

Greener communities, better lives: Kumasi residents' perspectives on the benefits of maintaining and increasing the presence of nature in the neighbourhood

Introduction: In February-March 2026 researchers from the University of Oxford, UK and KNUST visited eight communities across Kumasi to discuss residents' values towards urban nature, and the opportunities and challenges it presents for their wellbeing. This document summarises the key benefits of urban nature identified by community members for physical, psychological, cultural, social and spiritual wellbeing. It concludes with recommendations to encourage the protection and expansion of urban nature across communities.

Climate protection:
Shade, fresh air, rainfall, air quality, less flooding, less soil erosion

"When there are lights out, the heat that comes to our rooms [is uncomfortable], but if you have trees around our communities, you can come outside and have fresh air"



Food & medicine:
Subsistence, medical care, maintain traditional knowledge, practice self-care

"My child got sick and there was no drugs and only available herb was this guinea grass. I added soursop leaves and boiled it, and just after that he became well. There was no car available to take him to hospital, but when I gave him the guinea grass, he became well. So, anytime I see this I remember that it is my saviour"



Cultural identity:
Links to the Ashanti culture, history of forested lands, the 'Garden City'

"If you listen to our history, we worship trees so we can't take trees from our history when you talk about Asantes"

"Culture is the way they move, the way they dress, the way we do things, and then dressing is normally about the clothes we wear, but the environment itself also has to be dressed, the trees, the plants around are the things that we can use to dress that place, when you enter there, culturally when you enter that place you will marvel at the appearance"



Reduce stress, peace of mind:
Clear your mind to make informed decisions, escape conflicts in the home, speak freely

"Sometimes I just want to sit at a quiet place and think about my future because this place is chaotic and noisy, sometimes you need a serene place so that you can think"

"There is a Twi expression that says, 'buildings have ears', it is nice to have the free space with nature around and to speak"



Excitement, joy, learning:
Hands-on learning of natural/agricultural practices, uptake new knowledge, see something new, creative inspiration

"You cannot just see mango every blessed day, so when I see different types of trees the way it is formed, the creativity of nature is more appreciated"

"It helps me in my talent. It's beautiful because when the leaves dry you will get different colours. So, if I see different colours, I want to do a cocktail to resemble the same colour"



Social cohesion, equality, opportunity:

Togetherness in nature, people are on the same level, network for jobs, share knowledge

"Sometimes you may find yourself in the company of people, you may think that this one is higher than me in terms of thought, when you get to these spaces then your thoughts are the only ones that you are focusing on and you feel like everything is OK, everything is fine"

"You find yourself at such places, you may even meet someone who will tell you they want a plumber or an electrician"



Aesthetic beauty:

Beautiful places bring happiness, pride in the community, sense of modern development, self-confidence

"It is sort of the same as when you dress nice you feel more confident. When you work in such a place it gives some sort of morale"

"Those who have flowers in their houses are mostly recognized as special people"



Memories, place attachment:

Symbol for the community, repository of memories, rural homes and relationships

"If you go to Zongo most of the people are northerners or Muslims, they find something that connects to where they are coming from. So, I think I am the same, but with having nature around"

"That particular tree has been growing all day, and even though they've tried cutting it down, they were not successful because it's very strong. Since then, it has been a symbolic tree for the community"

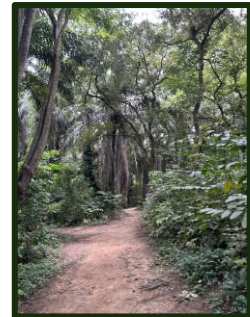


Stewards to God's creation:

Duty to protect God's earth, nature as a conduit to God

"You feel as if you are in heaven, this place is indeed very beautiful. At first, God built this universe full of flowers and trees without any buildings"

"The first living thing God created was a plant. So today if we call ourselves Christians or Muslims when you plant a tree, your blessings in heaven are multiples. So why don't we use the same religion as a tool of education or awareness. If you really want to practice your religion you must connect with nature, because the fundamentals of man started in a garden"



Recommendations:

- One tree, one place can bring multiple benefits to different people
- Small actions can have large impacts on your community's health and wellbeing
- Not everyone can access the Palace or Rattray Park frequently, but everyday nature can bring peace, provide space to meet others, provide medicinal resources etc.
- The 'Garden City' was a British design – now make it your own, **use nature to address your needs**
- Save fruit seeds for replanting, low-cost option
- Minimise deforestation, encourage leaders to manage issues rather than simply remove trees

- Hold community meetings in nature, show nature as being an important part of everyday community life
- Bring curiosity: share stories and knowledge, even if one person is encouraged it is a success.
- Ask a neighbour who migrated from a rural village on how nature is treated differently there – learn from each other
- Agriculture helps people respect nature, pass on stories and practices you learnt from your (grand)parents to your children
- Discuss with your community leader a space to leave for nature, for people to freely attend. Request a small space to be undeveloped
- Climate change is worsening; trees, bushes, and flowers will help you manage your environment, to protect your community
- Practice your religion by protecting God's creation