

## ***Naomba Beachwalk***

Over the last two issues, we have dreamed of squares and canopied promenades. These essentials for the well being of a city can (and should) be linked; squares can straddle or border promenades, a necessary pause, the equivalent of a comma in a text, during a stroll.

But there can be no experience to equal the inner pleasures of walking by the ocean. And Dar is blessed with an extensive coastline. As Gloria Mawji's articles in this same magazine have suggested, the founding of Dar es salaam was prompted by its harbour, a fundamental impulse which determined its planning and growth. It all started from Kivukoni and moved slowly inwards (Sea View & Upanga were still bush on the 1918 plan of the city).

This particularity of Dar es salaam meant that it was never seen as a possible garden city, one of the organising principles of colonial urban planning. (Nairobi is an example of this methodology that originated in England in the 1920s).

Perhaps this lack of an overall urban strategy was due to the changes in colonial masters – from the Germans to the British. No one really had a handle on this.

But now this underlying armature of the coastline needs to be asserted. Walk along the coastline from Kawe to Kivukoni, and you have covered a distance of around 50 kilometres. That's over a marathon.

So, naomba beachwalk.

Not just a beach, but beaches linked by a waterfront promenade, a defined route for ambling. Link it with a promenade to the innards of the city and perhaps even to defined urban spaces (see *Naomba Square* and *Naomba Promenade* in previous issues). A promenade by the ocean that would allow our inner being to resonate with the waves.

Less poetic, but equally important, it will also help in encouraging a feeling of belonging to the city as a whole – so that Kawe residents do not feel unconcerned about Sea View. A walk such as this, in effect a city long promenade, will gather the different areas of the city both mentally (as in our image and perception of the city) and physically.

It's a universal desire common to all classes. Visiting consultants seek this experience to exorcise their guilt, courting couples ponder the tribulations that lie ahead, lovers mark the experience.

Its not that the available beaches are neglected. During the last Idd, the influx of pleasure seekers from the innards of the city was so great that all the roads from Oyster Bay through Msasani up to Kimweri Road were jammed with people returning home from the beach. Pavements overflowed; buses were at a standstill.

The other easily accessible stretch at Ocean Road has budding boxers toning their calves in the early mornings, judo enthusiasts punching the breeze, football players, diabetic exercisers and couples in the evening. Saturdays are for the obligatory initiation for newly weds; on public holidays, the beach is packed. Residents from Kariakoo and as far as Temeke, come to partake of the only pleasure that one does not have to pay for.

But it needs some organisation, the addition of some basic facilities.

Again, as for squares, its not an expensive proposition. The ingredients for reclaiming this part of the city are the same as for squares.

Some paving in parts, an occasional bench for courting couples, and most importantly, askaris to fend off the marauding muggers. Dot the walk with some much needed toilets. Ban advertising hoardings from the beachfront and ensure that that sneaky mobile advertising hoarding on a trailer does not desecrate the view.

Emphasise the existing trees. Provide some extremely discrete lighting so that the stars are still visible In the 60s, kerosene lamps lit the cultivated gardens (and fountains) of Kivukoni waterfront.

Add a cycle path for fishermen and mango vendors who move from Kigamboni ferry up north, or west to the markets, for children to go to school, for the office messenger, and the newly arrived helmeted enthusiasts.

The hawkers of ice lollies and coconuts are already present; the more enterprising ones at Oyster Bay now provide seats and battery operated lights for their customers of mishkaki, roasted corn and cassava.

Dar is perhaps one of the few cities in the world that does not have a plethora of restaurants facing the ocean that are affordable. Add some (but no supermarkets or dukas please).

The awareness and intentions of the authorities are already signaled by the yellow litter bins and barriers that stop cars using the beach during rush hour. There are occasional patrols of policemen.

It also requires an effort by Dar residents to maintain and care for this precious bounty. Legislation stipulating all construction to be set back from the ocean is regularly flouted (and resorts at Kigamboni have askaris to impose their rights to the beach to the detriment of other users).

We cannot ask more of the authorities; the maintenance of our pleasures requires an effort from ourselves as well.

© Nadir Tharani

First published in *Dar Guide*, July 2004.