

# The Geometry of Building Justice: *Exploring Dignity through the Buxton Point Affordable Housing Project, Kenya*

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## Abstract

*This study examines the intersection of spatial design and social equity through a qualitative case study of the Buxton Point Affordable Housing Project in Mombasa, Kenya. Using a dignity matrix incorporating spatial, material, cultural, and procedural parameters, it evaluates the project's alignment with national housing goals and international norms of human dignity. Findings reveal strong technical compliance with construction standards but identify deficiencies in inclusivity, transparency, and participatory planning. The results demonstrate that dignified housing extends beyond physical adequacy to embrace justice, belonging, and community representation. The paper argues that embedding structured community participation and post-occupancy evaluation within Kenya's Affordable Housing Programme is essential to ensure that "building justice" is not only designed but also democratically realized. Ultimately, the study underscores the need for rights-based, participatory frameworks that integrate social values into urban development and housing policy in rapidly urbanizing African cities.*

**Keywords:** AHP, Affordable housing, dignity, spatial justice, human-centered design, procedural inclusion, Buxton point, Kenya

## INTRODUCTION

Housing is a fundamental human right and plays a crucial role in upholding the dignity of individuals and communities. Globally, adequate housing is recognized as essential not only to human survival but to human flourishing, with the right to housing enshrined in various international conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 25) and the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights (Article 11). The built environment is not merely a container for social life; it is a determinant of how dignity is expressed, experienced, and sustained. In this context, housing is not just about shelter but about providing an environment that promotes dignity, safety, health, well-being, and socio-economic mobility.

The rapid urbanization witnessed in Kenya, particularly in cities like Nairobi and Mombasa, has placed immense pressure on the housing

sector, exacerbating the already dire housing deficit. According to the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), the demand for affordable housing in urban areas is set to increase by an estimated 200,000 units annually. To address this challenge, the Kenyan government launched the Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) as part of the "Big Four Agenda," aiming to construct 500,000 affordable homes by 2022. The Buxton Point Affordable Housing Project in Mombasa is one such initiative designed to provide modern housing for low- and middle-income earners while rejuvenating the urban fabric of Mombasa.

The Buxton Point project represents a significant shift in the approach to urban development in Kenya, seeking to integrate modern design and community living into the traditionally underdeveloped Buxton Estate. The redevelopment of the Buxton Estate, which was established in

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the 1960s as part of the post-colonial efforts to address urban housing needs, is expected to provide over 1,800 housing units. These units are being built on land that was originally designated for low-income tenants, and the project has been marketed as a solution to Mombasa's housing crisis. However, while the physical transformation of the Buxton Estate is evident, the social and economic outcomes of the project raise critical questions regarding inclusivity, affordability, and displacement.

This paper investigates the Buxton Point project through the lens of architectural dignity, asking:

- i. To what extent does the project uphold the principle of spatial dignity in design and layout?
- ii. How inclusive and participatory was the planning process in aligning with procedural dignity standards?
- iii. Does the project meet affordability benchmarks that support socio-economic dignity for low-income residents?

To frame these questions, the study employs a qualitative case study approach grounded in a "dignity matrix"; a conceptual and evaluative tool integrating spatial design criteria, participatory metrics, and affordability benchmarks. Methodologically, it draws on policy document analysis, spatial mapping, and semi-structured interviews with residents, planners, and local officials. This analytical framework allows a structured comparison between the intended objectives of the project and its lived outcomes.

In examining the Buxton Point project, this paper seeks to explore the relationship between architecture and dignity in the context of affordable housing. The concept of "dignity" in architecture is multifaceted, encompassing not only the aesthetic and material quality of buildings but also the social, cultural, and procedural elements that influence the lived experiences of the people who inhabit these spaces. In the case of Buxton Point, the design of the housing units, the integration of green spaces and amenities, and the attempt to create a community-oriented environment reflect an ambition to uplift the quality of life for residents. However, the manner in which these goals are achieved and to whom they benefit requires a closer analysis.

The paper also critically engages with the tension between the intended benefits of the project and the unintended consequences, particularly with respect to the displacement of long-term residents. The eviction of over 500 individuals from the original Buxton Estate raises ethical and legal concerns regarding the right to adequate housing, public participation in urban planning, and the distribution of benefits from urban redevelopment projects.

Furthermore, this paper explores the extent to which the Buxton Point Affordable Housing Project aligns with the broader goals of urban regeneration and social justice. Does the project embody an approach that is truly dignified for all Mombasa's residents, or does it serve the interests of a select few? By evaluating the project's design, implementation, and socio-economic impacts, this paper will determine whether the Buxton Point Affordable Housing Project fulfills its promise of a dignified approach to architecture or falls short in meeting the housing needs of Mombasa's marginalized communities.

Through this exploration, the paper aims to contribute to the discourse on dignified housing within the context of Kenya's ongoing efforts to tackle the urban housing crisis, offering insights that may inform future urban redevelopment projects both in Kenya and beyond.

Preliminary findings reveal strong technical compliance with architectural standards, such as improved materials, infrastructure, and spatial organization. However, they also expose critical gaps in procedural inclusion, particularly around stakeholder consultation, tenure security, and clarity of affordability criteria. While the project succeeds in upgrading physical infrastructure, it risks undermining the social fabric by failing to adequately integrate long-standing residents or ensure equitable access to the new housing.

This paper argues that housing dignity must be embedded not only in the design of spaces but in the processes that produce them. Urban redevelopment, particularly under public-private models, must go beyond physical transformation to foreground justice, transparency, and inclusivity. The case of Buxton Point demonstrates that without these elements, even well-intentioned housing projects may reproduce or deepen urban

inequalities.

In conclusion, the study contributes to the discourse on dignified housing in Africa's rapidly urbanizing cities by offering a framework for assessing housing projects through spatial, economic, and procedural dimensions of dignity. It calls for future initiatives, both in Kenya and beyond, to adopt rights-based, participatory models that prioritize the lived experiences and needs of marginalized urban populations.

### **Kenya's Affordable Housing Programme: Context and Intentions**

Launched in 2017 as part of the Big Four Agenda, Kenya's AHP seeks to construct 500,000 housing units targeting low and middle-income groups. The Programme was initially to be driven as a public-private partnership (PPP) model and emphasizes modern construction technologies (MOTIs), digital registries, and efficient land use (Government of Kenya, 2018). With the introduction of the Housing Levy in 2024, the Government aimed to generate funds to finance and speed up the construction of affordable housing units while stimulating economic growth through job creation. Despite its technical and economic merits, critiques have emerged around evictions, lack of inclusivity, and uniform design templates. The architecture of dignity challenges such interventions to not only build faster and cheaper but to build with empathy, diversity, and cultural sensitivity.

The following sections present the theoretical framework, methodological approach, and findings derived from the application of the dignity matrix. Section 3 outlines the conceptual foundations of dignity in architecture, Section 4 explains the qualitative case study design, Section 5 discusses empirical findings under the four dignity parameters, followed by a discussion and policy-oriented recommendations.

This study contributes a structured dignity-based evaluative framework for assessing state-led affordable housing projects in rapidly urbanizing African contexts. By operationalizing architectural dignity across spatial, material, cultural, and procedural dimensions, it offers a replicable analytical tool for examining how governance processes and design decisions interact to shape lived urban experience.

## **THEORY**

### **Ethical, Participatory, and Cultural Foundations of Architectural Dignity**

The concept of dignity in architecture is complex and touches on philosophical ethics, cultural anthropology, urban sociology, and design theory. Dignity, as argued by Immanuel Kant, is an intrinsic and inviolable value of the human being. Architecture must therefore avoid treating people as machines but should instead foster their autonomy, privacy, comfort, and social worth. This ethical position places architecture not only in the realm of aesthetic, structure, and function but also morality (Nussbaum, 2011).

Martha Nussbaum's capabilities approach offers a more practical framework, emphasizing the conditions that allow individuals to live meaningful lives. In the built environment, this means access to adequate space, clean water, safety, social inclusion, and recognition. Dignified architecture must therefore address both material and symbolic aspects of living (Nussbaum, 2011).

Jeremy Till developed the idea that "*architecture depends*" on people, politics, time, and context. It infers that dignity in architecture cannot be captured in form alone but must be developed with users through participatory processes, culturally relevant symbols, and flexible systems (Till, 2009).

Closer to home, African views of dignity focus on community, mutual respect, and belonging. Concepts such as *utu* or *ubuntu* express a relational understanding of dignity rooted in reciprocity and collective life (Munyaradzi, 2008). Such ideas are manifested in the organization of traditional homesteads, communal courtyards, or informal economies, as well as in Swahili urban traditions along the East African coast (Wario, 2021). As a result, architecture that ignores these aspects might be functionally adequate but culturally impoverished.

### **Spatial Justice and the Right to the City**

Spatial justice is a critical theoretical framework for understanding how space is socially produced and politically contested. Edward Soja conceptualizes spatial justice as the fair and equitable distribution of spatial resources and services, emphasizing

that spatial organization is both a reflection and a driver of social relations (Soja, 2010). The built environment, therefore, is not neutral, but it can perpetuate inequality or serve as a platform for empowerment.

Henri Lefebvre's seminal work *The Right to the City* complements this by asserting that all urban residents should have not only access to urban spaces but also the ability to shape and transform them (Lefebvre, 1996). This concept supports the idea that housing should go beyond shelter to affirm identity, agency, and collective belonging. In the context of affordable housing, the right to the city implies a right to live in a dignified, integrated, and culturally appropriate environment and not merely an inexpensive dwelling on the periphery.

These frameworks are essential in interrogating Kenya's Affordable Housing Programme (AHP), particularly in light of critiques that mass-produced, standardized housing often excludes residents from participatory design processes and reinforces spatial segregation (Kombe & Kreibich, 2000).

### Human-Centered Design and Dignity in Architecture

Human-centered design (HCD) emphasizes empathy, co-creation, and responsiveness to users' needs (IDEO, 2016). In architecture, this translates to built environments that are adaptable, inclusive, and deeply contextual. Scholars such as Till argue that architecture must be socially engaged and participatory to be ethical and effective (Till, 2009).

Dignity in this context involves creating spaces that respect the lived realities and aspirations of users. According to Nussbaum, human dignity is intimately tied to capability—the ability to live a life one values (Nussbaum, 2011). Housing, as a basic platform for human development, must therefore support both physical comfort and psychological security.

In Africa, architects such as Joe Osae-Addo and Francis Kéré have championed context-responsive, dignified architecture through the use of local materials, participatory methods, and culturally grounded spatial configurations. Their work provides valuable benchmarks for evaluating Affordable Housing Programme projects within

diverse cultural settings (UN-Habitat, 2016).

### Global and African Discourse on Affordable Housing

Globally, affordable housing discourse has evolved from simply addressing shelter deficits to examining issues of inclusivity, resilience, and liveability. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG 11) call for "inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable cities and human settlements," emphasizing quality as much as quantity (UN-Habitat, 2020).

In the African context, housing policies often struggle with balancing economic feasibility and cultural relevance. Kombe and Kreibich highlight that state-led housing initiatives in Sub-Saharan Africa frequently adopt imported models that are unsuited to local urban dynamics, often failing to reflect socio-economic diversity and the spatial fluidity of African urbanism (Kombe & Kreibich, 2000).

Moreover, the African Union's *Agenda 2063* underscores the need for "African solutions to African problems," including housing that promotes identity, dignity, and community cohesion (African Union, 2015). These calls align with critiques of Kenya's AHP, where modernist, standardized block typologies may clash with localized, dynamic ways of inhabiting space.

### Parameters in Determining Architecture of Dignity

Dignity in Architecture is therefore not a stylistic program but rather, a moral and ethical imperative in ensuring persons are accorded the necessary respect in the built world. It challenges architects and urbanists to design spaces that affirm human worth, enable community, and challenge injustice.

In this study, architectural dignity is operationalized as the measurable convergence of spatial adequacy, material safety, cultural recognition, and participatory governance within the built environment.

### Synthesis of Frameworks and Convergence

Although the theoretical lenses; Kantian ethics, Nussbaum's capabilities approach, Lefebvre's "Right to the City," and African philosophies of *ubuntu*, emerge from distinct intellectual traditions, they converge on a core principle:

architecture must enhance human dignity by enabling agency, recognition, and inclusion. Where Kant emphasizes the moral obligation to treat individuals as ends in themselves, Nussbaum provides a framework for operationalizing dignity through material conditions and life opportunities. Meanwhile, Lefebvre and Soja call attention to the spatial production of inequality and the political right to co-produce urban form. These ideas find cultural grounding in African traditions that frame dignity as inherently communal and context-sensitive. Taken together, these frameworks support a multi-dimensional understanding of dignity in housing, rooted in ethics, rights, lived experience, and place-based meaning.

From the foregoing, it can therefore be deduced, that the to achieve Dignity in Architecture the following parameters are critical.

*Spatial Justice:* Spatial justice relates to conformity to technical and anthropometric building standards including the fair distribution of space and to infrastructure and services.

*Material and Aesthetic Quality:* This aspect evaluates whether the materials used affirm human worth by conforming to safety, comfort and aesthetic standards. The use of contextually appropriate locally available materials is a key consideration.

*Cultural Resonance:* Cultural Resonance refers to the extent to which architectural design reflects, honors, and engages with the cultural identity and local spatial practices. It connects directly to the idea of regionalism and symbolic representation of the built environment.

*Procedural Inclusion:* This parameter focusses on the active involvement of communities in shaping their built environment. Participation in design and planning processes is essential for embedding dignity into both structure and governance.

### Identifying Knowledge Gaps Addressed by the Buxton Point Case

While the frameworks above offer normative goals for dignified architecture, their real-world application, especially in public housing, often falls short. The Buxton Point project presents a unique opportunity to evaluate these theories in practice and address key gaps in the literature.

*Participation:* There is a persistent lack of empirical evidence on how procedural inclusion is implemented in urban housing projects. Buxton Point reveals the limitations of “consultation” without shared decision-making power.

*Affordability:* Affordability is frequently invoked but rarely disaggregated. Although not the main focus of this paper, defining “affordability” as perceived, and experienced across income groups, would be critical in exposing the gap between official pricing models and lived economic realities.

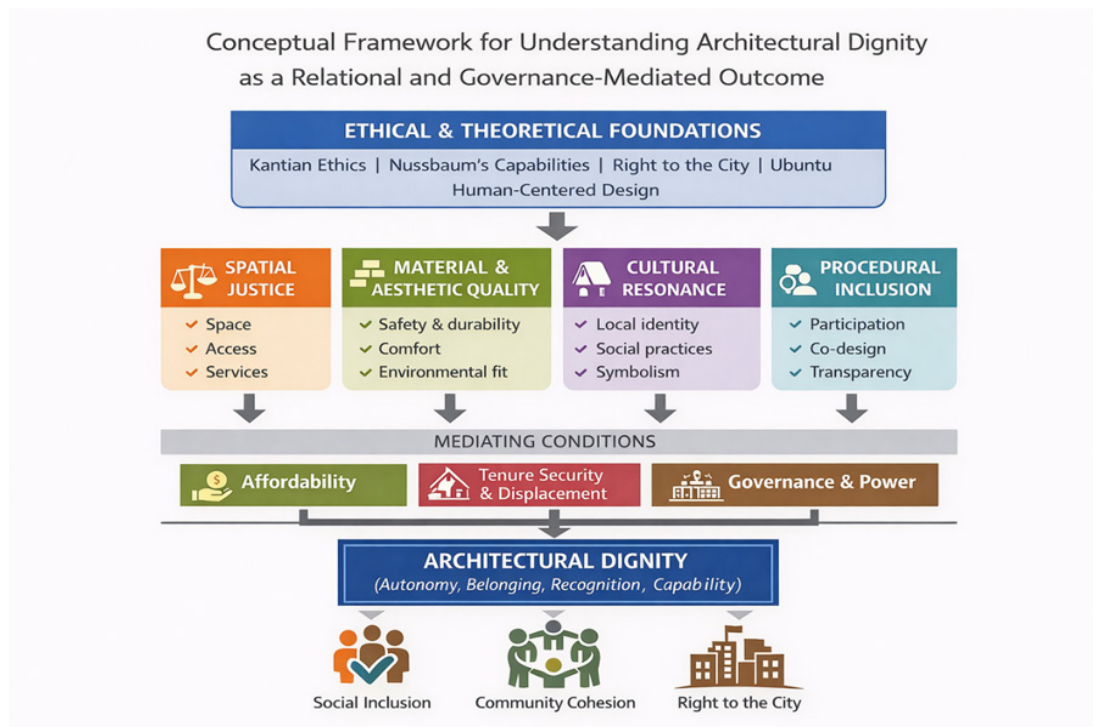
*Displacement:* While displacement is a known risk in redevelopment, few studies examine its ethical and dignity-related implications. Buxton Point’s evictions foreground the tension between physical upgrades and the erosion of social ties and tenure security.

These knowledge gaps—participation, affordability, and displacement—form the analytical backbone of the subsequent findings. Each is revisited empirically in Section 5 through the Dignity Matrix, translating abstract ethical principles into measurable spatial, procedural, and cultural indicators of dignity.

### Conceptual Framework for Understanding Architectural Dignity as a Relational and Governance-Mediated Outcome

**Figure 1** illustrates the conceptual framework underpinning this study’s understanding of architectural dignity as a socially produced, ethically grounded, and politically mediated outcome of housing development. The model positions dignity not as an aesthetic attribute or technical performance alone, but as a relational condition emerging from the interaction of spatial, material, cultural, and procedural dimensions of architecture.

At the foundation of the framework are ethical and theoretical principles, drawing from Kantian ethics, Nussbaum’s capabilities approach, Lefebvre’s Right to the City, African philosophies of ubuntu, and human-centered design theory. Collectively, these traditions converge on the normative claim that architecture must treat human beings as ends in themselves by enabling agency, recognition, and meaningful participation

**FIGURE 1**

Conceptual framework linking governance to architectural dignity outcomes

**Source:** Author's synthesis based on interdisciplinary theoretical foundations literature

in the production of space.

These ethical commitments inform four core and interdependent dimensions. Spatial Justice addresses the equitable distribution of space, infrastructure, and services, including compliance with anthropometric and accessibility standards. Material and Aesthetic Quality concerns safety, durability, comfort, and the symbolic affirmation of human worth through construction and design expression. Cultural Resonance captures the extent to which architectural form reflects local identity, social practices, and culturally meaningful spatial configurations. Procedural Inclusion emphasizes participation, transparency, and shared decision-making throughout planning, design, implementation, and post-occupancy stages.

The framework further recognizes that these dimensions are shaped by mediating conditions, notably affordability, tenure security or displacement, and governance power relations. These mediators influence whether technical compliance and design quality translate into lived dignity or instead result in exclusion, dispossession, and social fragmentation.

The interaction of the four dimensions, moderated by these conditions, produces the dependent outcome—Architectural Dignity, defined as the lived experience of autonomy, belonging, recognition, and capability within the built environment. Where dignity is achieved, housing contributes to social inclusion, community cohesion, and the realization of the right to the city. Where procedural inclusion, cultural alignment, or affordability are weak, dignity remains partial or undermined despite physical upgrading.

This conceptual model provides both an analytical lens for evaluating affordable housing projects such as Buxton Point and a normative guide for dignity-centred architectural and housing policy. It is operationalised in this study through the Dignity Matrix, which translates these conceptual dimensions into measurable spatial, material, cultural, and procedural indicators.

## RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a qualitative, case study approach, combining theoretical interpretation with document and spatial analysis. The objective is to critically examine how the principle of human

dignity is embedded in the built form, planning logic, and stakeholder processes of an Affordable Housing Programme (AHP) project.

The Buxton Point development in Mombasa was purposively selected due to its high visibility within the AHP rollout, strategic centrality near the CBD, and its status as a widely publicized model for urban development.

Data sources include project briefs, architectural plans, policy frameworks, and official planning documents, supplemented by secondary material from academic publications, news media and civil society reports. Visual and spatial assessments were conducted using satellite imagery, site photography and architectural renderings, to evaluate design impacts on users' lived experience.

The project was evaluated using a dignity assessment matrix based on four parameters: Social Justice, Material and Aesthetic Quality, Cultural Resonance and Procedural Inclusion.

Documentary and spatial data were thematically analyzed and systematically categorized under the four dignity parameters to ensure analytical consistency. Where interviews and secondary testimonies were referenced, they were used to triangulate documentary findings and strengthen interpretive validity. The Dignity Matrix was applied as a qualitative evaluative framework rather than a quantitative scoring instrument, allowing structured comparison between policy intentions, spatial outcomes, and governance processes. This approach ensured that the analysis remained grounded in observable design features, regulatory standards, and documented stakeholder experiences.

*Spatial Justice:* An assessment was undertaken to determine whether the units meet the minimum standard sizes and whether circulation routes promote mobility and equitable use.

*Material and Aesthetic Quality:* Material for construction was checked as to whether they meet the baseline safety codes, offering comfort and environmental responsiveness.

*Cultural Resonance:* this analysis focussed as to whether cultural elements were included in the design of the units as well as for the shared spaces.

The analysis focussed on traditional spatial practices such as shared courtyards and multi-generational proximity.

*Procedural Inclusion:* The project was assessed on community engagement beyond informational meetings, with na focus on co-design or feedback loops in planning.

This framework allows a layered understanding of how technical decisions in design and policy directly shape dignity outcomes. It also highlights concrete design and governance interventions that could recalibrate AHP projects toward more inclusive, contextually responsive, and dignity-centered urban futures.

This study is limited by its single-case design and reliance on documentary, spatial, and secondary data sources rather than extensive field interviews. While this ensures ethical integrity and methodological consistency, it constrains generalizability beyond the Buxton Point context. All visual materials used were drawn from publicly available or official sources with appropriate attribution.

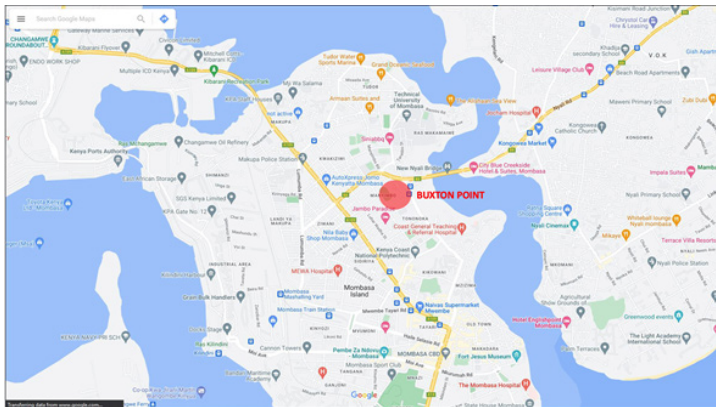
## RESULTS

This section presents a structured analysis of the Buxton Point housing redevelopment in Mombasa, evaluating its spatial justice, material quality, cultural resonance, and procedural inclusion through the lens of architectural dignity.

### Project Analysis: Buxton Point, Mombasa

Buxton Point, redeveloped from a colonial-era estate, comprises 1,850 residential units spread over 14 blocks with commercial and social amenities. Led by GulfCap Africa and the County Government of Mombasa, it follows a developer-financed model with zero government offtake. The project replaces dilapidated housing while promising “modern and dignified living” (GulfCap Africa Ltd., 2022).

**Figure 2** illustrates the geographical position of Buxton Point in relation to major urban landmarks, transportation routes, and surrounding neighborhoods within Mombasa Island, highlighting its strategic accessibility and integration within the city's urban fabric.

**FIGURE 2**

Buxton Point Location

**Source:** Adapted from Google Maps (2026). Map of Buxton Point, Mombasa City. Retrieved from <https://www.google.com/maps>

**Figure 3** illustrates a modest residential courtyard lined with aging apartment buildings, where daily life unfolds amid open balconies, hanging laundry, and a cyclist passing through the dusty communal space.

### Spatial Justice

The master plan incorporates mixed-use blocks, green areas, playgrounds, and retail corridors. Building heights range from five to twelve floors, forming a compact yet navigable urban fabric (**Figures 4, 5, 6** and **7**). Pathways are pedestrian-friendly, and open spaces are interspersed. The planning demonstrates a shift from the isolated mono-functional estates of the past.

Analysis of the development reveals the following:

- i. According to technical and anthropometric data, all liveable spaces meet the minimum standards regulation bodies. The building density of the project was well considered in respect to the culture of the Swahili people. The project has green communal spaces and sufficient spacing between buildings. Communal areas such as *Barazas* and courtyards are used for different social activities enhancing community living.
- ii. The windows meet the minimum standard specifications and allows for sufficient natural daylight and ventilation to each room and unit.

**FIGURE 3**

File Photo of Buxton before development

**Source:** Author's analysis, 2026



**FIGURE 4**  
 The Buxton point Master Plan  
 Source: Author’s analysis, 2026



**FIGURE 5**  
 Rendering of the Buxton Master Plan  
 Source: Author’s analysis, 2026



**FIGURE 6**  
 Master plan incorporates mixed-use blocks and green areas  
 Source: Author’s analysis, 2026



**FIGURE 7**

Typical 2-bedroom unit plan

Source: Author's analysis, 2026

- iii. The vertical access at Buxton Point meet the minimum regulatory requirements set by the Kenya National Building Code 2024 and align with all the other international standards. The staircases use 1.2m widths improving accessibility, with risers of 150 mm and treads of 300 mm, respecting the ideal 1:2 ratio.
- iv. Phase 1 does not require a lift since it is only 5floors. Phase 2 comprises of 17 floors and has been provided with adequate elevators.
- v. Hallways sizes have a tight dimension of 1000mm width contradicting the Kenyan Building Code requiring 1200mm widths for wheelchair accessibility.
- vi. All the setbacks are within the Kenyan Building Code and increase the security of the project.
- vii. Buxton Point is easily accessible to transportation as well as social amenities enhancing user engagement.

The technical compliance reflects a strong baseline of functional accessibility, safety, and spatial adequacy. It sets a good precedent for affordable housing developments aiming to meet both

regulatory and human-centred design standards.

Overall, these provisions enhance spatial dignity by ensuring accessibility and safety, though minor non-compliances highlight the need for more inclusive design for persons with disabilities.

#### Material and Aesthetic Quality

Buxton Point is constructed using reinforced concrete and masonry blocks, providing strong structural performance and durability suitable for Mombasa's coastal conditions. Facades are enhanced with earthy-toned stone cladding Coral-stone, which offers additional weather resistance and thermal moderation. These materials support the project's long-term maintenance needs while balancing affordability with functional quality (Figure 8).

The development follows a clear, repetitive architectural language, with consistent building forms and aligned façades that reflect thoughtful modular planning (Figure 9). The integration of warm-coloured stone cladding within the otherwise neutral exterior palette helps create



**FIGURE 8**

Façade ornamentation incorporating vernacular sensibilities and cultural articulation

Source: Author's analysis, 2026



**FIGURE 9**

Clear repetitive forms reflect thoughtful modular planning

Source: Author's analysis, 2026

subtle contrast and rhythm. Though minimalistic, the design achieves visual order and coherence suitable for high-density residential housing.

Buxton Point's layout includes window openings, open-air stairwells, and exterior corridors that allow for natural lighting and passive ventilation. These elements are well-suited for Mombasa's humid climate and support comfort in indoor spaces without over-reliance on mechanical systems. While corner units benefit most, some internal units may have limited airflow or daylight depth, depending on room configurations.

Ornamentation is understated, reflecting the functional priorities of affordable housing.

However, the textured stone cladding adds a layer of visual depth and breaks up the monotony of concrete surfaces (Figure 10). The material's earthy tones contribute to a grounded, natural aesthetic, although the design avoids decorative motifs or expressive details, opting instead for a clean, simple architectural language.

The project reinforces material dignity through durable, climate-responsive construction but limits expressive diversity, risking a monotonous urban identity.

#### Cultural Resonance

Buxton Point accommodates small to medium-sized urban households, with units ranging

**FIGURE 10**

Use of a simple architectural language with Swahili undertones

**Source:** Author's analysis, 2026

from studio to three-bedroom apartments. These configurations align with the needs of nuclear and compact extended families common in contemporary Kenyan urban life. However, the layouts may not fully reflect the fluid, intergenerational household structures typical in traditional Swahili or coastal communities, where shared courtyards and adaptable rooms are culturally significant.

Buxton Point introduces shared courtyards between blocks, which offer open space for light, ventilation, and social interaction (**Figures 11** and **12**). Although these are not fully enclosed like traditional Swahili house courts, they reflect an attempt to integrate familiar spatial patterns into a vertical urban context.

The project includes a range of well-distributed community spaces such as courtyards, playgrounds, football and basketball courts, swimming pools, and community centers. These spaces provide opportunities for social gatherings, recreation, and informal interaction, supporting

community rituals such as evening barazas, youth engagement, and shared cultural practices.

Buxton Point presents a modern aesthetic that incorporates subtle references to Swahili coastal design. Elements such as openings, textured wall finishes, warm earthy tones, and the use of local stone cladding evoke the materiality and rhythm of traditional Swahili architecture. While the overall form remains contemporary and functional, these details help root the development in the cultural context of Mombasa. The integration of such motifs, though restrained, adds a sense of place and identity to the housing project.

The project combines local culture and symbolism through Swahili-inspired courtyard layouts, coastal architectural themes, and community-focused amenities. It respects Mombasa's diverse identity through inclusive design features and green corridors. This development stands as a contemporary cultural landmark grounded in traditional social values.

**FIGURE 11**

Clear repetitive forms reflect thoughtful modular planning

**Source:** Author's analysis, 2026

**FIGURE 12**

Project combines local culture and symbolism

**Source:** Author's analysis, 2026

Cultural dignity is partially achieved through symbolic Swahili references; however, the limited adaptability of unit layouts constrains inter-generational living patterns central to coastal culture.

### Procedural Inclusion

Buxton Point was developed under Kenya's Affordable Housing Programme through a public-private partnership between the Mombasa County Government and GulfCap Real Estate. While the redevelopment aimed to replace aging housing stock with improved units, early engagement with original Buxton Estate residents was limited. Reports and petitions presented to the Senate raised concerns that tenants were not meaningfully consulted prior to eviction and demolition, resulting in feelings of exclusion and distrust toward the project's planning process.

Although various stakeholders were later involved in the planning and execution, there is little evidence of broad-based community participation in key design or relocation decisions. Concerns from former residents highlight gaps in inclusivity, particularly in addressing the needs of vulnerable groups. The lack of participatory planning forums or design charrettes meant that residents had limited input on housing types, social facilities, or tenure terms.

Transparency around tenant relocation, allocation criteria, and pricing models has been a contentious issue. Public documents and media coverage indicate that many residents were unclear about their eligibility for new units, repayment terms, or

compensation.

Buxton was initially home to over 500 tenant households, most of whom were relocated with compensation or relocation assistance (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 2021). However, civil society groups protested limited participation and perceived gentrification, arguing the new housing was unaffordable to former tenants (Mombasa County Civil Society Network, 2021). This raises questions about dignity in procedural justice (Figure 13).

Despite technical success, the weak participation of former residents undermines procedural dignity, indicating that equitable processes are as vital as built outcomes.

### Elements of Dignity Matrix

Table 1 presents a comparative analysis of spatial and design parameters drawn from Kenya's current building standards and an applied housing project case study.

Table 2 outlines the design materials and visual language used, the cultural integration of Swahili coastal traditions, and the degree of community involvement in planning and post-occupancy processes. Together, these insights reveal how Buxton Point balances affordability with identity, comfort, and inclusivity within Kenya's affordable housing framework.



FIGURE 13

The project had limited participation

Source: Tweet by Okoa Mombasa (@OkoaMombasa, June 7, 2023) announcing a Twitter Space discussion on the Buxton Estate redevelopment project

**TABLE 1**

Comparison of spatial justice parameters in national standards and the Buxton Point housing development

SR	PARAMETER	STANDARDS			CASE STUDY
		Kenya National Building Code 2024	Kenya AHP Building Design Guidelines 2018	Buxton Point, Mombasa	
<b>A</b>	<b>SPATIAL JUSTICE</b>				
1	ROOM SIZES				
i.	Living Room	Minimum of 3.5m <sup>2</sup> per person.[87(3)] Minimal internal dimension of 2.1m. [87(2)]	10.6m <sup>2</sup>	8.4 m <sup>2</sup>	✓
ii.	Bedroom	Minimum of 3.5m <sup>2</sup> per person. [87(3)] Minimal internal dimension of 2.1m. [87(2)]	9 m <sup>2</sup>	9.24m <sup>2</sup>	✓
iii.	Kitchen	The internal area of every kitchen in a renement house shall be at least 3.75m <sup>2</sup>	4.6m <sup>2</sup>	6.3m <sup>2</sup>	✓
iv.	Bath	The room area should fit for the purpose for which it is intended. [87(1)]	3.8m <sup>2</sup>	4.55m <sup>2</sup>	✓
2	DENSITY				
	Plot Ratio	FAR shall be determined by the governing authoriy according to the zone	N/A	3.17	
	Ground Coverage %	Minimum GC 65% [2.1.4 (c)]	GC determined by physical planning handbook	31.5%	
	No. of Units / Acre	70 units per hectare but in special cases i.e Kibera minimum land 133 units per hectare. [2.1.3]	N/A	100	
	Space Between Buildings	The distance between any two dwelling (front to front) shall not be less than 2 times the height of the taller bulding. [2.1.4(e)]	Façade-façade 10m Façade - Building end 8m Building end - Building end 6m	6m	
3	WINDOW SIZES				
		For ventilation at least 5% of the room area. [138(3)] For lighting at least 10% of the room area. [136(4)]	N/A	L 17.14% B 15.15% K 22.17% BT 7.91%	✓
			L = Lounge, B=Bedroom, K = Kitchen, BT=Bathroom		

Source: Authors' analysis, 2026

**TABLE 2**

Evaluation of material, cultural, and procedural dimensions in Buxton point housing development, Mombasa

SR	PARAMETER	STANDARDS
		Buxton Point, Mombasa
<b>B</b>	<b>MATERIAL &amp; AESTHETIC QUALITY</b>	
	Material	Reinforced concrete and masonry blocks with coral-stone on facades.
	Language	Repetitive modular language with warm-coloured stone cladding creates subtle contrast.
	Human Comfort	Window openings, open-air stairwells, and exterior corridors allow natural light and passive ventilation suited for Mombasa's climate
	Ornamentation	Ornamentation is understated with coral stone earthy tones grounding natural aesthetics. Clean architectural language reflects functional priorities of affordable housing.
<b>C</b>	<b>CULTURAL RESONANCE</b>	
	Unit Configuration	Apartments range from studio to three-bedroom. Layouts do not reflect the fluid, intergenerational household structures typical in traditional Swahili communities.
	Spatial Organization	Shared courtyards offer open space for light, ventilation and social interaction reflecting an attempt to integrate open areas into a vertical urban context.
	Social Amenities	Has community spaces; courtyards, barazas playgrounds, play courts, swimming pools, and community centers, providing opportunities for social & informal gatherings and recreation.
	Style	Presents a modern aesthetic incorporating subtle Swahili coastal design elements; courtyards, textured wall finishes, warm earthy local stone cladding, adds a sense of place and identity to the housing project.
<b>D</b>	<b>PROCEDURAL INCLUSION</b>	
	Pre-Development Engagement	Early engagement with original residents was limited.
	Participatory Design	Minimum participatory planning forums or design charrettes with residents.
	Allocation Transparency	Lack of transparency around tenant relocation, allocation criteria, and pricing models.
	Post-Occupancy Feedback	Little publicly available evidence of formal post-occupancy evaluations or structured feedback mechanism.

**Source:** Authors' analysis, 2026

**SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

The Buxton Point project illustrates the constant tension between the need for housing and the need for social and cultural inclusion. The project's conformity to technical standards and cultural inclusion has contradicted the architecture of dignity with the lived realities of exclusion and displacement. Though Buxton Point's redevelopment is commended by the

integration of cultural resonances, it raises issues of gentrification and loss of tenant rights.

**DISCUSSION**

The Buxton Point project demonstrates that architectural dignity is produced through both material form and governance process, not design quality alone. When assessed using the Dignity Matrix, spatial justice and material quality indicate measurable progress within Kenya's Affordable

Housing Programme through improved physical standards, infrastructure provision, and regulatory compliance (Government of Kenya, 2018; State Department for Public Works, 2024). These improvements align with Soja's argument that spatial organization shapes access and opportunity (Soja, 2010). However, compliance alone does not guarantee belonging or agency.

Materially, the project achieves structural durability and climate-responsive design, supporting dignity as safety, comfort, and long-term well-being (UN-Habitat, 2020). Yet the repetition of standardized typologies raises critical questions regarding expressive diversity and adaptability. Technical adequacy, while necessary, remains insufficient for producing lived dignity.

Cultural resonance is partially realized. Shared courtyards and community facilities provide opportunities for social interaction and collective life, reflecting aspects of Swahili urban traditions (Wario, 2021). However, vertical unit layouts and limited internal flexibility constrain intergenerational and fluid domestic practices central to coastal culture. This distinction underscores the difference between providing open space and enabling culturally meaningful dwelling.

The most significant deficit lies in procedural inclusion. Evidence of limited consultation, contested affordability, and unclear allocation processes suggests insufficient resident agency in shaping redevelopment outcomes (Kenya National Commission on Human Rights, 2021; Mombasa County Civil Society Network, 2021). Lefebvre's "Right to the City" clarifies this gap: housing justice requires not only access to improved space but participation in its production (Lefebvre, 1996). From a capabilities perspective, dignity depends on real opportunities for secure tenure and social participation, not merely upgraded structures (Nussbaum, 2011). Ubuntu similarly emphasizes relational continuity and belonging, both of which redevelopment can disrupt (Munyaradzi, 2008).

Buxton therefore illustrates a redevelopment paradox: physical upgrading may coexist with social exclusion. Where affordability and tenure security weaken, dignity outcomes remain contested despite technical success. This reinforces the need for rights-based governance

mechanisms embedded within housing policy. Institutionalizing participatory planning, transparent allocation systems, and structured post-occupancy evaluation is essential if AHP projects are to translate physical transformation into durable dignity.

## CONCLUSION

This paper examined whether the Buxton Point Affordable Housing Project advances an "architecture of dignity" by assessing it through a Dignity Matrix structured around spatial justice, material and aesthetic quality, cultural resonance, and procedural inclusion. The findings indicate that Buxton Point performs strongly on technical and spatial standards, offering improved infrastructure, safer construction, and better-organized communal amenities that support liveability. In this sense, the project demonstrates that physical upgrading can improve baseline conditions of safety, comfort, and access to services.

However, the study also shows that dignified housing cannot be achieved through technical compliance alone. Cultural resonance is only partially realized: while shared spaces and design cues gesture toward coastal identity, unit typologies and limited adaptability constrain intergenerational and flexible living practices central to local urban culture. The most significant deficit emerges in procedural inclusion, where limited consultation, contested affordability, and unclear allocation processes reduce resident agency and weaken trust. These shortcomings reveal that dignity is produced not only by what is built, but also by how decisions are made, how communities are included, and how benefits are distributed.

Overall, Buxton Point highlights a key lesson for Kenya's Affordable Housing Programme: building justice must be approached as both form and process. Where participation, transparency, and cultural grounding are weak, physical transformation risks reproducing exclusion even when the built outcomes are modern and technically adequate. For affordable housing to become genuinely dignity-producing, it must institutionalize participatory planning, culturally responsive design, and post-occupancy learning so that housing delivers not only improved

structures but enduring belonging, security, and equity.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- i) Strengthen procedural inclusion and participatory governance
  - Establish structured community participation throughout the project cycle, including early consultation, co-design forums, and clear feedback mechanisms.
  - Provide transparent, accessible information on relocation, eligibility, allocation criteria, and repayment terms to reduce uncertainty and build public trust.
  - Introduce post-occupancy evaluation as a routine requirement to assess lived experience, satisfaction, accessibility, and social cohesion after occupation.
- ii) Embed cultural resonance and flexibility in design
  - Incorporate adaptable unit layouts that better accommodate intergenerational living, shared domestic practices, and changing household needs.
  - Enhance culturally meaningful communal spaces that support everyday social life, including baraza-like interfaces, shaded courtyards, and flexible gathering areas.
  - Allow controlled variation in building expression and typologies to reduce monotony while maintaining affordability and coherence.
- iii) Improve inclusive accessibility and spatial justice outcomes
  - Strengthen universal access requirements for corridors, circulation routes, and shared facilities to ensure dignity for children, older persons, and persons with disabilities.
  - Treat spatial justice as more than minimum room sizes by prioritizing usability, safety, comfort, and equitable access to amenities across all resident groups.
- iv) Protect affordability and tenure security
  - Strengthen safeguards that ensure former tenants and low-income households can realistically access the new housing and remain within the redeveloped area.
  - Clarify affordability benchmarks and prevent informal exclusion through pricing, financing conditions, or allocation practices that marginalize original residents.
- v) Institutionalize a dignity-based monitoring framework

- Integrate dignity indicators into project appraisal and performance reporting, covering spatial, material, cultural, and procedural dimensions.
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration between built-environment professionals, social researchers, and governance actors to ensure that dignity is consistently translated into design and implementation practice.

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