



PLAY AFRICA

DESIGNING WITH CHILDREN

A CREATIVE APPROACH
TO RE-IMAGINING CITIES
AND COMMUNITIES

Designing with children: A creative approach to re-imagining cities and communities, v.1

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HISTORY OF PLAY AFRICA



HOW TO USE THIS TOOLKIT

You may choose to read and download the entire document, or choose the sections that are relevant to you. Parts 1-4 will guide you in conducting the Play Africa designed workshop “Designing with Children”. Part 5 provides additional context and learning to deepen perspectives on play.

Part 1 - Planning a Workshop

These documents will assist you in planning the workshop “Designing With Children”. Read this section to prepare your space, group, and materials.

Part 2 - Running a Workshop

This is the workshop curriculum “Designing with Children”. Here you will find suggested activities, timelines and scripts.

In Parts 1 and 2 there are references to additional documents available in [Workshop Documents](#) or [Safety of Children](#).

Documents found in Part 3 are highlighted in orange

🔗 [Documenting Children’s Thinking](#)

Documents found in Part 4 are highlighted in purple.

🔗 [Risk Mitigation Form](#)

This Toolkit has been designed for children broadly from 7-12 years old. However, we’ve found that it’s been useful and easy to adapt for children in high school and beyond.

Part 3 - Workshop Documents

We have created some materials to aid in the implementation of the workshop. Please feel free to adapt them to your needs.

Part 4 - Safety of Children

Here you will find an adaptable child safety policy, as well as other safety documents such as consent forms, a risk mitigation template and a photo/media release form.

Part 5 - Learning Materials

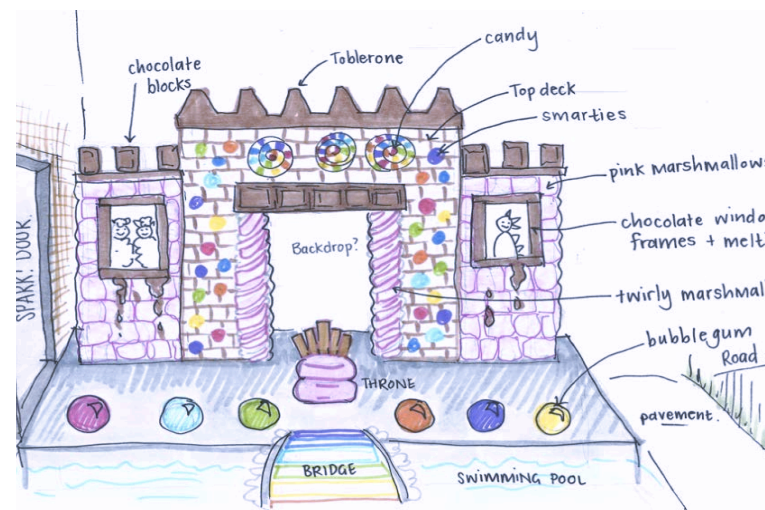
This part is divided into two sections. The first section is a collection of [Thought Leadership](#) pieces from various practitioners engaging in placemaking in Africa and around the globe. The second section is a [History of Play Africa](#) and Play Africa’s experience in participatory placemaking with children.

REAL PLAY CITY CHALLENGE

Play Africa was awarded a “Special Mention” in the Real Play City Challenge: Placemakers 2020-2021. The global challenge, conducted by the Real Play Coalition and PlacemakingX, encourages organisations to scale-up child-friendly urban practices.

Play Africa won the special mention for its programme called “Our Ideal World”. This flexible workshop for children between the ages of 7 and 12 uses an adaptation of the design-thinking process used by The Hasso Plattner Institute of Design at Stanford University (commonly known as the d.school) to teach children creative problem solving. It is a powerful opportunity to invite children’s participation in the creation of solutions to local neighbourhood challenges to create more child-friendly, safer, playful cities and communities. Through the workshop, children are also introduced to problem solving, creativity, critical thinking, and other 21st-century skills required for careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and maths). We utilised this programme as a base from which to develop this toolkit.

While the potential is to scale this programme globally, our focus was on replication in South Africa and Africa with a view to engender more child-friendly, safe and playful cities.

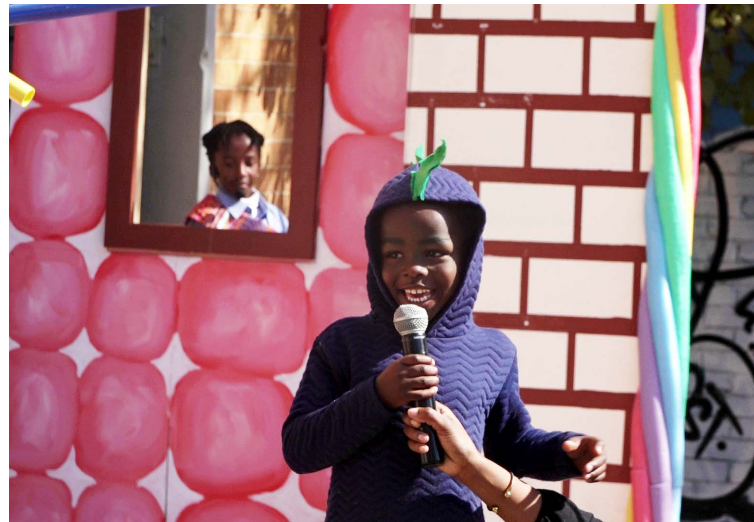
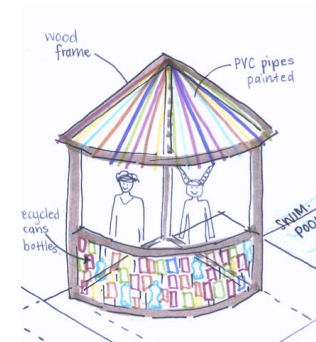


For the pilot phase in 2021, we developed the virtual toolkit, and then partnered with four organisations who tested our curriculum and materials by facilitating a workshop in their own context. We supported these partners with high-quality training and technical assistance in implementation.

WHY A TOOLKIT?

We developed this toolkit to build the capacity of placemakers, educators and others to lead a participatory workshop to positively influence the development of more child-friendly, safe and playful urban environments, with a focus on African cities and towns.

Toolkits are a collection of authoritative and adaptable resources for practitioners that enable them to learn new ways of doing things. Because they support implementation by new people, and people who are learning as they go, toolkits help translate theory into practice, providing for flexibility and local adaptation.



THE POWER OF PLAY

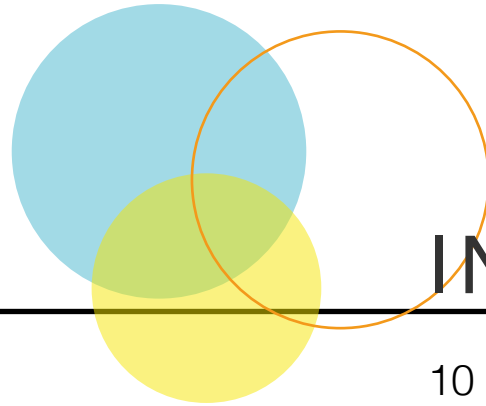
Play Africa believes all children are strong, curious, creative and capable. We believe children can, and do, shape their own learning, particularly when they are provided with safe, nurturing and stimulating play environments, materials and provocations that invite them to lead their own learning.

As an innovative children's museum, we leverage public spaces for children's play and learning. Our methodology to empower children to use design thinking and prototyping in our placemaking efforts helps ensure our processes and interventions are locally relevant, catalytic and drive impact in our city.

Our initiative can help promote and amplify the Real Play Coalition Framework and The City at Eye Level for Kids Framework, and help local governments, urban planners and citizens identify and respond to the causes and effects of lack of play in cities.

In partnership with others, we can help cities become more playful and inclusive for optimal child development. Together, we can help families, schools, communities and city officials understand the power of play in a child's life.





INTRODUCTION

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DESIGN THINKING FOR CHILDREN



Why include children in design?

Children all over the world, and in particular in many African countries, face challenges that can jeopardise their development. Some of these environmental challenges in African cities are a result of the remnants of colonial pasts coupled with continued neglect that leaves them with few resources.

While there is great positive momentum for designing child-friendly spaces in communities all over the world, few of these are in Africa and even fewer make use of approaches involving children's participation in the design process. Without disregard for existing African contributors to this discourse, Play Africa believes there is a great need for more contextualised research, precedents and advocacy for child-friendly placemaking and approaches. This guide aims to not only advocate for child-friendly placemaking, but also amplify existing voices and work within this discourse, while offering you

an approach that encourages you to design WITH children and empower these young change-makers.

Play Africa's extensive experience working with children in a variety of communities and settings has resulted in the expertise used to provide you with guidance you will need to empower children to become full participants in their own development and that of their communities. Our guide includes a workshop that provides a step-by-step process to allow children to provide meaningful input about their communities.

Child-friendly environments designed without children's input often only offer adult perceptions of what they should be like and deny children the opportunity of creatively solving the problems they face. Ultimately, spaces designed for children benefit the entire community.



AN AFRICAN PERSPECTIVE

Play Africa brings a unique perspective to the larger conversation of placemaking and child-friendly cities. However, much of the global conversations around this are occurring in the “Global North” while leaving out a continent of 1.2 billion people. Many African countries are rapidly urbanising, and currently, 40% of the population of the continent is aged 15 or younger. With greater populations living in cities that may not have planned for a population boom, and riddled with remnants of a colonial past, community groups, planners and thinkers are considering the futures of African cities.

Looking at Africa through the lens of *Ubuntu*, which can be described as a concept in African philosophy that asserts “I am because we are”, this guide aims to offer a placemaking ethos that builds onto this thinking by putting children at the core of community-centredness. Recognising the tango between this humanist philosophy and the design-thinking process gives the opportunity for spatial strategies that transcend Eurocentric ideals and allow for a new African, postcolonial urbanity to emerge. Play Africa also recognises that the scarcity of guides and approaches contextualised to Africa with regard to placemaking with and for children creates a challenge for urban actors to effectively transform African urban spaces into child-friendly spaces. It is also important to note that Play Africa realises that within Africa there is great diversity. This guide aims to bring an African perspective that may be adaptable to various countries in Africa and other developing countries.



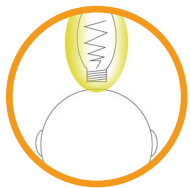
WHO IS THIS WORKSHOP FOR?

This workshop is designed with educators and urban practitioners in mind, but can be adapted by anyone working with children and youth. In this toolkit, we want to show placemakers how they can lead a playful, participatory process with children using lighter, quicker and smarter placemaking principles to develop solutions by, and with, the community, including children.



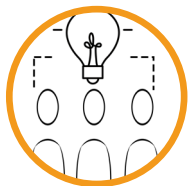
ARCHITECTS, CITY PLANNERS, URBAN ACTORS IN AFRICAN CITIES

This is an opportunity to include children's voices in your work. When was the last time you made child-friendly spaces reflecting factors not only as proposed by professionals but as experienced by and desired by children too? Use this handbook to gather children's voices and engage children in the process of placemaking and realising more inclusive, playful and equitable cities.



DESIGN THINKERS

Design thinking is a creative way to solve problems. Now apply that thinking in the challenge of making cities playful and child friendly. Help children learn the design-thinking process that is vital in effective problem solving.



EDUCATORS

Empower students to develop key 21st-century skills like critical thinking and problem-solving skills through design thinking.



ADVOCATES FOR CHILDREN

You already advocate for children to be full participants in a democratic society, now give them the tools to make their own spaces. Teaching children to actively participate in the development of their physical living environment can plant the seeds for them to grow into active contributors in various aspects of the development of their country.



COMMUNITY GROUPS

Children are an integral part of the community and should be included in community support and improvement agendas. Good community environments empower children by uplifting their voices and giving them freedom beyond their home environments. Use this handbook to help children make choices about their spaces.



PARENTS/GUARDIANS

The primary focus of any Play Africa programme is always children. However, we always invite and encourage parents/guardians to observe, if not also participate with, their child. Observe your child participating in an innovative workshop and gain new insights into your child's thoughts. In this way, we find that parents enjoy gaining new insight into their children outside of the home.

KEY PRACTICES FOR FACILITATORS

These are the ways that facilitators can help and empower children to get the most out of this workshop:



Invite and **empower** children to share their thoughts of their community



Use the design thinking process to **gather** children's voices for community development



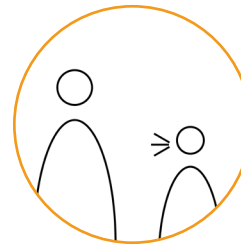
Empower children on how to **solve problems** using design thinking



Engage your community to create playful spaces for children



Utilise the curriculum to inspire the **inclusion** of children in city planning

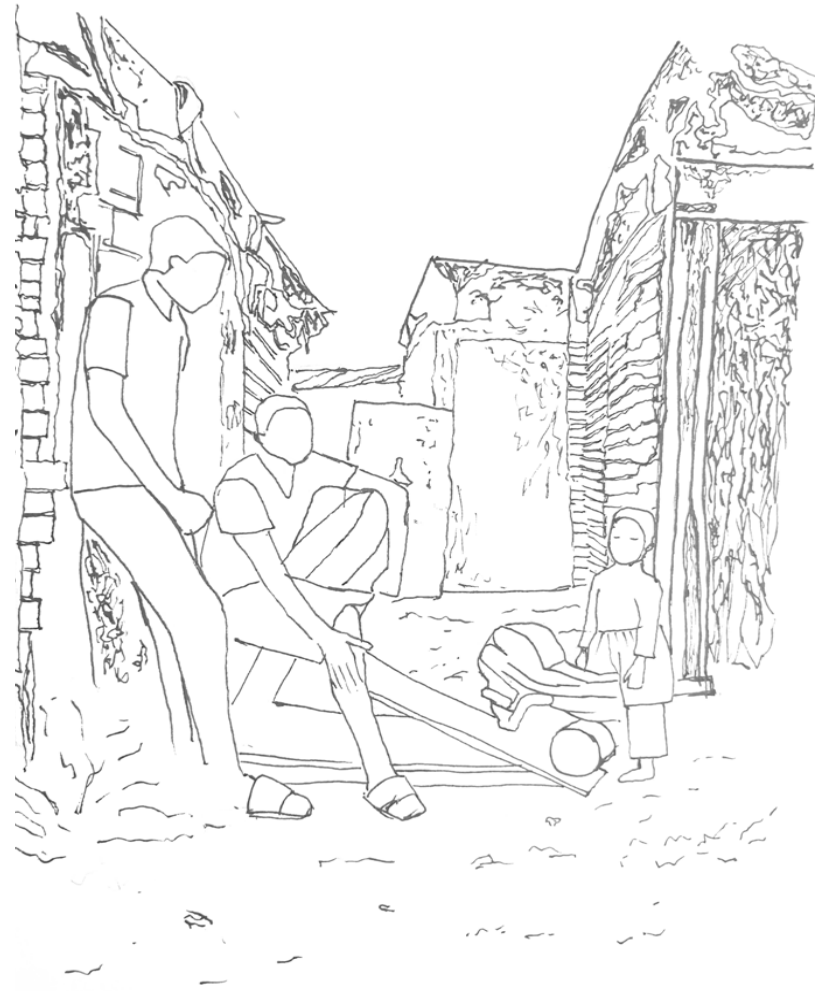


Start conversations about **including** children's voices in community planning

WHAT IS PLACEMAKING?

Placemaking is the process in which spaces are turned into places. These processes are embedded in a wide range of practices. Paramount to placemaking is the consideration of exploring the practice and discipline of architecture beyond expert culture. Transcending expert culture is not about the destruction of expert knowledge, but rather opting for more mindful ways in which expert work can enable the very people and places it serves. Expert work can be disabling in that it denies people their potential to take control over circumstances that take place in or impact their lives. Transcending expert culture sets placemaking within critical practice and pedagogy, extending the value and potential of the field's contribution to cultural production.

Bringing an African perspective is essential to effectively implementing child-friendly environments in African contexts. Many existing guides and knowledge on this area of discourse is contextualised to the Global North which tend to cause difficulty in the effective implementation in African contexts. Many African countries remain riddled with the remnants of colonial pasts and have fewer resources compared to other contexts. Promoting an African perspective helps bring about an approach to placemaking that challenges the high-risk of sub-optimal development that children growing up in Africa face due to the environmental factors within their context.



WHY USE DESIGN THINKING IN PLACEMAKING?

The key benefit of using the design-thinking process in placemaking is the first step: empathise. What one outside of the community may see as a problem may differ from what one inside the community sees as an issue. Empathising first requires one to spend time with the community to fully understand the issues at hand. Additionally, following steps of prototyping can also be cost effective; what looks good on paper might not work in real life. The mindset of using design thinking suggests that projects may take multiple iterations before being completed.

Why should children use design thinking?

Children can benefit from learning the design thinking process early and often. The process of following distinct steps encourages planning and regulation, which are key skills for young children. Furthermore, the process of ideating, prototyping and testing demonstrate to children that the first idea might not be the best, but that it's important to go back and try again. Persistence, along with the 21st-century skills of collaboration, communication and creativity, are all developed through design thinking.

The image below is included as a printable poster in Section 3 Workshop Documents

