

## Developing Cultural Heritage Plan in Response to Future Challenges: Case of Lamu-Town World Heritage Site, Kenya

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### 1 ABSTRACT

Spatial justice is a term that advocates for the equal distribution of resources and privileges that are not easily accessible by the commoners due to various reasons such as financial constraints, poor education among others (UN-Habitat, 2018). Choosing Lamu Town as a case study, one of the best preserved Swahili settlement would best bring out how spatial justice would play a significant role in the preservation of cultural heritage. The term commoners in this research refers to the indigenous people. With the promising future of Lamu since its initiation of Lamu Port – South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSSET) among many other development projects that are neighboring the town, the threat to the heritage site due to uncontrolled developments expedites. The role of urban planning in spatial justice applying in Lamu Town would be to provide a sense of acceptability, support, compliance and suitability for the commoners in Lamu. Putting in mind the boundaries of sustainability in cultural preservation for future generation. The research employed qualitative study methods, such as; conducting primary dataset that includes online survey questionnaires with 40 participants and 10 physical survey questionnaires, interviews with 5 local experts, photo observation and on desk survey. According to the data collected so far, there is a larger concern for the declination of cultural heritage due to urban developments. Secondly, all aspects such as land, housing, water, electricity and waste system are inadequate for the rapid growth of population. To conclude, the contribution of this research is to highlight on the importance of spatial justice and its role in safeguarding cultural heritage that not only plays a significant role in economy but as well as protecting a far greater value which is identity.

Keywords: Cultural heritage, spatial justice, urban planning, sustainability

### 2 INTRODUCTION

Lamu Old Town is located on a small island off the north coast of Kenya, as seen in figure 1. Its neighboring towns such as Shella, Pate, Siyu and Faza are as well among the best preserved swahili settlements, each with a distinctive aura along the East African coast (Marguerite Y. 1979) whose cultural practices relate to the teachings of the Islamic religion. Lamu Town has the largest populations among the neighboring towns hence choice of the case study. The Old Town was enlisted as a World Heritage Site in 2001 by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) due to its realization of its unique cultural heritage and its characterization of indigenous building technology that was borrowed from different traders and colonists such as the Indians, Arabs and Portuguese. The Old Town is a historical site with a good number of still surviving 17th and 18th century stone houses that are about 700 years of age or more and which had been screened from modern development pressures (National Museum Heritage Act, 2006. Cap 216).

However, as a result of Lamu Port – South Sudan – Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSSET) near Lamu town that consists of several other infrastructural components such as: a new modern port of 32 berths, planned new transport infrastructure containing an airport, railway line, an oil pipeline and a good number of highways. Among other developments such as metropolis city with the capacity to take in 1.1 million people see figure 2. All the developments mentioned above happening at the node of Lamu World Heritage Site. Where regardless of its protection by a number of organizational bodies would be impacted. Its effect already being felt. Therefore increasing the urban challenges facing Lamu Town and the efforts of conservation of the historical site.

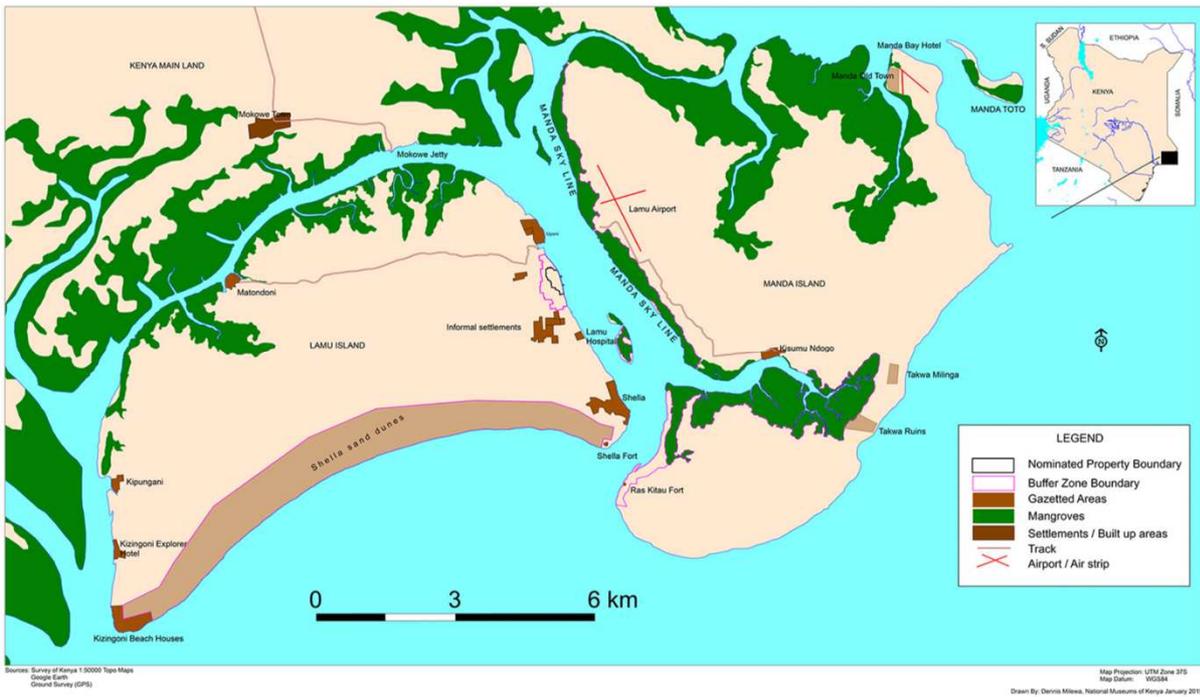


Fig. 1: Location of Lamu (Source: National Museum of Kenya)

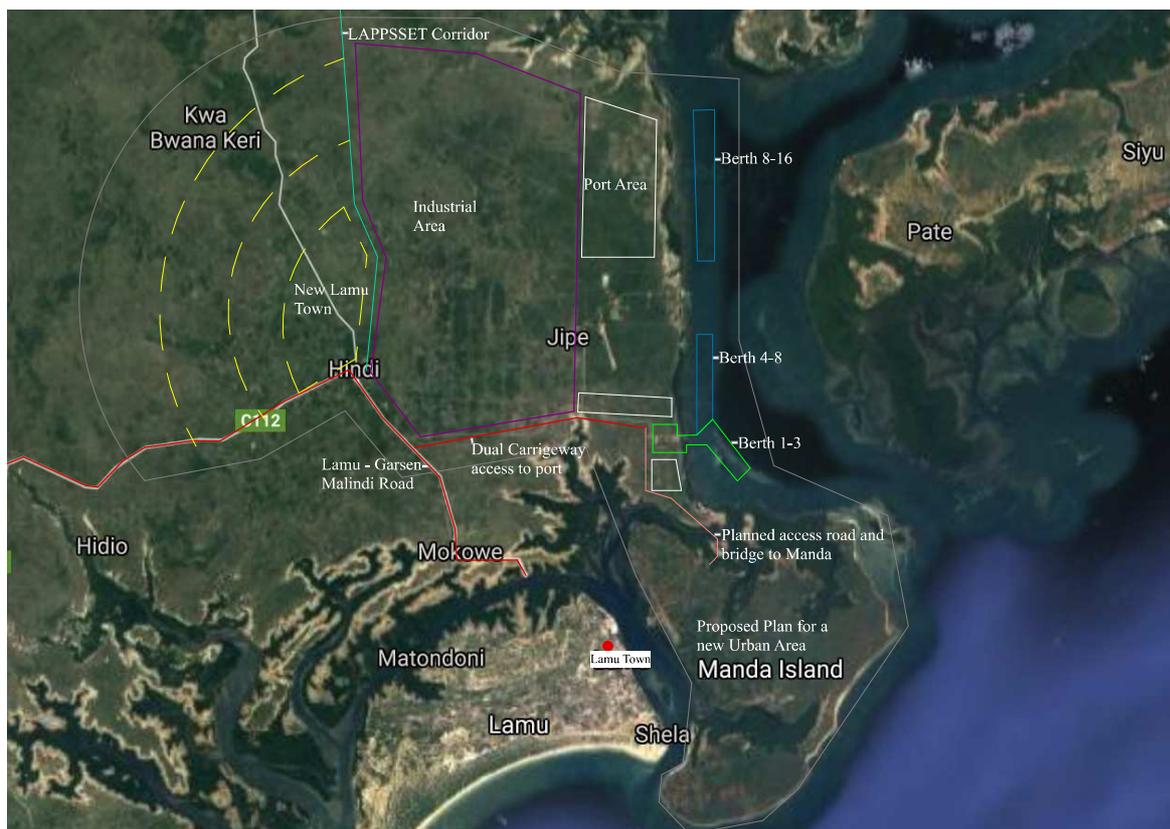


Fig. 2: Upcoming developments neighbouring Lamu Island (Source: Edited from Google maps)

Experts say that regardless of efforts to prevent any kind of development relating to the port, the town will undergo development whether intentional or not (World Heritage Committee, 2015). Through projection of population estimation between the year 2009 - 2025, it was computed that by 2025, Lamu Town population would be at 12,242 (Lamu County Spatial Plan, 2017). A census was conducted in 2019 and the population was at 25,385 surpassing the computed population of 2025 by twice the estimated figure. Thus proving that Lamu Town is at a greater risk than anticipated. The emergence of such pressures will have a profound effect on the Old town. With an increase in urban pressure imposing on the commoners, resources such as land, housing, water, electricity and sanitation does not meet the demand of the rapidly increasing population.

Moreover, most commoners finding the living conditions becoming harder especially after being affected by the decline in tourism and the fishing industry as a result of the port development.

## 2.1 Physical Context

Lamu Old Town is the oldest and best preserved Swahili settlement on the East African coast. According to (Lamu County Spatial Plan, 2017: pg.11), about 65% of the physical structures are in good condition with only 20% being in need for minor changes and that of the remaining 15% may need total restoration. The majority use of the buildings being commercial, public purpose or residential. The town is characterized by narrow intertwining streets where most are less than an arms stretch allowing for pedestrian movement and donkeys in most streets, in some the pedestrians have to pave way for the donkeys to pass. In 2013, through the new County Government Act, Lamu was urged to prepare a spatial plan showing the Land use zones for its future vision and figure 3 shows the proposed Land-Use-Zones of Lamu Island by the County Government in 2013 that is yet to be implemented.

The vernacular architecture of the town depicts a two-storey building with a terrace constructed from local resources and with local traditions, often with wooden facades, and overhanging eaves. The carvings in the wooden doors are highly decorated, reflecting floral patterns. With the modern material and technology most upcoming buildings use this technology as it is cost and time efficient.

Moreover, Lamu town having been known of a place that offers tranquility due to its minimal motorized vehicles that only served as a garbage collector, ambulance and policing that was only used on the seafront. Major transport used was donkeys and carts where goods are moved through the narrow twisted alleyways of the town. Until of recent times, motorbikes are now mostly used as a means of transport for people from one place to another. This has brought debates on whether they should be banned, but as of now, there is no control on the motorcycles. Moreover, the streets not only serve as a space for movement but rather as a socializing space where youth and elders engage in talks and even play board games thus integrating both tangible and intangible attributes that bring out its outstanding universal value as a Heritage Site. On the other hand, the shore line of the sea is used a space to conduct businesses as well as a space that allows people to enjoy the view of the ocean. Over time, the seafront has been used for cultural festival activities that happen each year attracting visitors from different parts of Africa, Gulf and other parts of the world. In addition to this, the Town has a common square that acts as the center of the town, where auctions, political and social functions take place. Neighboring the square is a market which plays a significant role in the community's identity.

## 2.2 Economical Context

Over the century, the main economical source of income of Lamu is tourism and fishing. Other sources being furniture making and farming. The two major source of economy has proven to not being reliable due to security threats by terrorists, change in climatic conditions and the new port development affecting the nearby fishing grounds where local fishermen with insufficient fishing equipment greatly suffer. The town has continuously been undergoing economical decline threatening the cultural heritage due to displacements of its commoners in search of jobs, better education and living conditions.

## 2.3 Culture and Lifestyle

The culture and lifestyle of the commoners in the Old Town remains conservative and responds to the Islamic teachings as majority of the people are Muslims. Lamu, has ever since been a center for Islamic knowledge from 19th century by the arrival of the Jamil al Layl Sharif, Habib Saleh from Comoro Islands, who is said to be a direct descendant of prophet Muhammad (Paul G. 2018). Each year Lamu holds three festivals one celebrating the birth of prophet Muhammad known as 'Maulid' and the second one the cultural festival showcasing the culture of the people of Lamu and sport games from donkey racing to boat racing and dhow racing on every new year's day. According to Sheriff, Islam played a role in the Town's evolution in their planning. He further states that Islam provided administrative, legal, educational and spiritual structures that allowed for the expansion of the Swahili city states (Sheriff, 2010: 239). The lifestyle of its people is mostly simple and as result of the climatic conditions, the working clock starts off early in the morning and stops slightly after noon then resuming in the evening after their evening prayer 'asr'.

### 3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In line with the research goals that aim at expounding on challenges facing the commoners in relation to the unmanaged urban development on the heritage site, the research strategy used is based on qualitative research methods. A variety of sources were used to obtain data for triangulation purposes. Thus allowing for proper assessment of different sources of information to investigate concepts on the fact that a consensus of the findings will produce better results. The figure below shows the outline of the dataset.

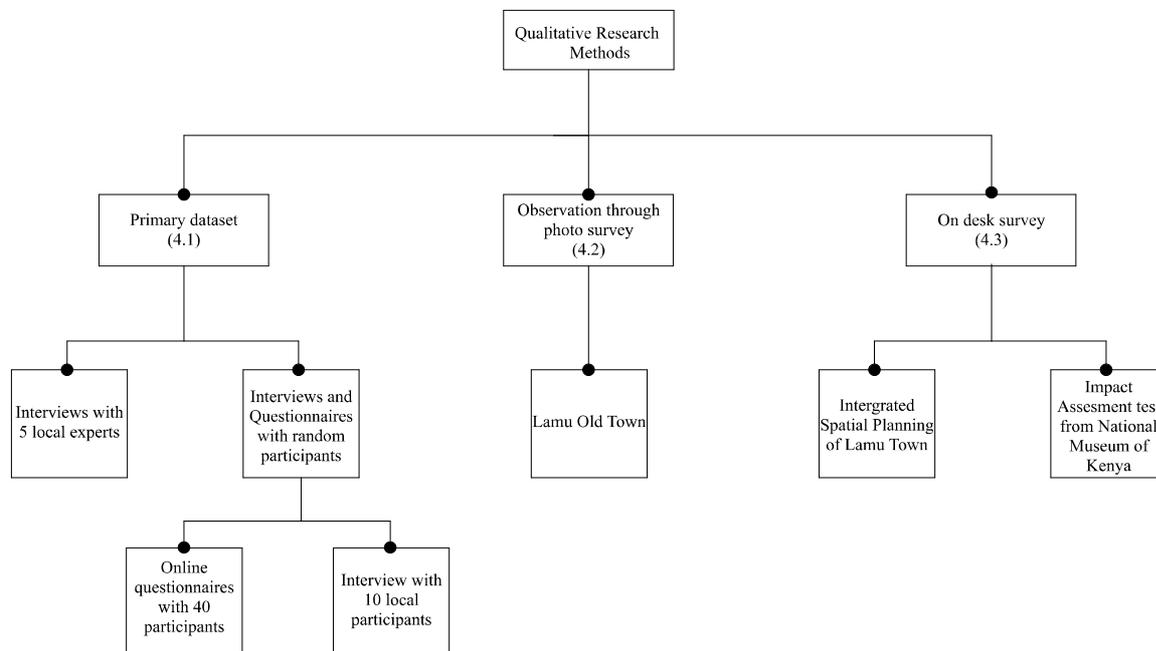


Fig. 3: Diagram showing qualitative research methods

Structured question	Respondent 1	Respondent 2	Respondent 3	Respondent 4	Respondent 5
What are the positive and negative effects of development in Lamu town	<b>Positive:</b> -The money harnessed if properly managed could help the heritage site -Improvement in all sectors; health care, security and infrastructure <b>Negative:</b> -Spontaneous, poor management -Inadequate sewer system -Modernisation -Issue of purchasing power affecting the locals	<b>Positive:</b> -Employment -Improvement in socio-economic development <b>Negative:</b> -Depletion of natural resources -Food insecurity -Displacement of indigenous people -Heavy impact on fishing industry -Rapid demographic change	<b>Positive:</b> -Improvement in building technology <b>Negative:</b> -Traffic -Sporadic development -Loss in heritage -Insufficiency of land -Land conversion	<b>Positive:</b> -Employment <b>Negative:</b> -Decline in tourism -Change in ecosystem -Loss in heritage -Land conversion -Pollution	<b>Positive:</b> -Employment -Improvement in infrastructure such as the expansion of market building, paved road on seafront <b>Negative:</b> -Insecurity -Effect on tourism -Pollution
Which aspects (water, electricity, land, housing & transport) meets demand of rapidly increase in population of Lamu Town	-Non meets the demands	-Non meets the demands	-Non meets the demands	-Non meets the demands	-Non meets the demands
If funds were made available for future development, which area should it be focused on	-Disaster risk management to be implemented -Diffusing pressure by buying land and creating space -Improvement in services	-Environmental friendly technology -Fishing industry -Alternative livelihood projects -Improving solid-waste infrastructure	-Water to be looked at as a necessity -Public utilities -Constructing a different path for motorist -Designing of the seafront	-Landscaping -Improvement of facilities -Improvement of street lights -Designing of the seafront to represent culture	-Fishing industry -Improvement of facilities -Improvement in the education sector
How can funds be raised	-County government of Lamu -Donors	-Donors, UNICEF -National Museum of Kenya -Bilateral organisation	-Donors -UNESCO -Lamu County Government -Mosques	-Donors -UNESCO -World Heritage Bank	-Donors -UNESCO -NGO's
What roles should residents play in helping to plan for a viable development	-Community led initiative centre -Learned community member to give back	-Request support from donors	-Sensitization of community	-Creating awareness -For the learned to give back to community	-Community led initiative centre -Creating awareness

Table 1: Response from local experts

## 4 RESEARCH FINDINGS

### 4.1 Primary dataset

An empirical data was conducted with 5 semi-structured interviews with local experts on heritage conservation and urban planning (Fig. 3) sampled by selecting them from public sector (Table 1). This assisted in providing an in-depth exploration of emerging issues, observation and documentary evidence. Interviews was sought through the respondents perspectives on issues concerning the heritage and urban planning. The interview schedule consisted of five main questions that aimed at effects of development on a heritage site.

Respondent 1: Mr. Mohammed Mwenje, Curator of the Lamu Museum, National Museum of Kenya

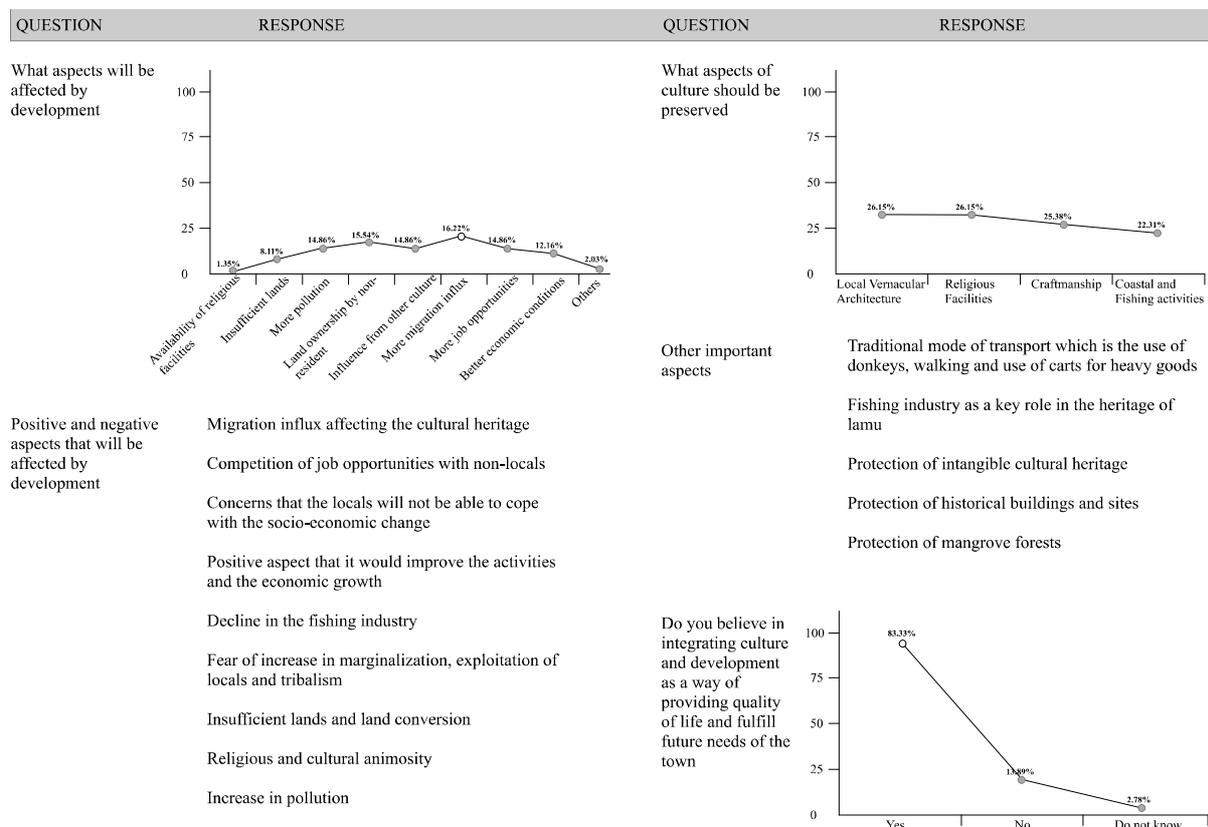
Respondent 2: Mr. Mohamed Baishe, Director of Environment and Natural resources, Lamu County

Respondent 3: Arch. Omar Saggaf, County Architect and Head of Public Works

Respondent 4: Mrs. Husna, Lamu Museum

Respondent 5: Mr. Maawya Farid, Commisioner of Lamu County Service Public Board

An online questionnaire with 40 participants at random was conducted, majority of the count 23 being of the age 25-40, 18 being of the age 40-60, 4 above 60 and 4 between 18-25 years. 73% of which are residents of lamu and 90% being indigenous people of Lamu. On the level of education, 88% had an educational achievement of college/university, 6% of secondary certificate, 2% each of primary certificate, technical school and 2% responded non of the above. Under empolyment, 42% of respondents were working in public, 35% in private, 2% industrial and 21% in other forms of jobs. This type of online questionnaire had an advantage of getting the response from educated people yet a disadvantage of getting response from participants who found the choice of language challenging. I therefore conducted 10 interviews with the locals by using the local language and their response was included in the illustrations below.



## 4.2 Observation through photo survey



Fig. 4a : Seafront during the day, Fig. 4b : Seafront at night



Fig. 5a: Open storm drainage system, Fig. 5b: Building materials scattered along the seafront neighbouring the temporary market



Fig. 6a: Vernacular architecture, Fig. 6b: Modern architecture



Fig. 7a: Open space around the main hospital, Fig. 7b: Open space (mkunguni)



Fig. 8a: Traditional mode of, Fig. 8b: Traffic on the sea front, Fig. 8c: Tractors loading building transport materials

### 4.3 On desk survey

#### 4.3.1 Proposed spatial plan of Lamu Island

As Lamu is heading towards a new era of large-scale development and infrastructure investment, mostly as a result of the multi-million dollar LAPPSET project. Just as these developments could generate substantial economic and social benefits, they as well could pose a threat when not managed properly. Responding to the facts, Lamu County Government developed a county spatial plan in 2017 to guide the development, use, demarcating the conservation zone among other resources in the next county that was meant to last for 10 years. The spatial plan is yet to be implemented. Figure 9 shows a proposed Land Use Zones in Lamu Island by the County Government. The Old Town has no direct connection with the mainland and through studies it has been noticed it would improve the economy by just providing the access as seen in fig. 4 hence it was proposed in the spatial plan.

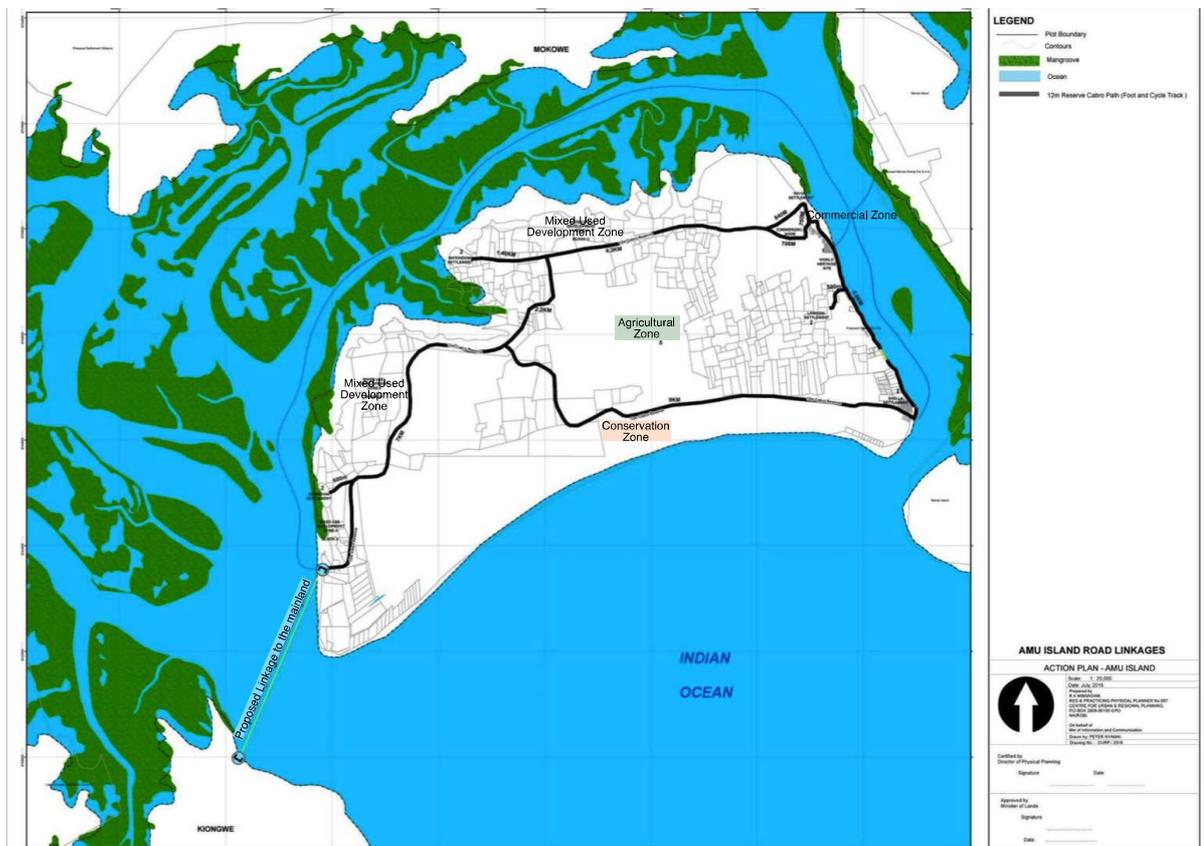


Fig. 9: Proposed Spatial Plan, 2013 (Source: Lamu County Spatial plan)

#### 4.3.2 Impact Assessment Test on The Heritage Site

The National Museum of Kenya (NMK) on behalf of the state-party to the World Heritage Committee (WHC) by conducting a Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) which was used as a tool for

safeguarding and building sustainable policies, plans and programs and the strategic initiatives of LAPSSET corridor Infrastructure Development Project, that there was a changing in the order of land use (NMK 2017). Lamu's landscapes are seen to undergo drastic changes. Such as; increase in land-use change in favor of settlement and urbanization, communities becoming more sedentary more or so around permanent water sources, increased in the commotion for individual land ownership, constricted livestock grazing leading to overstocking and localised overgrazing, increased adoption of both rain-fed and irrigated agriculture, increased human/wildlife conflicts, increasing land degradation and reduced carrying capacity, pastoral livelihoods under great threat and last but not least, increase of severity and impact of droughts (NMK 2017).

Moreover, on the question of escalating poverty; Lamu's livelihoods are under threat from: reduced carrying capacity, increased severity and impact of cyclic droughts. Increased in unemployment especially for young adults, dwindling water resource base and cases of Lamu dropouts on the increase. Overall poverty levels in Lamu remain high (NMK 2017).

In addition to the pre-existing concerns on community land management, the following was stated: Lamu lands are undergoing drastic and accelerated change due to: intensified clamor for individual ownership of formerly communally owned land, accelerated and contentious allocation of communally owned land, official and unofficial encroachment on community land, lack of appropriate legal mechanism to govern community land and increasing conflict over access and control of land (NMK 2017).

In the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) for Lamu County Infrastructure Development Project the following were given as the priority concerns; the question of water demand management, in order to support urbanization, industrialization, port functions, etc. Modalities for co-existence between LAPSSET investments and wildlife. Wildlife dispersal areas and corridors. Impacts on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Endemic and rare species. Loss of forest cover, mangrove ecosystem which also acted as the breeding areas for fish. Potential impacts on land, land ownership and associated benefits. Rush to alienate community land to private individuals and firms. Impacts on pre-existing livelihoods and production systems. Indigenous forest-dependent communities such as pastoral systems and fishermen. Modalities for sustainably managing change; Immigration, cultural dilution, political implications; Urbanization and industrialization –social services. Management of the environmental balance; Environmental flows, waste management and pollution (NMK 2017).

## 5 DISCUSSION

This section discusses the findings from evidence gathered through the on desk survey, interviews, and photo-survey discussed above. Data analysis has been conducted through questionnaires, interviewing officials, and direct observation notes. Photos shown in this section are taken as part of the direct observation and photo-survey of Lamu Old Town. Furthermore, the representation of cultural heritage from the document analysis is included in this data discussion. Two thematic areas of discussion emerged from the findings. They include: effect of uncontrolled development on the heritage site (5.1) and valuing heritage on an intangible dimension (5.2)

### 5.1 Effect of Uncontrolled Development on the Heritage Site

Through the inadequately planned and managed heritage site Lamu faces immense challenges in its urban context. For instance, as a result of unsafe housing with poor provision for clean water, sanitation, inadequate infrastructure and services that currently Lamu is facing, can turn natural hazard into a disaster. By way of illustration as seen in figure 5a, with an open storm water drainage near the market area which tends to block oftenly due to the unsanitary conditions, could result to an outbreak of hazardous diseases such as cholera.

Lamu Town experiences a drastic change in its physical context from several issues that are as a result of sporadic increase in population. This being a small island with a limited carrying capacity poses a major issue in land efficiency. Through the census that was conducted in 2019, the population surpassed the computed number by twice the estimate. As a result, it caused the encroachment of conserved areas, land conversion by building on agricultural land and land demand sky rocketing as people with purchasing power out buy the locals creating a major threat towards the intangible heritage.

From the traditional mode of transport being donkeys and carts to how buildings interact with one another and with the streets, to how open spaces function as a socialising space gives this town a unique urban

heritage that generates tranquility and ambience. However, due to poor management, the town is experiencing a sporadic change, from uncontrolled motorcycles, pollution and servicing as seen in figure 5a, 5b and 8b, 8c.

Despite having a magnitudinal project neighboring the area, the essential aspects such as: water which is rationed by each house-hold getting access to water twice in a week for an hour each, surge in electricity in the evenings, sometimes blackouts and waste management are far from reach. An issue that will continue to worsen as population increases if not handled instantaneously. The issue in proposing a different waste management that includes the sewer system is critical, as negligence in it could cause an epidemic.

Moreover, as the town expands, the denser it becomes and so do the conditions of the environment change. Due to the uncontrolled development and poor spatial planning there are no play areas for children or adequate open spaces which are currently only found at the sea front see figure 7a and 7b. In addition, there are no policies implaced that manage or reduce existing and future disaster risks, which can prove to be catastrophic were there to be an outbreak or a disaster such as fire and other natural causes.

## 5.2 Valuing Heritage: Intangible Dimension

In its landscape, urban planning plays a significant role in reinforcing a town's identity through the integration of heritage and historic urban area conservation, management, and planning strategies into local development processes and urban planning aids (Girad L. 2013). An ideology that lacks in the preservation of Lamu's cultural heritage. Moreover it fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness of economic, social, cultural, and environmental systems that could play as a key resource in urban sustainable development.

Through local expert interviewees, they pointed out that the local politicians are not concerned with the value assigned to Lamu's cultural heritage as they should and without political buy-in and commitment, heritage is then being left at the margins of urban development.

Furthermore, the developments have affected the major economical activity of Lamu Town, the artisanal fishing industry. Where traditional methods of fishing is still used and their main fishing grounds affected by the port development. Regardless that some fishermen were compensated, it was not a sustainable solution as the money was inadequate and for them not being exposed and learned, their lives becoming difficult. And there is still no measures that have been placed to enable the fishermen to go deep sea fishing

Without the acknowledgment and appreciation of Lamu's culture and values, opportunities for establishing social cohesion and connectivity are missed. Lamu's urban fabric is under consistent pressure to "modernize", leading to the continuous disappearance of traditional skills and crafts that are part of the intangible cultural heritage (Jigyasu R. 2014). Expert interviewees commented on the depreciation of a sense of place and belonging in the commoners of Lamu due to the various physical environmental challenges mentioned above and the increase in population.

In addition, the social connectivity and cohesion are becoming weak and therefore there is lack of interest in engaging with Lamu's heritage. This challenge will worsen when considering migrant populations who have settled in Lamu primarily for industrial activities and have no inherited sense of responsibility to conserve and value Lamu's heritage.

## 6 CONCLUSION

This paper has examined the challenges the commoners face in Lamu's Heritage Site as a result of poor spatial planning. The discussion is based on the grounds of a growing population in a poorly managed urban setting and how its negligence affects the identity of the commoners. The town of Lamu is explored as an exemplar study through qualitative fieldwork. Although Lamu is yet to make effective steps in addressing its spatial planning issues and the existing challenges on commoners. The findings from this study highlight the following:

The need for decision-makers with the involvement of the commoners to enforce new policies that protects the already diminishing heritage by acknowledging the spatial injustice the commoners face. By providing better living conditions through adequate infrastructure, good management and cooperating both formal and informal sectors.

As a result of the sporadic increase in population in a limited land carrying capacity, the future generation of the commoners is faced by a threat as people with purchasing power outbuy the commoners from their

ancestral lands. In order to sustainably preserve the heritage of Lamu by valuing the intangible dimension, policies that protect the commoners from being replaced should be considered.

Of great significance should be, that the commoners are able to live in a conducive environment that they could reflect as their identity. Proper spatial planning policies that reflect the commoners' identity by borrowing from the past should be adopted. In that it will allow them to have a sense of belonging.

To maintain its land use allocation pattern of Lamu, there is a need to assess, monitor and oversee the trend and the pattern of development as they happen. For instance the uncontrolled motorized traffic that threatens to destroy the unique ambience of the island. For the unchecked development damages the beauty of Lamu and the sustainability of the heritage site.

Assembly points should be designated as part of the disaster risk management strategy. As it is, Lamu town is densely populated and measures of prevention of disaster is highly significant.

An initiative should be taken in developing an alternate waste management strategy which may include installation of risk-reducing infrastructure such as closed storm water drainage and slope stabilization as the current is not environment friendly and with the increase in population, the situation will worsen.

Future research can be focused on urban cultural representation. Lamu is not a unique case, the narrative on this case study reflects current challenges on conservation of heritage assets in rapidly-growing urban areas and also portrays how much the commoners are affected by such pressures.

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