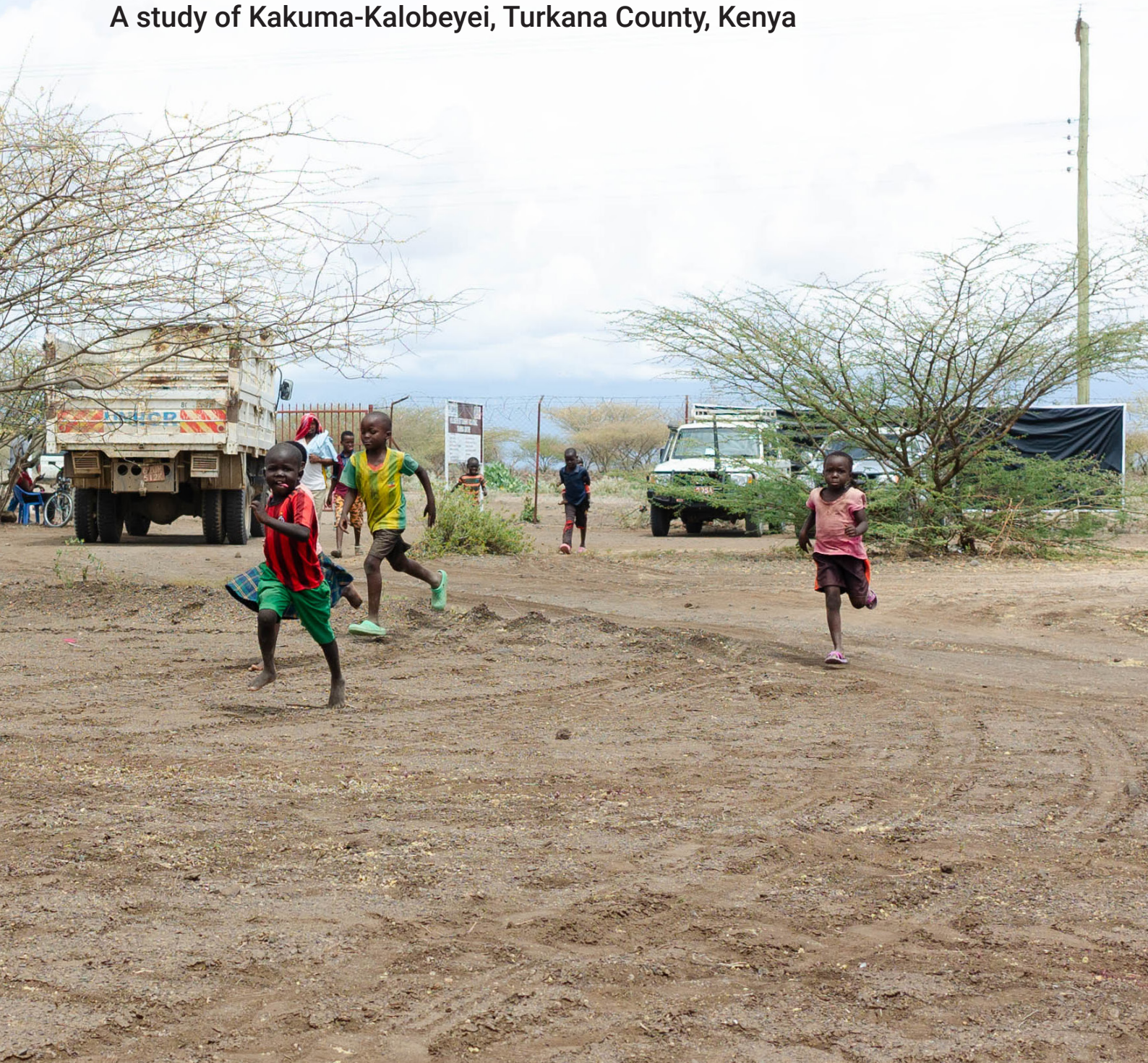


The Role of **Public Spaces** for **COVID-19** Response in Refugee Settlements

A study of Kakuma-Kalobeyei, Turkana County, Kenya



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ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
GCoP	Global Community of Practice
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee
IDPs	Internally Displaced Persons
IPC	Infection Prevention Control
KISED	Kalobeyei Integrated Socio-Economic Development Programme
LAPSSET	Lamu Port-South Sudan-Ethiopia-Transport
NACTO	National Association of City Transportation Officials
NFIs	Non-food Items
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAHO	Pan American Health Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNDRR	United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WFP	World Food Programme
WHO	World Health Organisation

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Executive Summary

Turkana County, Kenya, has been hosting refugees for nearly three decades. These refugees have arrived from neighbouring countries facing civil conflict and war in South Sudan, Somalia, Ethiopia, and Uganda. Just like other refugee-hosting counties in the region, Turkana County has been supporting refugees through collaborations with international donors and partners, while at the same bringing in the socio-economic opportunities accompanied with refugee hosting.

Like other cities and settlements, in Kakuma-Kalobeyei, streets, public spaces and shared public facilities have played a critical role in supporting host and refugee communities in their day-to-day activities. UN-Habitat's 2017 *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey and Mapping Report* noted that "92.9% [of respondents] accessed lower-order services (dispensaries) on foot" and "80.2% of respondents travelled on foot [to access hospitals]".¹ Well-planned and designed public spaces provide a range of benefits and advantages to developing settlements and towns, such as through ensuring accessibility via walkable distances, availability and access to facilities that meet the needs of residents, and a location for social interaction and exchange.



Photo Above:

Public Spaces are multi-functional spaces that support the everyday lives of both host and refugee communities.

¹ UN-Habitat, 2016, pg. 25.

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic has drastically altered people’s relationship with “[...] streets, public spaces and public facilities. Restrictions, while necessary, are impacting on people’s quality of life and disproportionately hurting the urban poor, many of whom have lost their livelihoods, pushing them to the edge and threatening the economy, safety, security, peace and stability”.² Access to well-designed and suitable public spaces have become increasingly essential, and especially for hosts and refugee communities who live with greater vulnerabilities – including a lack of access to basic and essential services and livelihoods such as marketplaces, aid distribution centres, healthcare centres.

In Kenya, national restrictions and measures for the management of COVID-19 transmission have been put in place since early 2020 to increase social distancing and reduce transmissions. Physical distancing reduces intimate personal connections and often exacerbates the feeling of social isolation and exclusion, which can worsen already fragile relationships between host and refugees. These restrictions on movement and access do not mean “reduce[d] demand. People still need to go outside, for essential grocery shopping, to work and study, for play and leisure as well as to socialize and [for their] mental health.”³

UN-Habitat, through its ongoing programmes in Kakuma-Kalobeyei, and in close partnership with the Turkana County Government and partners, aims to continue making public spaces an essential component of a holistic COVID-19 response to help limit the spread of the virus, improve physical and mental health, and to ensure equal access to services and public facilities. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted several gaps in public spaces in Kakuma-Kalobeyei which need to be addressed in the short-, medium-, and long-term including accessibility, flexibility, design, management and maintenance, connectivity, and equitable distribution. As Kakuma-Kalobeyei starts to open from lock-down, we need to re-build confidence about being out in public spaces and redefine the role these spaces will play moving forward.

² UN-Habitat, 2020(a), pg. 2.

³ Ibid.



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Introduction

1.1 Overview

The last half century has seen a rise in global conflict, which has translated into an ever-growing refugee crisis. Sub-Saharan Africa currently hosts more than 26% of the world's refugee population.⁴ Most of these refugees, both originated from and sought

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