



DEMBENI (FR)

Between Mangrove and Informal Settlements: An Architecture of Ecology?

Echelle
XL/L

Team Composition: Architect mandatory
Location: Dembeni (976)
Population: City: 15,848 inhabitants, Metropolitan Area: 87,285 inhabitants
Study Site: 83 ha (Dembeni)
Project Sites: 11 ha (Iloni Mangrove District)
Proposed by: EPFAM (Public Land Establishment of Mayotte) and CADEMA (Dembeni Mamoudzou Agglomeration Community)
Owner(s): Department/State

Post-competition mission: Design studies, urban and landscape project management, overall project supervision.



SITE / CONTEXT

Located in the municipality of Dembeni, on the eastern coast of Mayotte, the site extends along National Road 3 (RN3). Characterized by informal urbanization, it presents a mosaic of self-built dwellings, ranging from simple tin-roofed « bangas » to multi-story concrete houses. Often constructed in high-risk areas and near protected natural spaces, these buildings exhibit a gradual decline in quality as they extend away from the main road towards the mangrove.

Covering 11 hectares, the area serves as a strategic link between the University of Mayotte, the Tsararano-Dembeni mixed-use development zone (planned for 2,600 housing units), and the mangrove ecosystems. It comprises several neighborhoods: Irashi and Mouhokoni in Dembeni, Manyasini and Minadzini in Iloni, all characterized by informal housing. Mapping of the area reveals a stark contrast between a structured urban core and an extensive natural zone, where substandard housing is concentrated—particularly in Manyasini, which in 2017 had 249 dwellings in high-risk areas out of a total of 310.

The passage of Cyclone Chido on December 14 highlighted the site's resilience. The cyclone's eye passed during low tide, and the mangrove's protective role helped reduce its impact on the neighborhood. Informal structures were quickly rebuilt, while concrete buildings, with their flat roofs and low height, demonstrated greater resistance. However, certain infrastructures, particularly schools, suffered more significant damage.

This event underscores the urgent need to integrate resilience strategies against natural hazards into urban planning. Positioned at the intersection of development challenges and ecological preservation, Dembeni represents a testing ground for urbanization models that foster a sustainable coexistence between sensitive natural ecosystems and human habitation.



How can existing neighborhoods be structured while preserving the mangrove and minimizing natural risks?



QUESTIONS FOR COMPETITORS

At the scale of the study site: how can the interfaces between inhabited and natural areas be reorganized to promote resilient urbanization adapted to local socio-cultural dynamics?
What rehabilitation strategies can be implemented in neighborhoods located in high-risk natural hazard zones?

At the scale of the project site: how can mangrove spaces be sustainably reintegrated into the urban fabric while fostering an inclusive approach for residents?
How can innovative solutions be designed to rehouse populations with dignity while enhancing the natural heritage?

This site invites participants to redefine intervention methods for precarious housing by combining architectural innovation, bioclimatic solutions, and the restoration of fragile ecosystems.

Teams will be expected to propose solutions that align with an urban resilience approach and a co-construction process with local communities.



How can synergies between natural dynamics and human needs be established?
With which housing typologies?