

Refinement Stage Idea: MAP(Market & Park) Alliance for Kids

Responses to Questions from the Amplify Team

Q: Can you tell us a little more about how community members are engaged in the existing park? How have you attracted families to participate?

A: Brief context: Mmofra Foundation has served children 0 to 16 in Ghana with [cultural enrichment and literacy programming](#) for two decades, earning along the way a strong record with families plus about 60 schools and other communities. This trust and social capital transfers readily to the park (the new "home" for the org's programs, which until a year ago were held outdoors in a nearby donated space).

The majority of our children come from lower middle class and urban poor backgrounds. For example, five children who have absolutely thrived on our programs are the children of a kiosk trader, a driver and a fruit stand owner across the street. These are parents who can literally see the growth in their children.

A charrette we hosted in 2012 brought the park to the attention of some residents of the city who have remained engaged as an informal "friends of the park", and donors of services. This includes architects, horticulturists, artists, artisans, builders, theatre and other arts groups.. An engineering company next door has partnered to donate their composing toilet, building and aquaponics technologies. Adults, teenagers and older children volunteer as helpers, painters, builders and animators. The **albums** on our [Facebook page](#) tell great visual stories of community participation.

We think of the park as locally grounded but also globally crowdsourced - from the very beginning we also reached out online for collaborators. A very special element of this is the support from our "virtual community" who have given us early encouragement - <http://mmofraghana.org/playtime-in-africa/playtime-in-africa-and-the-power-of-we/>

Q: How could a park like this be sustainable? How might you incentive local residents to maintain and improve it? What other uses are there for the park that might help maintain it? (e.g. markets, events, etc.)

A: The park is a CBO/NGO project and all its income will be plowed back into its development/maintenance/programs. A 2013 collaborative study we conducted with a Masters level team from the Technical University of Delft recommended that the park operate on a combination of sponsorship, fee structures, in-kind support and alternative arrangements in order to continue to serve all children. Sponsorship by companies, donors, etc, will enable children from low-income households to use the park "free". We are thinking of designing donor recognition elements into the landscape, for example in paving or wall bricks, etc. We are also thinking of creative ways in which children can "earn" access within the park - for example, through periodic campaigns to incentivize them to collect and bring in a certain amount of plastic "waste", or to form a

school volunteer squad to help maintain the site. (1/05/05 update) No child has ever been turned away from our high quality cultural programs in almost two decades. Most of the children we serve would fall into the category of urban poor / lower middle class.

The fee structure may apply to special events (e.g. master classes, workshops, tours, exhibits, fairs, vacation programs, etc); private events (e.g. birthdays, private schools, compatible adult events including health&fitness/meditation/retreat/day seminar/activities) book or art club).

Because it is a pioneering venture in child-friendly design in urban Ghana, the park will be ideal for undergraduate/graduate academic interest in fields like ECD, sustainable design, public health, urbanism, STEM learning, play, art residencies, and more.

Q: *Have you considered income generating activities may encourage community ownership of the park, thus ensuring responsibility for its upkeep is shared and prioritized in the community?*

A: We're thinking the market mothers participation in planning children's market day may be one of several innovative ways to encourage community ownership for responsible upkeep.

Q: *Why is a park uniquely well placed to spread messages and behavior change?*

A: The park is uniquely well placed as a site with space for both free play and room to design, demonstrate and explain (i.e. show and tell) solutions for urgent urban problems of water, sanitation, energy, nutrition, environment (Hence the original title, the "Full Service Park"). A large percentage of urban children have inadequate sanitation facilities. Their water and power supplies are often unreliable and they may be in polluted environments. Hands-on experience of these solutions in creative and playful ways has a very powerful impact - in the first instance for immediate respite, and also to spark and feed the curiosity impulse early, about things that will matter a lot in their lifetimes. (Updated 1/05/05) Because we do not have a culture of regular park use by large numbers of families, one carefully designed space like this one could readily become a hub to which people are attracted.

Q: *You mention that toolkits are the key to your idea – why is that? What would your toolkits be on? How would you ensure that they are utilized by the parents and children that take them*

A: This question was in relation to the original prototyping focus on WASH. It's still very relevant to the broad notion of the "shared park" which is a welcoming physical space to enjoy and also a place of creative activity and demonstration of workable models. We cannot stress enough that very little design activity focuses on the needs and interests of the majority of city residents who experience inadequate facilities. We believe that solving for children frequently solves for everyone.

Toolkits are a means to share the benefits of a multi-purpose park widely. Two examples: (a) Toolkits for PLAY - The cable spool micro-playspace and the innovative play structure Agoro! were developed at Mmofra Place's maker space. A set of full instructions/infographics for construction could be made available to anyone who would like to reproduce these particular modules from the park in their community. Toolkits for HEALTH / NUTRITION - Parents and caregivers should be able to take away simple visual brochures explaining how (for example) composting toilets, solar energy, urban gardens, aquaponics systems work and how they may be made, or who to contact for help. A parent who learns from their child how a clean, micro flush composting toilet works well at the park might be interested to know how to acquire such a low-cost sanitation solution for their own household. Similarly, a demonstration aquaponics system growing fish and vegetables in a small space, serves as a great feature in the natural landscape for hands-on discovery, and also might be an important way for a community of households to think about augmenting their nutrition. In our specific stressed urban conditions, we believe that residents will be highly motivated to explore these solutions/ alternatives for the sake of their children. These particular examples of course are targeted at adults for the benefit of the children in their homes/communities. If a record is kept of who takes a toolkit, some of them can be followed up on, and incentives can be provided for families who commit to reporting back. In the early stages of Mmofra Place (mmofra=children), the engineering company next door has partnered to donate their composting toilet, building and aquaponics technologies. Many of their trainees visit the park to see how these are being used, and will adopt them for use in their own communities.

Q: *What is the rough timeline for the cycles that you are proposing for this prototype?*

A: We're thinking 3 two-week cycles for a total of 6 weeks - could be shorter, with the head-start we've made on the first cycle.

Responses to Questions from the OpenIDEO community

(Some questions on the same topic may be grouped together)

Question: *Seeing the conditions in which impoverished children are playing in Accra, in contrast to what this type of urban renewal/ park development project can afford them is striking. The article points out that there are organized teams and community efforts in the slum which is great. Imagine what the possibilities are once your park is developed and can become a prototype for others? What do you think?*

Answer: I certainly see the power of contrasting images, though I'm hesitant to use the word "impoverished" without explaining that when it comes to accessible and thoughtfully designed green space, urban children of all income levels are *impoverished* - consider the "privileged" child in the gated, burglar proofed concrete townhouse who has even less connection to nature than the "poor" child outdoors. There is an interesting discussion to be had on the nuances of "low-income" and "low resource", don't you think?

Question: *I'm curious to learn about your interest in scalability of your project. Besides the initial pilot park, do you have plans to build more parks in Accra or in other parts of Ghana (even other parts of Africa)? If you intend to build more parks, what is your strategy- do you aim to acquire land that is not currently in use or existing parks? What partnerships do you need to help your project reach scale? Lastly, what does success look like at the end of your project? I imagine you could select indicators for success based on the WASH project, but what about usage of the park overall?*

Answer: We are not intending to acquire land for more parks - our focus is on the thoughtful design of our current project so that its successes can be shared in new parks or to revive existing ones. As an example, we were recently contacted by a road construction company about the possibility of collaborating on playground design in some of the communities they will be impacting.

We've played a leadership role in advocating for the revival of children's parks in Ghana (a national children's park and library system established in four locations in the 1980's had virtually collapsed by the 2000's). FYI we hosted the first ever Tweetchat on parks in Ghana last month and will continue to do so periodically

<<http://ghanaparks.tumblr.com/archive>>

The partnerships most likely to help us reach scale will be with corporations, donor agencies and foundations who have a bold, culturally sensitive commitment to

community development and are willing to sustain a relationship over a period of time. This year, for example, a German Embassy grant to host a climate education exhibition on our site has enabled us to put in basic infrastructure in a starter solar power unit, a borehole water source and filter system, water tanks and a set of bio-digester toilets. (Updated 1/05/15 Another example would be the partnership between [Sabre Trust and ARUP](#) to build sustainably designed kindergartens in rural Ghana).

The successful park will attract children and families of all backgrounds in the city and will be at least 50% self-financing. It will be run by full-time staff including a program coordinator, plus a committed corps of volunteers, and will be open at least 5 days a week. It will have elements of a botanical garden and a children's museum, in flexible outdoor and indoor spaces where the arts and science intersect. Its features will clearly be inspired by local culture but will also incorporate best practices globally. Hopefully, it will always be a work in progress!

Question: *I was thinking that in addition to the toolkits you plan to create to share with families in the park creating a toolkit based on your experiences building the park might be a fantastic contribution for others who would like to learn from your experiences. Has your group considered this?*

Answer: We've "met" Yann and his colleague at ImaginationAfrika via social media, and we admire their work! The Creative Confidence Challenge does have great overlaps with our mission. I've been looking for someone/team who might help to create a toolkit (with beautiful botanical drawings!) on planting for play in Africa - in our environment what plants are best suited for parks? What grows fast? Which plants repel mosquitoes and snakes? Which are toxic for kids? How can plants mitigate high salt content in soil? Which plants might fascinate children (e.g. the huge fruit of the calabash tree, or seeds that explode when they come into contact with water). How to recognize medicinal plants and trees like mahogany and neem?

Some documentation is happening through the academic design/build studies we've engaged in with two teams of the Technical University of Delft Masters Project students(2012/2013) and this year's NC State undergrad studio (see their report in the attached pdf titled Playtime in Africa links).

Question: *Regarding the toolkit you mention above - is there a local art/design college where you might recruit artists and/or graphic designers who can do the illustrations? I wonder if there is a way to include children in this process using their drawings of these plants, snakes, fruit, seeds?*

Answer:

Answer: Children's participation in toolkit production is a must! We can even make it a facilitated art project for our regular monthly kid sessions at the park. The curators of the Foundation for Contemporary Art in Accra are amazing park partners and would certainly be able to find artists to help.

Question: *How you will address issues about park maintenance for sustainability? Do you have CBOs or government departments to draw on for this?*

Answer: Park maintenance is certainly an issue. One of our early strategies has been to establish a culture of responsible use through modeling and reinforcement. There are other CBO's whose efforts we follow, but no government departments (other than occasionally seeking informal advice from the Dept. of parks and Gardens). Can you think of successful models we might explore?

Question: *Do you have any thoughts on commercial ventures in the park that can be developed to help sustain the project?:*

Answer: (See answer to a similar question in the Amplify Team Q&A). We envisage a Children's Market as an annual event on the city calendar, and also hosting paid events like the ones you suggest but also perhaps compatible adult events (with solar power on site and mosquito control strategies) . The art elements of the park are being carefully designed with a view to programming themed tours of indigenous and contemporary African art traditions - these may be selectively fee-based. With almost no other well-planned natural environment for children in Accra, this park could be a destination in the city. Also, perhaps organically grown vegetables and high value cut flowers may be possible. The much larger scale Eden Project in Cornwall, England, is a model we can learn from.

Question: *Many children growing up in urban environments here in the US have never seen a vegetable grow in the ground. With the development of school and urban gardens this is changing. Is this similar in Ghana?*

Answer: Sadly, yes. In just two generations we've seen huge deficits in connection to nature and in the transmission of oral / material culture.

Question: *Would love to hear about the WASH programming that you mention is up and running in the park. Do you have any photos?*

Answer: The WASH solutions are possible b/c of the 80 meter borehole recently dug on the site as a water source independent of (unreliable) city water. Ground water in Accra at even up to 10 meters is generally thought to be contaminated with raw sewage. With

a reverse osmosis system, the brackish water will be potable and can be used for site irrigation - hooray! In the meantime we are using hands-free "Tippy Taps" which are working well - <http://goo.gl/D3tmz5>.

Commercial ventures must be a necessary part of strategic planning. We envisage a Children's Market as an annual event on the city calendar, and also hosting paid events like the ones you suggest but also perhaps compatible adult events (with solar power on site and mosquito control strategies) . The art elements of the park are being carefully designed with a view to programming themed tours of indigenous and contemporary African art traditions - these may be selectively fee-based.

Urban gardening learning labs for teachers/facilitators will include commercial gardeners from low-resource communities as leaders - we showcase the skills and knowledge that exist within slums but are often undervalued....most urban market gardeners are rural migrants. See here <<http://mmofraghana.org/playtime-in-africa/garden-play-accra/>> and also here <<http://mmofraghana.org/mmofra-news-and-events/urban-garden-is-living-classroom/>>.

Urban children in Ghana are experiencing many of the same deficits as children in developed countries (e.g. detachment from food sources) but very little attention is paid to redressing these.

Question: *We are wondering how you will ensure continuity of participation of the people such as mothers who are obtained from the market place? How do you plan to sustain this idea?*

Answer: In the first instance, we will rely on direct connections to gain trust with key individual women in the marketplace who have some influence. Getting the buy-in of the association of market women responsible for what happens within the market would be very useful. Continued participation is expected to be at both the market and the park. Our experience over almost two decades is that positive experiences carried by word of mouth can result in very solid loyalty to our programs. Some strategies we are considering are:

- Taking the project to where the traders work - a key factor, since their children will be there anyway.
- Making participation profitable. For example, some vendors can become suppliers of materials, food, etc, to the park. Can you help us with any ideas for incentivizing the mothers?

Question: *Would it be possible to include mothers in your trips from the market to the park? Recognizing that they need to work perhaps suggesting to them or asking them if they ever cover for each other at the market - a cooperative of sorts where a mom can leave her post for a few hours in the care of a colleague? If they plan in advance might this be possible?*

Answer: *Inclusion of market-based parents(vast majority are mothers)* - the 3rd cycle aspiration is to "create place together". Therefore, it will be very strategic to have at least one trader, possibly two, deliver the order we make for their wares personally to the park (cycle 2) where they can see for themselves what is possible, and carry the story back to the market.

The process is likely to reveal skills that the mothers have but need invitations to express - in artisanship, oral culture, music and dance . A great example would be the tradition of mural-making on household walls which is a women's art in Northern Ghana where many of the traders at Malata have migrated from. Also, many are probably wonderful storytellers in their own right. How fantastic would it be to ultimately put the art of the women of the market into the park!

We're sure some mothers would love to be chaperones, but we suggested the older sibling option in order to be sensitive to the economic realities - these are after all micro - to - medium business owners and even a few hours absence might make a difference to their bottom line. A practical option would simply be to ask the liaison trader to find out who might be able to chaperone, and on what terms that might be possible. Also, the kind of chaperone may determine which age group goes on the field trip. Absent a mother, the best age range for the test run may be 3 - 6.

Healthy snacks - important! This could be another business opportunity for someone in the market to supply yummy healthy snacks like akara (fried black-eyed bean cakes) or groundnuts or millet drinks.