

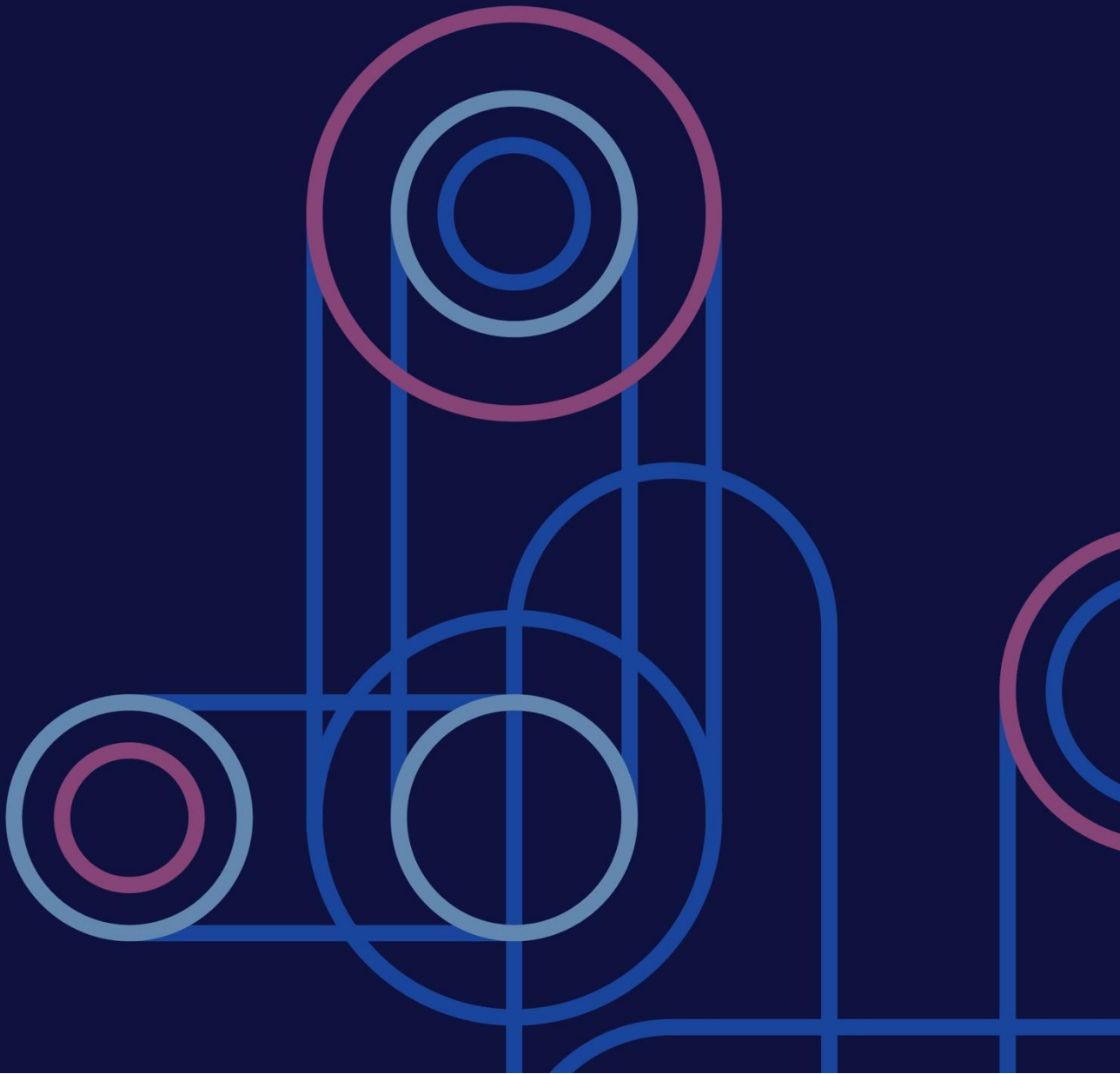


World Health  
Organization

CASE STUDY

# *A Decade of Street Activation in Dandora, Nairobi, Kenya*

2026



## Basic information

<b>WHO Region</b>	AFRO
<b>City or Country</b>	Dandora (Nairobi), Kenya
<b>Timeline</b>	2015 – ongoing
<b>Type of intervention</b>	Infrastructure; community activation
<b>Primary level of implementation</b>	Neighbourhood
<b>Primary sectors involved</b>	Transport; urban planning; public space; housing; solid waste management
<b>Primary health outcomes or challenges</b>	Environmental conditions; safety; health; equity

## Case description

Dandora is a neighbourhood in Nairobi’s Eastlands that has long faced environmental and social challenges associated with proximity to one of the city’s largest landfills. Over time, residents have faced inadequate drainage, stagnant water, accumulated waste, unsafe streets, and limited public spaces, all of which have heightened environmental health risks and reinforced negative perceptions of the area. Years of deteriorating infrastructure, inconsistent waste management, and limited engagement between community residents and local government contributed to a context in which improvement was challenging.

Beginning in 2015, the Making Cities Together initiative brought together local residents, community organizations, UN-Habitat, and other partners to co-design interventions to improve public spaces and overall living conditions. Through workshops, field research, and participatory design methods, the initiative sought to identify feasible actions to address environmental and mobility challenges. Activities included collaborative planning sessions, public engagement events, and neighbourhood improvement efforts. These early stages emphasized co-creation, accessible design, and shared responsibility among residents, local government, NGOs, and advocacy groups.

One key outcome of this work was the Model Street initiative, which revitalized a previously neglected area, creating a more functional and inclusive public space and implementing shared streets design principles. This involved improvements to road surfaces, planting of street trees, installation of street furniture, enhanced safety features, and the promotion of community use through public events. Youth groups



Model Street in Dandora. Nairobi, Kenya: 2023. © UNRSF / José Carlos Alexandre.

such as the Dandora Transformation League played an important role in mobilizing residents and supporting implementation. UN-Habitat fostered alignment with broader urban development objectives and provided technical input on mobility, accessibility, and public space design.

Building on the foundations established through Making Cities Together and the Model Street initiative, further efforts were undertaken between 2022 and 2023 to improve street conditions and intensify public space activation. Led by UN-Habitat in close collaboration with the Nairobi City County Government's Planning Department – and with funding from the UN Road Safety Fund – these activities also involved the World Blind Union and the Institute for Transportation and Development Policy. The participation of disability advocates revealed gaps for accessibility and challenged practitioners to rethink strategies and interventions for diverse users. Additional street paving was facilitated through the Kenyan National Government Constituencies Development Fund – a mechanism that finances local public works through parliamentary allocations – and the local chief supported coordination at the neighbourhood level.

The 2022-2023 expansion focused on upgrading environmental conditions, such as improving draining and waste collection and repairing potholes. It also introduced community activation activities, including cycling, skating, and family-oriented events.

Community workshops and consultations guided these choices, building on established principles of co-creation and ensuring residents' continued involvement. These efforts strengthened social cohesion, improved perceptions of safety, and provided new opportunities for recreation and informal livelihoods.

Several factors enabled progress across the multi-year process. Strong community leadership, especially from youth groups, provided continuity. Partnerships between local organizations, international agencies, and government actors brought in critical technical skills and resources and fostered sustained commitment. Political support facilitated larger-scale improvements to infrastructure, and participatory methods fostered ownership among all stakeholders. Barriers included infrastructural decay, persistent stigma, and the need to coordinate multiple actors across different programme phases.

Across this extensive sequence of activities, participating stakeholders maintained a robust focus on improving environmental conditions, strengthening public space, enhancing safety, promoting accessibility, and building trust among residents and authorities. These objectives advanced progressively as drainage systems were upgraded, public spaces became more usable, and collaborative processes matured. Evaluations through resident feedback and community monitoring documented improvements in play areas, street conditions, and perceived safety. The experience shows how continuous, community-centred action can generate cumulative health and social benefits when supported by partnerships and adaptable implementation strategies.

## Strategic Highlight

The evolution of public space interventions in Dandora highlights the impacts that community-scale experimentation can have on broader strategic action on urban health. Over nearly a decade, the Making Cities Together project, the Model Street initiative, and the Bicycle Programme Launch and Street Activation show how neighbourhood-level work can generate practical models and momentum that inform wider urban strategies.

The early cycle of work established participatory co-design approaches that enabled residents to articulate needs and shape feasible improvements. These processes built trust, strengthened local organizations, and demonstrated the value of shared decision-making. Engagement with disability advocates embedded and reinforced the importance of accessibility and equity considerations. As small interventions produced visible improvements, perceptions of the neighbourhood began to shift, encouraging greater institutional involvement.

Subsequent activities drew on these foundations. Improvements in drainage, street quality, and public space use were guided by earlier co-creative methods, while

activation events continued to expand opportunities for social interaction and recreation. Experimentation with low-cost materials fostered innovation and affordability. By combining technical support from international partners with strong local leadership, the initiative aligned immediate actions with longer-term systems strengthening, showing how experimentation spaces can evolve into more coordinated programmes when backed by political support and cross-sectoral collaboration.

The Dandora experience offers several lessons for decision-makers. Starting with manageable, community-driven interventions allows cities to test approaches, adapt quickly, and respond to local priorities. Linking these actions to municipal systems through political engagement, administrative oversight, and institutional partnerships increases their durability and potential for scale. Grounding physical improvements in community processes also enhances sustainability and strengthens relationships between residents and authorities. In Dandora, a sequence of community-scale innovations has gradually expanded into a broader approach addressing environmental conditions, mobility, accessibility, urban safety and security, and social cohesion. Through sustained partnership and attention to inclusivity, neighbourhood-level experimentation can provide a foundation for long-term urban health improvements.

## Further Information

- [Model Street – making cities together](#)
- [New Model Street launched in Dandora, Kenya](#)
- [Nairobi’s Dandora neighborhood shines again - thanks to UN-Habitat’s waste management led public space planning](#)
- [Crowdfunding a Model Street | Converting waste of Dandora dumpsite into community wealth](#)
- [How Can One Public Space Transform an Entire Neighborhood? UN-Habitat's Model Street Initiative](#)
- [Making Cities Together](#)