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urbanSEED stands for Urban, Social, Economic and Environmental Development. We are a cross-disciplinary design and planning action tank seeking to enact positive change through architecture, urban design/planning and development.

WHO WE ARE

Our history? urbanSEED was founded in late 2016 aiming to create inclusive, contextual and sustainable projects and developments. Headquartered in Washington, DC, with a team in Bogotá, Colombia, we work as a collaborative with a core team composed of our Leadership and a support team, and a solid network of collaborators who come on board to fulfill the needs of each context and project. Our experience spans from post-disaster reconstruction to long-term urban development, and from community-scale interventions to infrastructure resilience planning, bridging humanitarian assistance and sustainable development.

What we do? We call it Urban Stitching. Focusing on an integrated approach and strong participatory processes, our projects seek to enhance sustainable urban development and create more resilient, productive and well-functioning cities. Through partnerships with leading international organizations and direct engagement with communities and governments, we have deepened our expertise in disaster risk reduction, adaptation and resilient infrastructure while maintaining our participatory, community-centered approach. Our work addresses interconnected urban systems—physical, social, economic, and environmental—recognizing that sustainable solutions must integrate technical rigor with genuine community engagement.

Our focus? We work with different types of programs and projects focused on housing (including housing reconstruction and housing development PPPs), urban rehabilitation, disaster risk reduction and reconstruction, community development, and resilience. We work across multiple phases of a project—from strategy and programming to participatory approaches and design to implementation support—and across scales from building to city-wide infrastructure. Our work bridges emergency response and long-term development.

WHAT WE DO

Design, Urban Planning + Vision Development. We aim to create dynamic urban fabrics that engage with the life of neighborhoods, their surroundings and the environment. We integrate multi-hazard risk assessment and adaptation strategies into all planning work, considering urban systems as interconnected networks.
Disaster Resilience + Infrastructure. We bring systems-based approaches to resilience and disaster risk reduction, integrating multi-hazard risk analysis, historical landscape analysis, and nature-based solutions. We contribute participatory planning and community-centered design expertise to infrastructure projects, ensuring technical solutions are contextually appropriate and sustainable.
Housing Development + Policy. FFrom incremental housing to PPP advisory, we create resilient, affordable housing solutions grounded in community needs. We bring innovative solutions to create productive, sustainable and resilient spaces and communities.
Urban Rehabilitation + Informal Settlement Upgrading. Integrating informal and underserved neighborhoods through improved infrastructure, public space, and nature-based solutions. We also focus on the social infrastructure to ensure strong local governance, appropriation, as well as grounded operation and management (O&M) strategies.
Bridging Reconstruction & Long-term Development. We apply a whole settlements approach that addresses immediate post-disaster needs while building long-term resilience and sustainable development.
Economic Development + Partnerships. We design recovery and upgrading to strengthen local economies: better urban environments that spark local business, value chains built on local skills and suppliers, housing as a productive asset, and public-private partnerships that make each public dollar go further.

We work across the multiple phases of a project, and have a particular knack for:
> RISK REDUCTION + NATURE BASED SOLUTIONS: TThrough our systems-based approach, looking at infrastructure as interconnected networks rather than isolated interventions, we bring a landscape-driven approach to planning and design, incorporating NbS and locally appropriate interventions.
> PLACEMAKING + TACTICAL URBANISM: Allowing PEOPLE AND NATURE to be at the center of our approach, we can create successful projects and a strong sense of local appropriation and place-making, bringing forth specificities of place and innovation.
> SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS + VERNACULAR CONSTRUCTION: Exploring sustainable materials and construction techniques, such as bamboo and earth, as well as leveraging local skillsets and techniques.

HOW WE DO IT

We aim for **integrated interventions** and s**trong participatory processes** to enhance sustainable urban development and create more resilient, productive and well-functioning cities. Our **systems-based approach** recognizes that urban challenges are interconnected—infrastructure, governance, environment, economy, and social dynamics—and solutions must address these dimensions holistically.
We value local appropriateness and sustainability in every sense—physical, environmental, financial, and socio-cultural. Our process begins with understanding place: **historical landscape analysis** reveals how the settlements evolved, what ecological systems were disrupted, and what vernacular strategies existed. Multi-hazard risk analysis identifies vulnerabilities across floods, earthquakes, landslides, and extreme weather. This foundation informs designs. This foundation informs designs that directly **incorporate passive and nature-based strategies** for optimizing natural resources, efficient and responsible water management, risk management, and production alternatives that **promote self-sustainability, local economic development,** and **community empowerment**.

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OUR CORE VALUES

Collaborative and participatory nature: We seek a collaborative process with both the Client and the community at hand, thus aiming to directly respond to needs and desires as well as the specificities of place (environmental, social, cultural and political). In this manner, our process seeks to respect and bring forth local cultures, values and heritage..

Integrated and interdisciplinary approach: We bring an integrated approach merging architecture, planning, landscape, sociology and geography, engaging in both hard and soft components needed to build a self-sustainable community.

Resilience: Recognizing the growing impact of natural hazards, we place resilience at the center of our approach. Resilience and risk reduction strategies (including nature-based solutions) are integrated as a cross-cutting priority to ensure the physical resilience of structures and infrastructure facing various natural hazards. Through historical landscape analysis, we identify the key features of the target landscape—from ecosystem services and biodiversity to interdependencies with other ecosystems, populations, and infrastructure. Understanding how landscapes were historically constructed and what natural systems existed provides the foundation for interventions that enhance biological and cultural diversity, ecosystem services, and people's livelihoods. We conduct multi-hazard risk analysis to understand vulnerability patterns across multiple threats (flooding, seismic, landslide, extreme weather), informing integrated risk reduction strategies that address root causes rather than symptoms.

Ecological and Environmental Focus: Our methodology and interventions take into account environmental considerations in all program activities in order to reduce environmental impacts, while increasing resource efficiency and enhancing ecological approaches and more naturally resilient solutions. In this respect, nature-based solutions are actively sought and prioritized where possible.

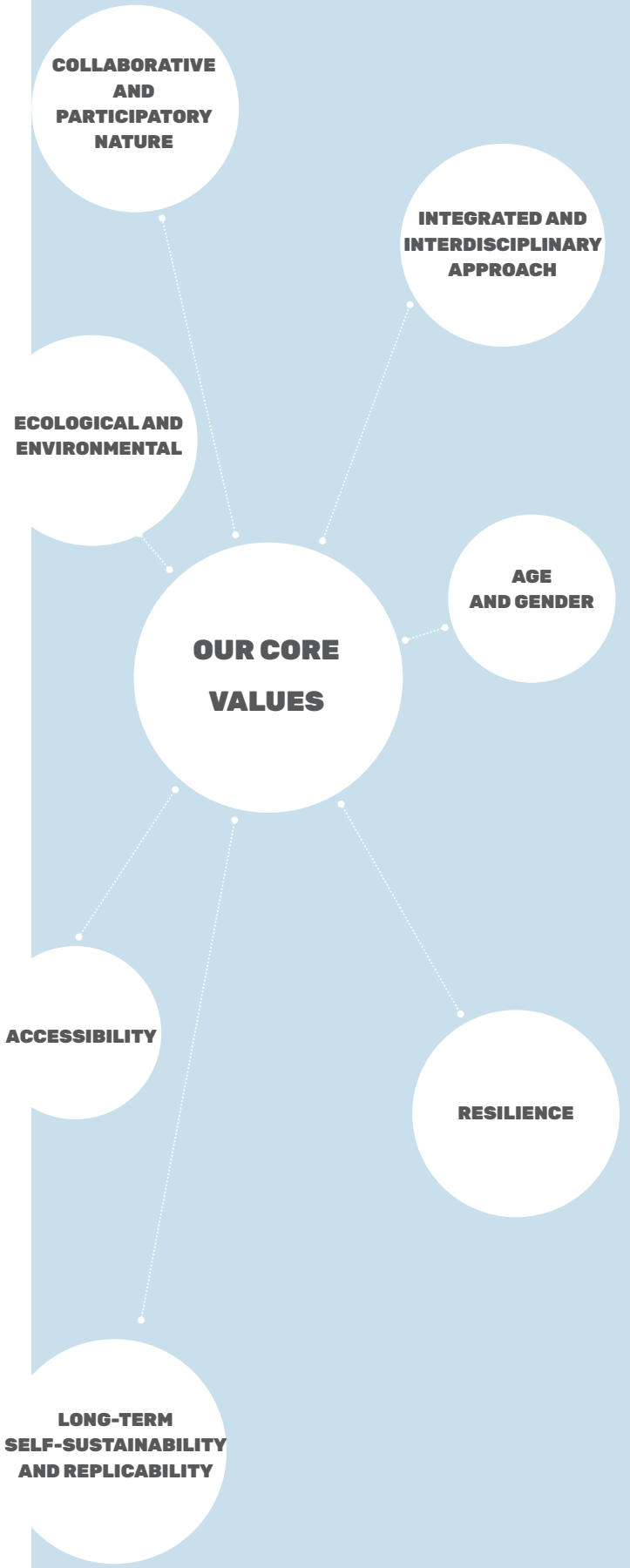
Our systems-based approach treats urban elements as interconnected networks rather than isolated interventions. We analyze how infrastructure systems (water, transportation, energy, waste) interact with ecological systems, social dynamics, and governance structures. This holistic perspective allows us to identify leverage points where interventions create multiple co-benefits—for example, green infrastructure that manages stormwater while creating public space, cooling urban heat islands, supporting local biodiversity, and providing opportunities for urban agriculture.

We incorporate passive design solutions (for example green infrastructure strategies for water management, such as permeable paving stones, rain gardens, bio-retention areas, etc.) to optimize natural resources and create resilient, comfortable and productive spaces that respond to specific climates and contexts.

Long-term Self-sustainability and replicability: We seek to bring forth design interventions that are appropriate and contextual, replicable and innovative. Our designs take into account the specific needs, customs, values and desires of each community, and include participatory processes in order to enhance local ownership. We strive to use locally sourced or locally accessible building materials and existing skillsets (in construction, aesthetics, art and crafts), and bear in mind low maintenance and operating costs over the long term. Moreover, we aim to support *local governance* aspects through desig and operation and management (O&M) strategies.

Reaching All Residents: Our participatory processes are designed to reach residents across age, ability and income, including youth and seniors, so that interventions respond to the needs of everyone who will use them.

Accessibility: We design activities and spaces so that people with reduced mobility can take part and move safely, with particular attention to improving access and mobility.



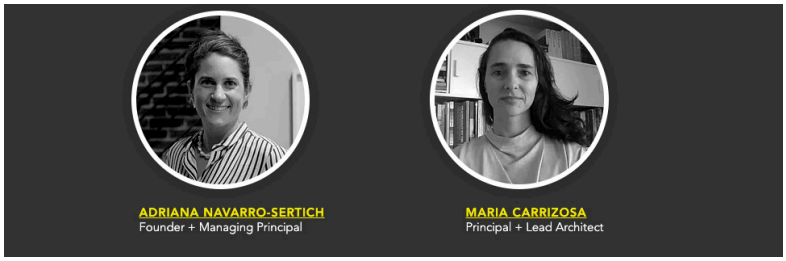
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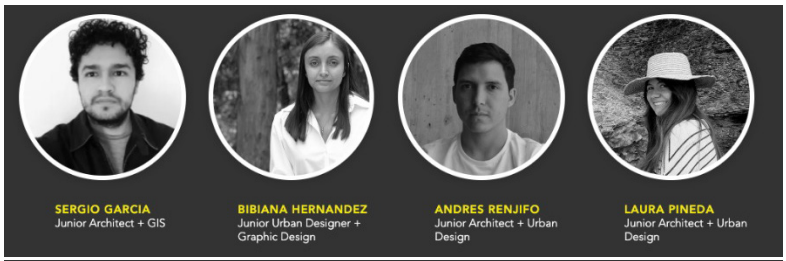
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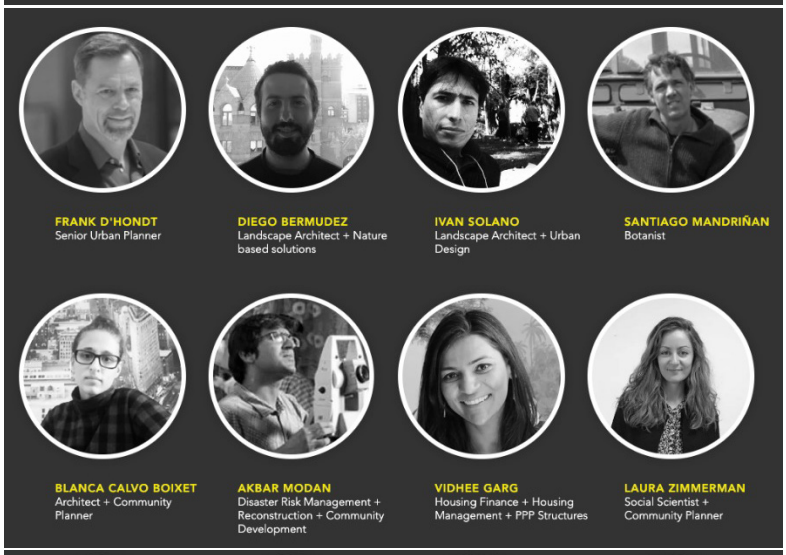
OUR TEAM

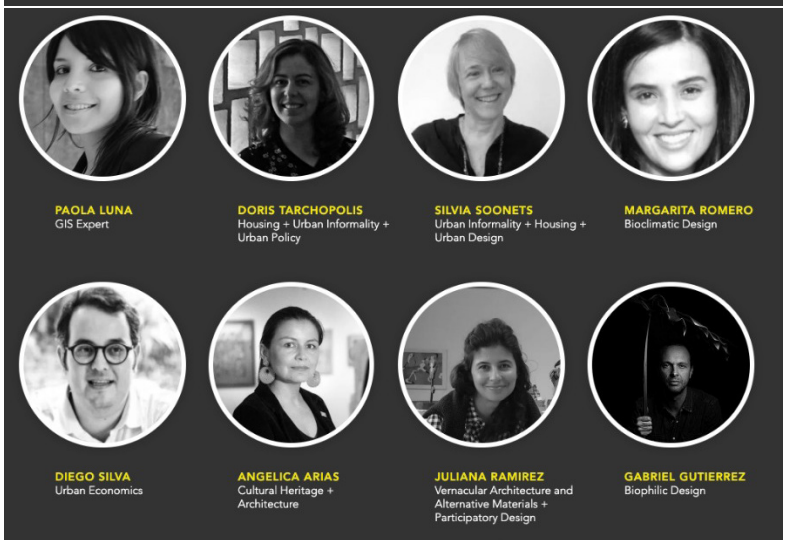
urbanSEED is an urban collaborative and nimble organization that strives to bring an interdisciplinary perspective and approach. Our strong network of multiple expertise brings the necessary knowledge and experience to address each project needs and the context's specificities of place.

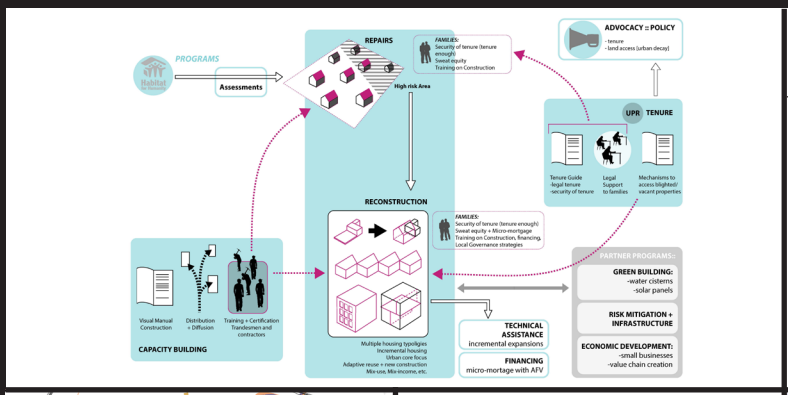
Our leadership team is composed of our Founder and Managing Principal, Adriana Navarro-Sertich, and our Principal and Lead Designer, Maria Carrizosa. Between them, they hold over 35 years of professional experience ranging from the private sector, to academia to international development work.











POLICY + URBAN & VISION PLANNING

Puerto Rico Housing reconstruction, with Habitat for Humanity. Developing pathways from informal to formal housing and resilient reconstruction.

Participatory Planning Session for Castries Vision, St. Lucia. Fast-track participatory process creating shared urban vision integrating DRR and informal settlement upgrading.





RESILIENCE

Urban diagnosis and flood zone, Kinshasa. Systems-based approach to flood and climate risk, integrating historical landscape analysis, multi-hazard vulnerability assessment, and nature-based solutions to transform vulnerability into productive, resilient infrastructure.
Multi-hazard risk analysis and adaptation planning across contexts



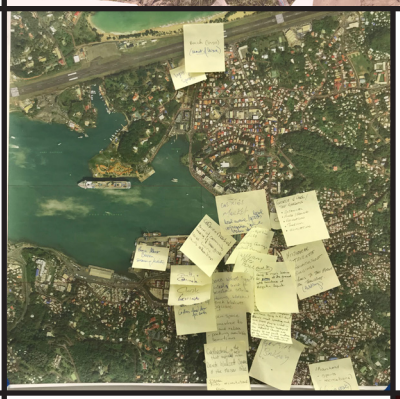


SOCIAL HOUSING + RECONSTRUCTION

Social housing cluster in peri-urban areas, Colombia. Resilient affordable housing with passive design

Housing PPP technical assistance. Market analysis and community-centered design strategies

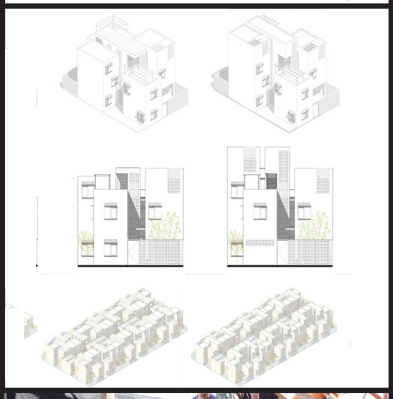
Incremental Housing & NbS schemes for displaced populations, Senegal



URBAN REHABILITATION + URBAN INFORMALITY

Republic of Congo, Context analysis, informal settlement





COMMUNITY PLANNING+ DEVELOPMENT

Co-creation workshops, Washington D.C.

Community-based risk mapping and planning in post-disaster contexts

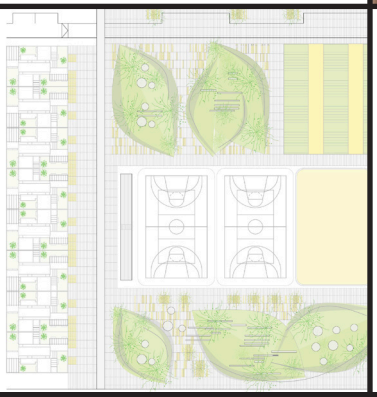
Capacity building for local governance and maintenance



SUSTAINABLE MATERIALS + VERNACULAR CONSTRUCTION

Construction process with the community,bamboo and earth exploration workshops in Colombia with Building Local





PUBLIC SPACE, PLACEMAKING + TACTICAL URBANISM

Conceptual design for public space for the development of social housing in Saint Louis, Senegal

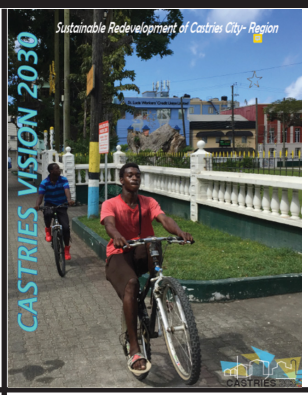
OUR FOCUS

Urban Vision 2040 Castries City Region

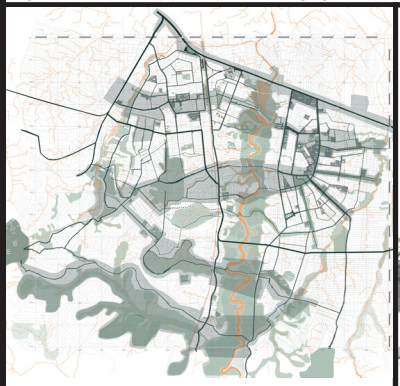
Our task consisted of advising UNOPS and the Government of Saint Lucia on a planning methodology to review the 10-year-old plan within a limited budget of time and finance. Instead of simply conducting a desktop/expert-based technical review and update of the old plan, we conducted a participatory bottom up review process that was more aligned with the **SDGs/New Urban Agenda**. A fast-track planning process was established through a series of stakeholder consultations and Focus Groups, culminating in the first ever Castries City Region Urban Forum, resulting in a Shared Vision Declaration as foundation for the **New Castries Urban Vision**. Themes explored included housing, informal settlement and urban upgrading, land management, transportation and mobility, climate change and resilience, local economic development, port infrastructure and economy, culture and public equipment, green and public spaces, amongst others.

After compiling a Castries Urban Profile, a draft Urban Vision was developed, including strategic project proposals to incrementally implement the new Vision. Intensive meetings were held to discuss the draft vision, including direct negotiations with PM Chastenet. The final draft was presented to and adopted by the Cabinet of the Government, and taken up by the Lord Mayor's Office of Castries.

The project exemplifies urbanSEED's ability to facilitate high-level strategic planning while maintaining genuine community participation, bridging technical rigor with inclusive engagement.



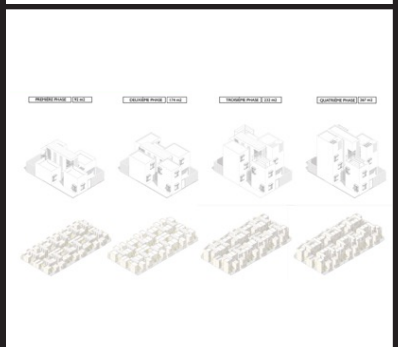






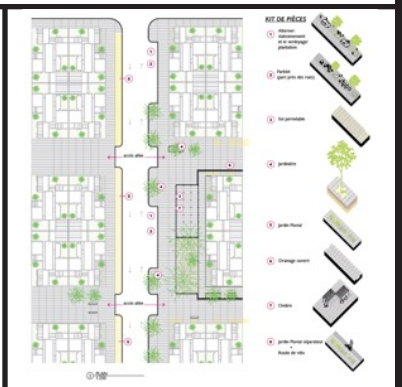
Flood and Erosion Risk assessment and Mitigation: N'djili River urban watershed, Kinshasa,DRC

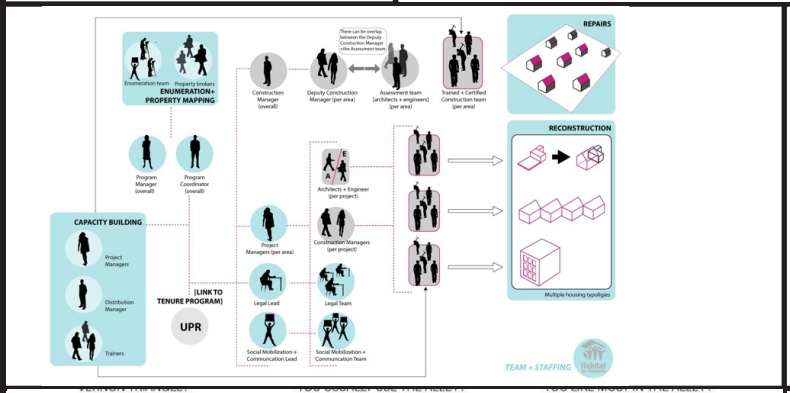
This project aims to build **multifunctional infrastructural spaces** that address all forces at play – physical, eco- logical, social and economic. The project reflects an integrated approach to urban planning, design and landscape architecture.
The Project proposes a Socio-Ecological Network informed by historical landscape analysis and multi-hazard risk assessment. Rather than gray infrastructure alone, the approach combines structural measures with NbS to support the multifunctional nature of the intervened neighborhoods and enhance the vibrant, dynamic life of the existing urban environment while protecting and fostering the livelihood of other species. The systems-based approach recognizes interconnections between water management, public space, mobility, land use, and community development. Opportunities include the combination of placemaking strategies such as spaces for encounter, productive spaces, spaces for recreation and contemplation, as well as opportunities to promote local biodiversity through the creation of wildlife habitats, water filtration, aquifer recharge, and other ecosystem services.



Project for the relocation of the displaced populations of La Langue de Barbarie, Senegal

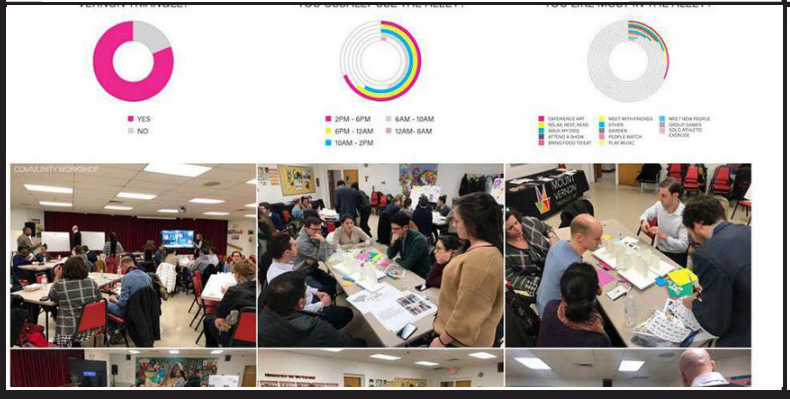
This housing project responds to the need to relocate the fishing community of the Langue de Barbarie in Saint-Louis, Senegal, displaced from their original land by coastal erosion and flooding. It consists of the development of 500 incremental units (1,500 people) as well as infrastructure, services and the urban development of a vacant 14-acre site on the outskirts of the city.
The proposal includes a review of an existing urban plan by the municipality, and the design of a prototypical housing unit. The reviewed urban plan offers insights for a more resilient and sustainable approach, incorporating nature-based solutions for water management, temperature reduction and enhancement of ecosystem services; integrating a mix of uses to enhance walkability and access to services and jobs; and re-orienting the lots to reduce sun exposure, improve comfort conditions and energy efficiency in the housing units, as well as guarantee its sustainability over time.





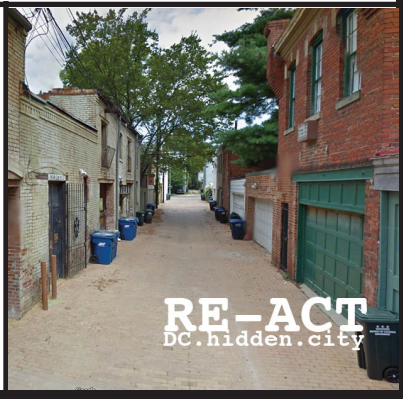
Development of Hurricane Maria's Recovery Program Strategy, Puerto Rico

The project's objective was to support Habitat for Humanity in developing its Hurricane María recovery strategy and resilient housing reconstruction strategy.
Based largely on the Pathways to Permanence strategy, the developed recommendations offered a framework to assist families to move from risk-heavy informal housing to lower-risk formal housing options that are safe, adequate and could serve as financial assets. In some cases the programs here take the first step in incremental movement to reduce risk. The framework recognizes that this requires different types of programs, and that security of tenure, community participation, access to finance, employment opportunities, public infrastructure, and basic services must be addressed alongside housing programs.
This project exemplifies urbanSEED's whole settlements approach—bridging immediate humanitarian response with long-term resilient development, addressing not just housing structures but the entire ecosystem of community resilience including infrastructure, services, governance, and economic opportunity.



Reimagining Washington DC's alleys, Urban Rehabilitation and Tactical Urbanism

Reclaiming and revitalizing Washington DC's alleyways, and in collaboration with Community Improvement Districts in the city, the project aims to optimize underutilized and undervalued urban spaces and alleys by proposing intermediate scale, inclusive, mix-use interventions with a strong focus on public space, community development and tactical urbanism.



WORK SAMPLES

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WORKING ACCROSS SCALES & PARTNERSHIPS

urbanSEED works both independently and in partnership with leading international organizations and firms. Our team has worked with UNOPS, the World Bank, the IDB, Habitat for Humanity, C40 and Conservation International, and alongside firms such as Miyamoto International (2022–2025) and SGI. Our current partners include with Build Change, the Affordable Housing Institute and Emergente, and can scale across several sites and contexts at once.

Whether leading community-scale projects or contributing specialized expertise to larger multidisciplinary teams, we bring the same values: people at the center, systems-based thinking, nature-based solutions, and long-term sustainability.

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Areas of Expertise:
Urban Resilience & Adaptation | Disaster Risk Reduction & Reconstruction | Participatory Planning & Community Development | Housing Development & PPPs | Economic Development & Partnerships | Urban Rehabilitation & Informal Settlement Upgrading | Nature-Based Solutions | Passive Design Strategies | Tactical Urbanism & Placemaking | Local Governance & Policy

Geographic Focus:
Latin America | Caribbean | Sub-Saharan Africa | North America

Working Languages:
English | Spanish | French | Portuguese

