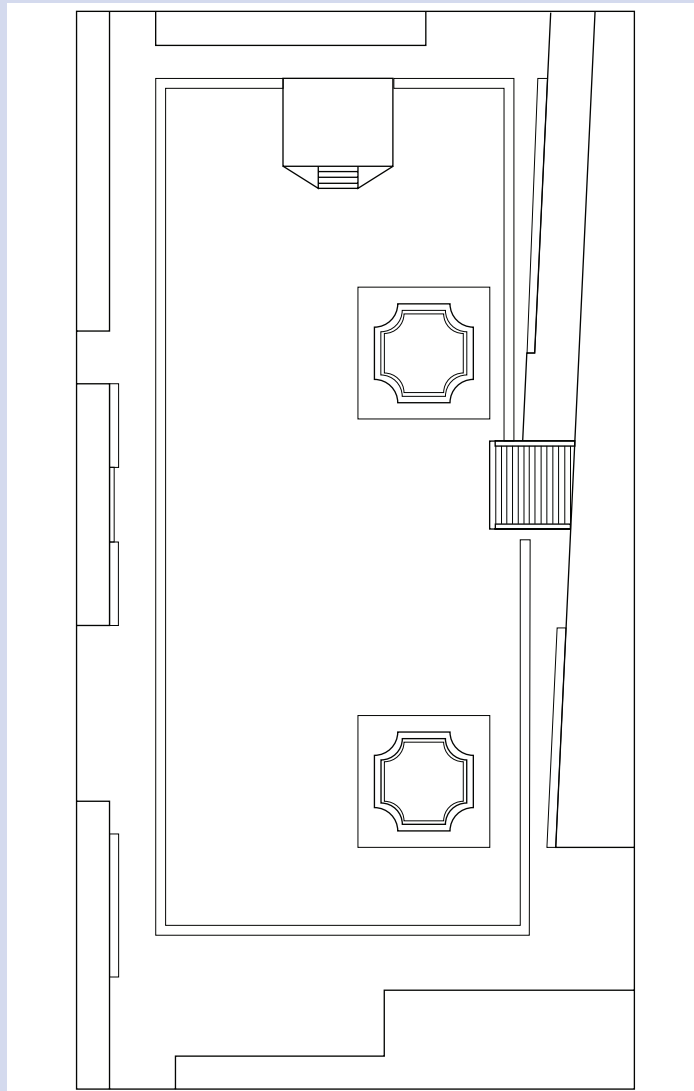
- Improving seating areas, such as benches, chairs
- Introducing play elements for children
- Improving services such as drainage
- Adding lights for safety
- Adding shading elements, e.g., trees
- Adding greenery and flowers
- Improving access and pathways on and surrounding the space
- Placing an information board in the space
- Adding a screen for movies or local news

#### Soft Interventions

- Organizing a festival
- Organizing an event for children
- Inviting a speaker
- Inviting a local NGO to share their work
- Organizing an open-air exhibition
- Showcasing a locally produced movie or presenting the local news
- Organizing a yoga or sports session
- Organizing workshops on site

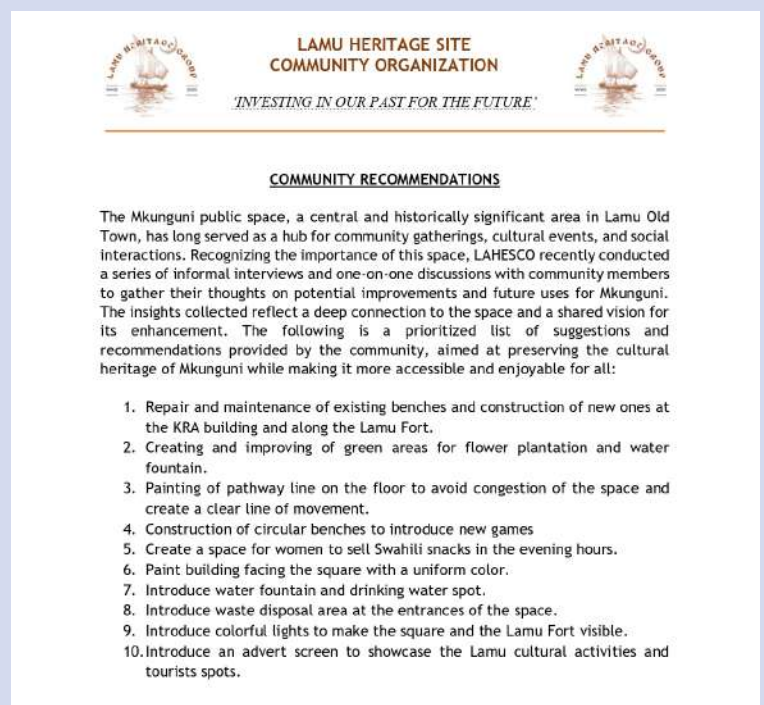
Note: Integrating cultural patterns and logos in the design of the physical intervention may give the space a recognized character, and helps people to identify with the space.

## Engagement tools used for Mkunguni Square



From left to right, top to bottom

- Drawing exercise exploring possibilities for Mkunguni square
- Letter outlining community recommendations
- Community photo-walk and exploration of heritage elements in the neighbourhoods
- Cultural stakeholders' workshop on Lamu Town exploring challenges and opportunities



**Figure 20** Examples of engagement tools used to decide on the interventions.

## 2. Executing selected interventions

After the interventions have been selected, you will need to ensure that the appropriate partners and contractors are engaged following regular procedures. Once you have completed the interventions, an opening event may officially inaugurate the space, attract the attention of a broader public, and encourage people to come.

### Examples from Lamu Old Town



**Figure 21** Examples of soft interventions including training in traditional crafts and children activities



**Figure 22** Examples of hard interventions.

# Step 4

## Evaluating and defining next steps

Once you have implemented your interventions, it is good to evaluate the effectiveness of the initiatives: observe and gather feedback from users and use this information to make improvements and adapt programs as needed.

### **What to do?**

**Observe:** Visit and observe the open space. Note how the interventions are working, how people are engaging with upgraded space, what is working and what is not working.

**Collect feedback from the community:** Engage in formal and informal conversations with the community, ask about their impressions, what they like and dislike about the proposed interventions.

**Improve and/or revise next steps (if needed):** If you have the means and time, you may choose to make improvements to the space based on the feedback collected. If your project has further steps, this is a good moment to revise them based on information you have collected.

### **Materials and tools needed:**

- Observation checklists for site visits
- Camera/smartphone for pictures

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### Disclaimer:

We have worked hard to make sure that all sources and references in this publication are correct and properly respected. If you believe that any information has not been appropriately credited, or that we have missed something or if there are any issues with the content, please contact the authors. We appreciate your feedback and will do our best to address any concerns.

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