

Kounkuey Design Initiative awarded grant from The Rockefeller Foundation

Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI), a Los Angeles-based non-profit design firm that partners with residents of impoverished areas to create low-cost, high-impact built environments, has been awarded a 100,000-dollar grant from The Rockefeller Foundation. The grant will support the development of an online information portal that will help non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and entrepreneurial individuals accelerate the launch and implementation of high quality water and sanitation projects in Kibera, the largest informal settlement in Nairobi, Kenya.

This grant was awarded as part of The Rockefeller Foundation's Centennial Initiative. KDI's entry, "WATSAN Portal: Kibera", was selected as one of 8 winners of the Centennial Innovation Challenge which drew 2,000 entries from around the world. KDI's proposal responds to a challenge to "translate vast amounts of available information into meaningful data that ultimately makes a difference in the lives of the poor or vulnerable residing in urban areas."

WATSAN Portal: Kibera grew out of KDI's 7 years of experience building Productive Public Space projects in Nairobi. Kibera sits on the tributaries to the Ngong River and Nairobi Dam - waterways that are burdened with garbage, human and industrial waste, and agricultural chemicals. Only 4% percent of residents have access to a water tap in the home and pit latrines remain the primary sanitary facility. A mere 12% of sanitation facilities have formal connections to municipal sewerage.

"Residents of Kibera, lack access to clean water and decent sanitation. Countless organizations are at work to improve this injustice, yet the process to locate, fund, and run effective water and sanitation projects is mired in bureaucracy. After years of trying, KDI has successfully navigated this opaque process and is acutely aware of the need for a simplified system," says KDI Executive Director Chelina Odbert. The WATSAN Portal: Kibera was developed as a response to this growing need to connect stakeholders to existing information and efficiently advance sector initiatives.

WATSAN Portal: Kibera is a web-based tool that will allow service providers in informal settlements to 1) understand existing infrastructure coverage (i.e. where formal sewage and water lines are located) 2) access simplified procedures for connecting to existing city infrastructure and 3) receive direct technical and logistical support to connect. The Portal improves the ability of small-scale service providers, local government agencies, and entrepreneurial individuals to more efficiently and effectively launch water and sanitation projects. "It fills a critical gap in the WATSAN project delivery process by making geo-referenced data on municipal infrastructure instantly available, accessible, and usable," said Ms. Odbert. The pilot platform will be developed using existing data for Kibera with the hope that within five years the tool will be expanded to encompass all of Nairobi. In developing WATSAN Portal: Kibera, KDI will work with two key implementing partners: Nairobi City Water and Sewerage Company, the agency responsible for installing and maintaining water and sewer infrastructure

in both formal and informal sectors of Nairobi, and Spatial Collective, a social enterprise that develops innovative digital tools to support collective action. KDI will implement a participatory process to design the tool together with practitioners and community groups, to ensure that the barriers water and sanitation service providers face in connecting to municipal infrastructure are properly addressed in the tool's interface and key functions.

This grant is the first received by Kounkuey Design Initiative from The Rockefeller Foundation. KDI is proud to have The Rockefeller Foundation support our efforts in exploring innovations that address regional, sustainable, and systemic changes in urban informal settlements.

About The Rockefeller Foundation

The Rockefeller Foundation aims to achieve equitable growth by expanding opportunity for more people in more places worldwide, and to build resilience by helping them prepare for, withstand, and emerge stronger from acute shocks and chronic stresses. Throughout its 100 year history, The Rockefeller Foundation has enhanced the impact of innovative thinkers and actors working to change the world by providing the resources, networks, convening power, and technologies to move them from idea to impact. In today's dynamic and interconnected world, The Rockefeller Foundation has a unique ability to address the emerging challenges facing humankind through innovation, intervention and influence in order to shape agendas and inform decision making. Please visit www.rockefellerfoundation.org for more information.

About Kounkuey Design Initiative

Founded in 2006 by 6 students at the Harvard Graduate School of Design, KDI is an innovative international partnership specializing in the practices of architecture, landscape architecture, engineering, and urban planning. KDI believes that participatory planning and design are key to sustainable development. By working collaboratively with communities from conception through implementation, they build on their ideas, enhance them with technical knowledge and design innovation, and connect them to extant resources. In doing so, KDI empowers communities to advocate for themselves and address the major physical, social and economic challenges they face. In Kibera, KDI has been involved in "reclaiming the river" by transforming waste spaces in four communities along the Ngong River. These Productive Public Spaces are community-driven, sustainable urban systems that function collectively to mitigate environmental hazards, provide public space amenities, build social networks, and develop micro-enterprises. In addition, KDI has completed and ongoing projects in Haiti and the Coachella Valley, California. Please visit www.kounkuey.org for more information.

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