The Stone Town of Zanzibar, the historic core of the capital city of the island of Zanzibar, located thirty-eight kilometres off the coast of East Africa, has been a regional cosmopolitan crossroads for centuries, reflected in its unique fusion of Swahili, Islamic, Hindu and European culture arising through trade and travel. Its principal waterfront cornice displays the front line of a dense array of arresting coral stone/lime structures which are both individualistic in character and yet highly integrated into a larger urban morphology of historic importance.

Although certain institutions of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN) trace their history in Zanzibar to the turn of the twentieth century, the first involvement of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) in Zanzibar dates to 1988, when the Aga Khan Award for Architecture organized an international seminar on the island. This event raised the Trust’s interest in the rehabilitation of the old Stone Town, which led to an agreement of protocol of collaboration in the Stone Town between AKTC and the Government of Zanzibar.

AKTC’s sustained involvement in Zanzibar over several years made it possible to develop a coherent, long-range strategy and set of initiatives aimed at the revitalization of the town’s historic core, from the definition of general policies to the implementation of specific building projects and area plans.

**The Old Dispensary**

The listed Old Dispensary building in the Stone Town was the second major historical building to be restored by the Historic Cities Programme (HCP) after its establishment in October 1992. As such, it provided a model for similar initiatives carried out both in the Stone Town and elsewhere during subsequent years. The design aimed to respect the existing historic fabric, while taking into account the different building phases, thus avoiding arbitrary interventions and unnecessary alterations. Great attention was paid to ensure that all materials used in the works corresponded to or were compatible with the original ones. Any changes deemed necessary for technical reasons were carefully recorded and identified. In terms of new uses, changes were considered for their compatibility and opportunity vis-à-vis the existing fabric. The final adaptive reuse choice was to transform the Old Dispensary into a combined service, retail and cultural centre. These new uses sought to enhance the building’s original qualities in the context of a culturally meaningful public function, while at the same time generating the income necessary to ensure the Centre’s future maintenance.
Conservation Planning

A number of wider urban planning and conservation efforts complemented the Old Dispensary initiative to guide future development in the historic area of Zanzibar. In particular, following earlier efforts sponsored by UNCHS/Habitat, AKTC developed, in close cooperation with the Zanzibar Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority (STCDA), the national authority responsible for the historic area, a number of urban surveys, research activities and planning proposals centred on Zanzibar’s historic area.

This area, traditionally known as the Stone Town, measures approximately 125 hectares, including the eighty-seven hectares that constitute the town’s built-up historic core. The Stone Town accounts for only about five per cent of greater Zanzibar’s total urban area. Within its confines, however, are concentrated the vast majority of Zanzibar’s monuments and registered buildings, as well as principal public and commercial facilities.

Starting in 1992, a joint initiative between the STCDA and AKTC led to the preparation of a ‘Conservation Plan’ for the Stone Town. The Plan was formally adopted by the Zanzibar Government in 1994. It includes controls on the use and development of land, measures to protect individual buildings, street elements and open areas. The Plan also contains a set of measures designed to improve infrastructure, parking and circulation in and around the Stone Town. These proposals are complemented by a set of new building regulations, which constitute an integral part of the Plan, as well as proposals to improve and develop the principal public spaces of the Stone Town.

Forodhani Park and the Seafort

Two such public spaces are the Zanzibar Seafort and Forodhani Park which were, and still are, the object of sustained AKTC work. Forodhani Park lies at the heart of the historic seafort district of the Stone Town. Approval to rehabilitate Forodhani Park was given in January 2008 and work on the Park proceeded from February 2008 to January 2009, together with the restoration of the historic seawall adjoining the Park, initiated in late 2008 and completed in May 2009. The Park was reopened in July 2009 and has since been used for a variety of public events and activities. The Park provides a contemporary urban space, whilst reviving a historic sense of place. Such is the success of the Park that the initiative led the government to request the World Bank to include financing for the rehabilitation of the adjacent stretch of seafort, the Mizingani area, into its ‘Zanzibar Urban Services Project’ (ZUSP) loan. In this case, AKTC will provide design and advisory services to the STCDA towards the implementation of the initiative.

The lesson which can be drawn from this experience is that sustained commitment and the ability to realize projects that generate local pride and international visibility are powerful catalysts for urban regeneration. Moreover, such projects are capable of raising complimentary support from governments and international institutions in areas that are normally excluded from financing because they are not considered a priority, such as culture and conservation. On the contrary, the Forodhani initiative and its expected follow-up along Zanzibar’s seafort show that reinforcing connections with the city’s past and its cultural traditions, and combining them with the economic regeneration of significant urban areas, can bring business and jobs, as well as increased revenue from tourism. In this respect, the Zanzibar experience can be extended to other cities in the region and provide an alternative model of urban development, one that reinforces the distinct character and authenticity of places over the look-alike, heavy-handed developments that are currently applied in so many city centres internationally.

Housing Rehabilitation

In parallel to the various activities outlined above, a ‘Stone Town Urban Housing Rehabilitation Programme’ was conducted over the period 1998–2004. Co-funded by the Swedish Development Cooperation Agency (SDA), the urban rehabilitation programme has benefited approximately five hundred of the poorest residents of Stone Town, who lived in publicly owned houses or in houses administered by the government-controlled religious charity board (Waqf). By the time the community-based rehabilitation programme was completed, nine large publicly owned houses had been rehabilitated, serving more than a hundred families.

The Kiponda Caravanserai is one of these. It was home to nineteen households with a total population of seventy people. Before rehabilitation it only had two functioning toilets: one for a family of six and one for the remaining sixty-four inhabitants. Now there are six working toilets and there are separate washing facilities. Cooking was done in the corridor or inside the rooms. Now it is done in the central courtyard. More importantly, perhaps, is that the tenants, who did not have any security regarding the length of their stay, now have formal ten-year contracts with the housing authorities. The Urban Village...

The ‘Stone Town Urban Housing Rehabilitation Programme’ included the rehabilitation of Mswali Mwaja, the former Royal Hotel. In the new Park design, large trees were retained along the foreshore of the Park to function as focal points.
Indian Ocean Maritime Museum

Future cooperation initiatives between AKTC and the Government of Zanzibar that build upon this foundation include the creation of a maritime museum through the adaptive reuse of the Orphanage building, an early twentieth-century structure located in close proximity to Forodhani Park. As a contribution to this museum, Zanzibar authorities entrusted the Sultan’s Barge to AKTC for restoration and eventual display. That work has already been completed. Also in this case, the thematic exploration of the maritime traditions of the region can become a major attraction for visitors to the island and an important educational springboard for local residents. Although Zanzibar already has two important museums aimed at local history and the past, a maritime museum focusing on the Indian Ocean would bring an international perspective and context to the island and return to the town the sense of its historical role in the development of the important commercial links that for centuries has united it to the rest of the Indian Ocean and beyond.

Tenants’ Committees that were called into life by this programme have played an important role in community mobilization and empowerment. In concert with the programme, courses in building repair and lime stucco technology were run for tradesmen, their content later being collated and published as practical repair guidelines made available in both English and Swahili.

Although limited to the initial phase of activities carried out by AKTC in the Stone Town, the housing rehabilitation initiative underlines another important aspect of the Zanzibar experience: the importance of housing in the context of urban regeneration projects. There is in fact no doubt, as other AKTC work has shown in places such as Cairo, that the single, most important catalyst for disadvantaged communities is improved housing conditions. If results can be achieved in this sector, even if numerically limited but significant in quality, community support and mobilization for conservation will follow. Rehabilitation of housing remains a central aspect of urban conservation and it is vital for the sustainability of urban regeneration in this and other cities of the Islamic world.

The facade of the building chosen to house the Indian Ocean Maritime Museum: the site, which had been the local orphanage, was relocated to new premises, is located next to Forodhani Park.

Kiponda Caravanserai (top) and Nyumba Ya Moshi (bottom) before (left) and after (right) rehabilitation. In the experience of the Historic Cities Programme, housing improvement has proved crucial in the process of urban regeneration.
Stone buildings were built in consistent numbers. Today, centuries. It was only after 1830, however, that Zanzibar's East Africa, the town is the result of a complex stratification of European-influenced structures, as well as thousands inhabitants. The 1992 inventory identified a total of 1453 (size of gazetted area) and houses an estimated 16,000 the Stone Town measures approximately 125 hectares and the pressure for change is greatest. The 1992 survey ascertained that, while the population household in 1992 was 6.10 with an average of 1.1 Stone Town would increase at a more moderate rate, 2700 households, the average size of the same survey ascertained that, while the population areas are critical spaces for the inhabitants of Stone survey carried out in 1992. Its purpose was to update previous surveys, and often used inappropriately or encroached upon by access to open space

The Stone Town has few open public spaces within the building condition survey carried out in 1992. It found that over 85% of buildings in the Stone Town were in need of repair and were generally poorly maintained and often used inappropriately or encroached upon by private development. Many houses were in need of a comprehensive and integrated plan for their rehabilitation, such as the case of Fonford Town Park, whose comprehensive upgrading was completed in 2009 with the financial and technical support of AKTC.

### Conclusions

The Stone Town of Zanzibar is the centre of the greater city of Zanzibar, located halfway down the eastern coast of Unguja, the largest island of the Zanzibar archipelago. The Stone Town is the economic, political and cultural centre of the island and contains most of Zanzibar's government and administrative buildings. As the largest and best-known historic settlement in East Africa, the town is the result of a complex stratification of European-influenced structures, as well as thousands of inhabitants. The 1992 inventory identified a total of 1453 (size of gazetted area) and houses an estimated 16,000 inhabitants. The Stone Town measures approximately 125 hectares and the average size of the household in 1992 was 6.10 with an average of 1.1 inhabitants per household. The remaining houses were inhabited by working men in the governmental sector, private commercial enterprises or construction. Many houses were in need of a comprehensive and integrated plan for their rehabilitation, such as the case of Fonford Park, whose comprehensive upgrading was completed in 2009 with the financial and technical support of AKTC. The Stone Town has few open public spaces within the built fabric; however, there are several large green areas adjacent to the town, including Forodhani Park, whose comprehensive upgrading was completed in 2009 with the financial and technical support of AKTC.

### Details

#### Baseline Standards

A complete field survey of the Stone Town was carried out in 1992. It was in public procedure and within the framework of the 'Conservation Plan'. All investigations were conducted on a plot-by-plot basis by teams of three or four trained and participated in the development of the Plan from its inception. They represented the core team of planning professionals who subsequently assumed positions of responsibility within the STCDA.

#### Master Planning Process

The master planning process aimed at developing two levels of proposal simultaneously, one for the establishment of broad conservation and development policies for the Stone Town. These included controls on the use and development of land, and measures to protect individual buildings, street elements and open areas. It included also a set of measures designed to improve parking, circulation and public infrastructure in and around the Stone Town. The second level of proposals aimed at identifying priority areas and developing preliminary planning proposals for four Action Areas (the Seawall and Fonford Park; the Port area; the Central Market and a new mixed-use complex in Mlandizi). These areas corresponded to the most critical parts of the Stone Town, which were to be managed as part of a comprehensive and integrated planning approach. Preparation of the Plan was accompanied by public hearings and participated by residents and professionals for their outstanding architectural, historical and cultural heritage, as well as by a comprehensive programme of ensuring its long-term preservation and appropriate development. The Stone Town has few open public spaces within the built fabric; however, there are several large green areas adjacent to the town, including Forodhani Park, whose comprehensive upgrading was completed in 2009 with the financial and technical support of AKTC.

#### Conservation Aspects

The planning approach and policies were consistent with the relevant international charters for the conservation of historic areas, with special reference to the UNESCO ‘Recommendation Concerning the Safeguarding and Contemporary Role of Historic Areas’ (1977, 1999). The Stone Town ‘Conservation Plan’ also succeeded in the establishment of an integrated planning approach and planning policies for the safeguarding of Zanzibar's urban heritage. It included the classification of significant landmarks and monuments (Grade I and Grade II, four Grade II structures) in a number of categories for their outstanding architectural, historical and cultural significance (49 in total), including the identification of individual architectural features to be protected. The Zanzibar Stone Town ‘Conservation Plan’ was the first comprehensive town plan for a historic urban area to be developed by AKTC and formally adopted by the national authorities. As such, it provided a model for similar planning initiatives carried out by the organization in the region and elsewhere.

#### Quality of Life

The slow expansion of the open-space improvement programme, with the creation of a public seawall promenade along Mzimba Road and the amalgamation of smaller gardens and open areas located in the southern portion of Zanzibar’s seawall.

#### Public Partners

Ministry of Water, Construction, Energy, Land and Environment
Stone Town, Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority.

#### Authoritative Framework

Exchange of letters and protocols between AKTC, the Ministry of Water, Construction, Energy, Land and Environment and the Stone Town Conservation and Development Authority (1992–94). Public hearings and regular reviews were scheduled throughout 1993 and the early 1994 years. The findings were used to prepare a comprehensive set of baseline standards, inventory of historic areas and the City’s major health facility is located within the boundaries of the Stone Town in the Mnazi Moja hospital. The Stone Town has few open public spaces within the built fabric; however, there are several large green areas adjacent to the town, including Forodhani Park, whose comprehensive upgrading was completed in 2009 with the financial and technical support of AKTC.

#### Master Planning Process

The master planning process aimed at developing two levels of proposal simultaneously, one for the establishment of broad conservation and development policies for the Stone Town. These included controls on the use and development of land, and measures to protect individual buildings, street elements and open areas. It included also a set of measures designed to improve parking, circulation and public infrastructure in and around the Stone Town. The second level of proposals aimed at identifying priority areas and developing preliminary planning proposals for four Action Areas (the Seawall and Fonford Park; the Port area; the Central Market and a new mixed-use complex in Mlandizi). These areas corresponded to the most critical parts of the Stone Town, which were to be managed as part of a comprehensive and integrated planning approach. Preparation of the Plan was accompanied by public hearings and participated by residents and professionals for their outstanding architectural, historical and cultural heritage, as well as by a comprehensive programme of ensuring its long-term preservation and appropriate development.