

Designing Urban Spaces Differently: A Case Study of the Hercity Herstreets Public Space Improvement Initiative in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract : As urban development initiatives continue to emerge and are implemented amid rapid urbanization and climate change effects in the global south, the plight of women is only being noticed. The pandemic exposed the atrocities, violence and unsafety women and girls face daily both in their homes and in public urban spaces. This is a result of poorly implemented and managed urban structures, which women have been left out of during design and implementation for centuries. The UN Habitat's HerCity toolkit provides a unique opportunity to change course for both governments and civil society actors where women and girls are onboarded onto urban development initiatives, with their designs and ideas being the focal point. This toolkit proves that when women and girls design, they design for everyone. The HerCity HerStreets, Public Space Improvement Initiative, resulted in a design that focused on two aspects: Streets are a shared resource, and Streets are public spaces. These two concepts illustrate that for streets to be experienced effectively as cultural spaces, they need to be user-friendly, safe and inclusive. This report demonstrates how the HerCity HerStreets as a pilot project can be a benchmark for designing urban spaces in African cities. The project focused on five dimensions to improve the air quality of the space, the space allocation to street vending and bodaboda (passenger motorcycle) stops parking and the green coverage. The process displays how digital tools such as Minecraft and Kobo Toolbox can be utilized to improve citizens' participation in the development of public spaces, with a special focus on including vulnerable groups such as women, girls and youth.

Keywords : urban space, sustainable development, gender and the city, digital tools and urban development

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