

March 2020 to present



Strengthening the informal transport sector for safer, more sustainable mobility



Nairobi, Kenya

Kenya's brightly decorated minibuses (matatus) are an iconic fixture on the urban landscape and a backbone of public transport, alongside buses and taxis. Now, matatus are being used as awareness-raising 'vehicles' for COVID-19 prevention; they have been spray-painted with images of cyclists and people with masks featuring messages such as 'We care for your safety', 'Keep Physical Distance' and 'Stop Coronavirus'.

Public transport for public awareness-raising

Health messages spray painted on buses will help ensure that the battle against the virus is front and centre in the minds of people as they travel about. Design of initial messages on the first two buses to circulate in the densely populated Kibra and Industrial Areas of Nairobi, was supported by UN Habitat, which has been working with the cities' stakeholders to improve the public transport system.

"Ensuring safe public transport to these areas will be essential for the health of the population," said Dickson Mbugua, Chairman of the Matatu Welfare Association, said in a profile of the awareness-raising initiative by UN Habitat.

Preventing the disease is critical to driver safety, added Matatu owner, Kevin Wandera: "The first person to fight the disease is me. When I meet passengers, I don't know who they met so I have to be very careful and encourage other people to follow my steps. I can be an ambassador of the messages," he stated.



Photo: UNHabitat/Julius Mwelu

Building future resilience: safe and convenient digital payments

Longer-term, there are efforts to expand the use of digital payments in the popular matatu system, in line with government recommendations. This would help decrease infection risks for passengers and drivers due to the constant handling of money, as well as creating a more reliable record of passengers that could be used for contact tracing and to plan more efficient transport systems.

Each matatu carries around 300 people a day, pointed out Mr. George Njao, Director General, National Transport and Safety Authority under the Kenya's Ministry of Ministry of Transport, Infrastructure, Housing, Urban Development and Public Works.

"This means that one sick matatu worker could infect 300 people in a day. COVID-19 is here to stay. The message on the matatus goes beyond COVID-19 – it is going to change the overall general public health in our transport system," he said.

Contact person and details /links: <https://unhabitat.org/using-public-transport-to-create-awareness-on-covid-19-%E2%80%93-a-kenyan-invention>

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