The Habitat Project
Maputo, Mozambique

Challenge
Informal settlements, defined by UN Habitat as residential areas where a group of housing units has been constructed on land to which the occupants have no legal claim or which they occupy illegally, are spreading. Living in these settlements poses significant health risks due to a lack of sanitation and sewage facilities, food storage and poor water supply. Non-compliance with planning and building regulations results in unsafe housing conditions, and often fire-fighting vehicles and ambulances are unable to pass through the narrow street networks.

Contribution
According to the Spanish NGO Arquitectura Sin Fronteras, 48% of the residents in Maputo’s informal settlements are vulnerable and exposed to health risks. They lack clean water and sanitation in the overcrowded and non-durable dwellings, and they are not able to get access to state-granted land rights (DUAT). The Habitat Project’s main goal is to ensure residents their land rights. In a partnership with public authorities, the NGO Water & Sanitation for the Urban Poor, and local partners, Arquitectura Sin Fronteras has worked to ensure residents their right to habitation as well as helping the settlements develop so that they can function as accessible neighbourhoods. This is done through a method called “6 steps to DUAT”, that seeks access to land through involvement processes and negotiation between public authorities (who own the land legally) and residents. As part of the process, residents renounce parts of their informal plots in order to obtain legal rights to a portion of the land. Consequently, a tool to establish legal borders and a legal framework is put in place, which makes it possible to establish streets with adequate widths and functional public spaces. Through this method, several neighbourhoods in Chamanculo, a part of Maputo, have obtained DUAT and seen a revival of the streetscape as a social space.

Architecture Sans Frontières International is a network of independent non-profit organisations that enables vulnerable communities to access architectural services, research and educational resources. Collaboration involves organisational, political and practical levels, and includes a wide range of professional fields.