

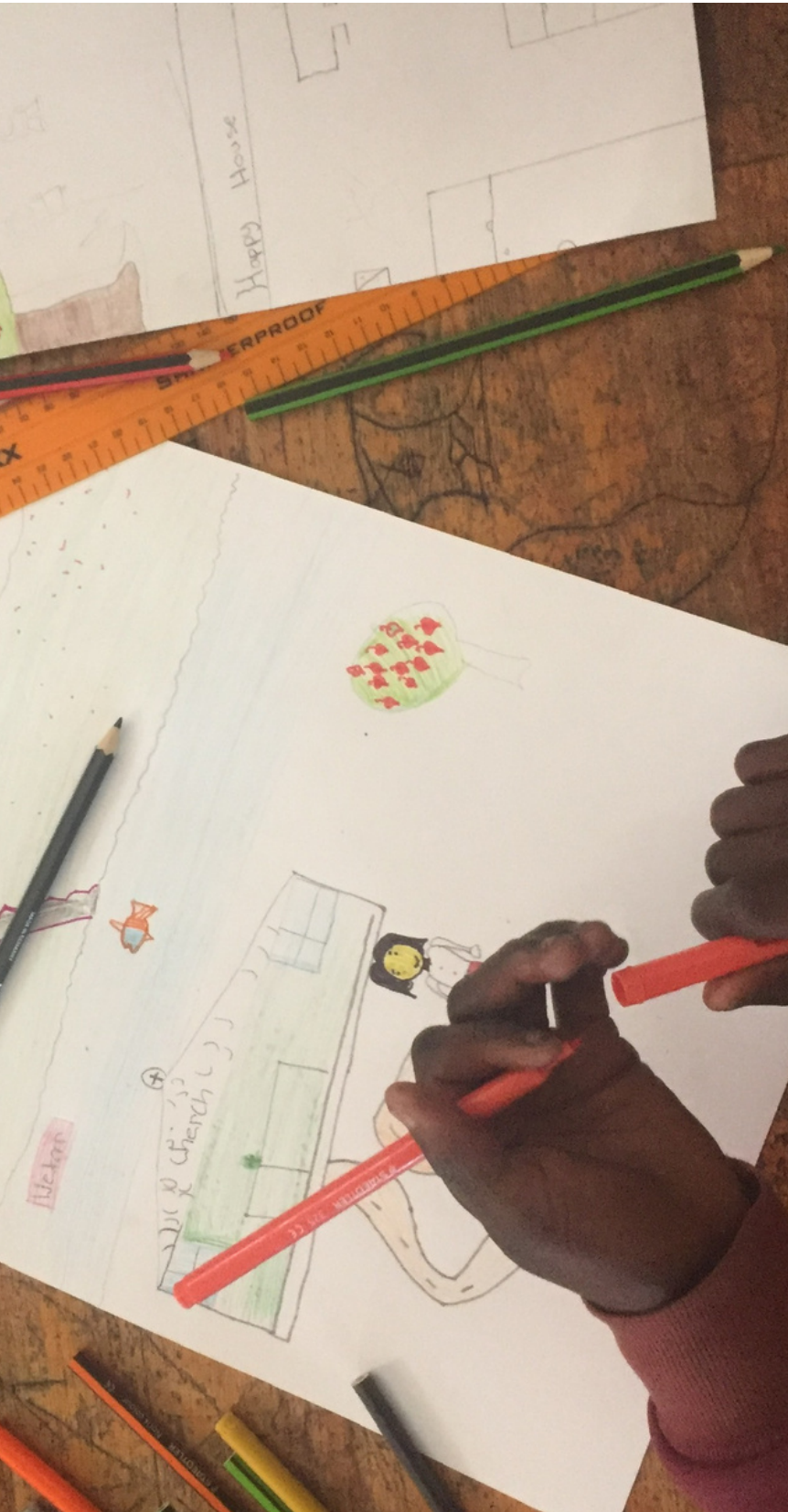
# A Child Centered Approach to Urban Resilience Research:

*participatory, art-based research with children from an under resourced urban community*

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# CONTENTS



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**03**

ABSTRACT

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**04**

INTRODUCTION

---

**07**

RESEARCH APPROACH  
AND METHODS

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**10**

CONCLUSION

---

**15**

RECOMMENDATIONS

---

**18**

BUDGET

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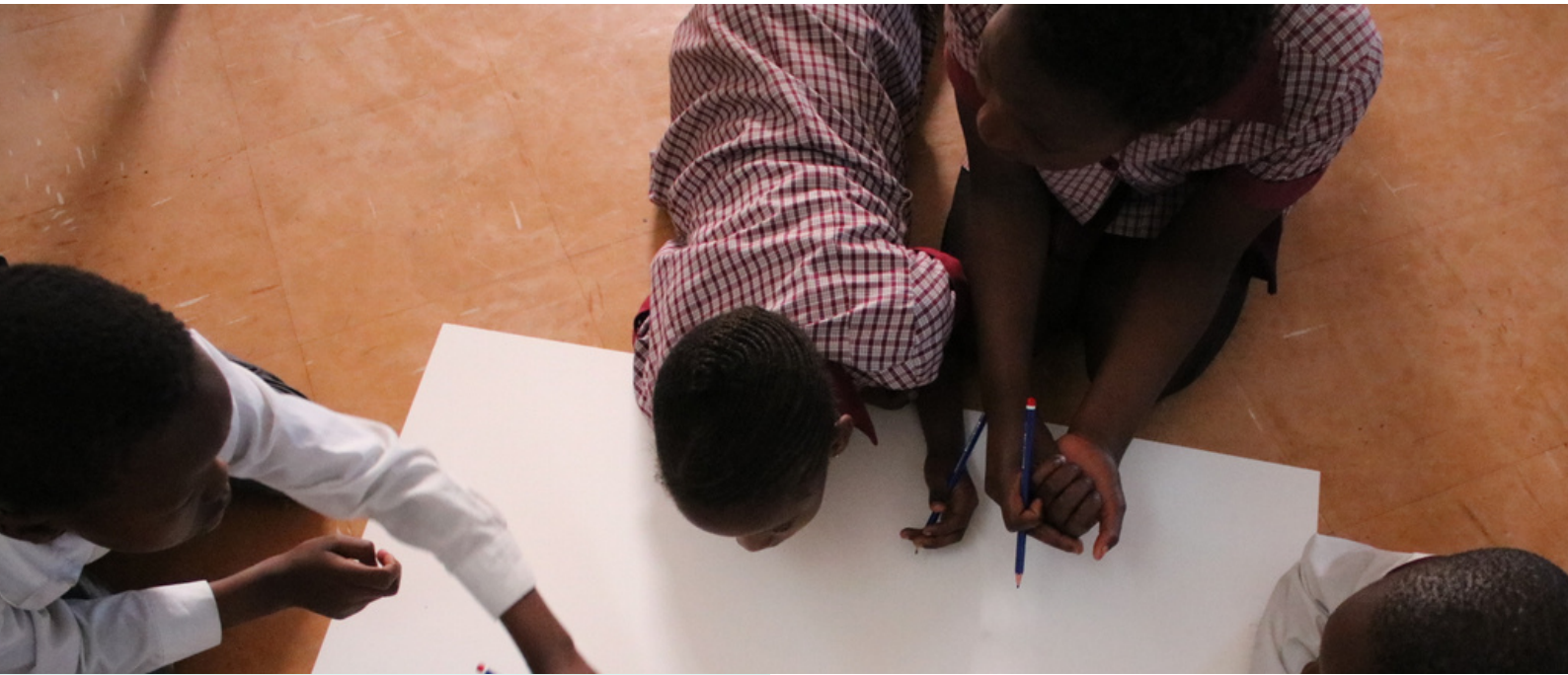
**19**

LIST OF REFERENCES

# ABSTRACT

Children's voices are underrepresented in research for resilience planning (Derr et al, 2018; Derr, Corona & Gülgönen, 2019; van Vliet, Chawla & Derr, 2017). However, social research methods that are often used with adults might not be as appropriate for understanding the lived experiences and views of children (Mort et al., 2018). A participatory and art-based research design was explored as a way to enable children to be meaningfully involved in resilience planning and research. In addition to art-based methods, ethnographic methods such as fieldnotes, informal discussion and reflections were used. Because of the importance of play in promoting resilience in children (Unesco, 2019) the project viewed resilience through the lens of play, and facilitated an opportunity to communicate the children's experiences of enablers and vulnerabilities in the environments where they play. Insights on the children's play experiences might lead to a better understanding of their relationships with their environments which have an impact on urban planning and strategies as well as on services delivered by the project partners (South African Education Program and City of Cape Town). The creation of safe spaces is identified as a priority for intervention. This includes fenced play areas, safer roads and controlled traffic, as well as ergonomically designed and serviced playground equipment. Finally, benefits and challenges of using a participatory and art-based research design are identified and recommendations for mediation of the challenges are made.





## INTRODUCTION

This report presents the findings and recommendations of a research project that aims to explore the use of a participatory and art based research design to communicate the play experiences of children in an under-resourced area in Cape Town, South Africa. The research responds to the underrepresentation of children's voices in urban resilience research and planning (Derr et al, 2018; Derr, Corona & Gülgönen, 2019; van Vliet, Chawla & Derr, 2017). It contributes to the field by addressing this gap. It is recognised that social research methods that are often used with adults, might not be as appropriate for understanding the lived experiences and views of children (Mort et al., 2018). Consequently, a further research aim was to explore the potential benefits and challenges in using a participatory and art-based research design to engage children in a process that enables them to become meaningfully involved in resilience planning and research.

Here meaningful involvement is defined as involvement which "recognises children and young people's status as 'experts in their own lives'" (Dun & Mellor, 2017:285). Van der Vaart et al. (2018) find that the benefit of using art-based methods in research related to community resilience is two-fold. Firstly it has the potential to generate deep insight into people's lived experiences, and secondly, it can catalyse further action and participation in resilience building. The development of methods to support the capturing, communication and understanding of children's perceptions is thus crucial.

In addition to exploring the methodological aspects of doing research *with*, instead of *on* children (Clark, 2010) the project aims to contribute to urban resilience research in general, and Cape Town's approach to Resilience strategies specifically. The City of Cape Town, through their

membership with the 100 Resilient Cities network (100RC) launched a strategy for urban resilience planning in 2019. The 100RC network, which is funded by the Rockefeller Foundation, defines urban resilience as “the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems within a city to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience” (100RC, 2019). They go on to define chronic stresses as “slow moving disasters that weaken the fabric of a city” and acute shocks as “sudden, sharp events that threaten a city” (100RC, 2019). Locally, a case study exploring the risk environment in Philippi and Touws River, Zweig and Pharoah (2017: 51) define everyday risks as threats experienced by poor urban communities that are often driven by developmental challenges that result in chronic forms of risk. Their findings specify a need for an understanding of risk at a local scale, and a need for sensitivity to the complex processes underlying everyday risk.

The 100RC network proposes the use of the prescribed lens of the City Resilience Framework (CRF) through which resilience challenges and opportunities are assessed. The City Resilience Framework’s holistic approach to understanding urban resilience, is reflected in the broad factors that include social cohesion, safety, poverty and unemployment alongside more commonly used disaster risk factors (100RC, 2019). It is noteworthy that despite the mounting

reports on the high rate of violence against children in South Africa (Artz et al., 2016; Hsiao et al., 2018 ; Jamieson, Sambu & Mathews, 2017), children’s perspectives are not considered in the CCT resilience strategy.

Our study aims to address this gap by taking a child centered approach to urban resilience and is consequently informed by the guiding concepts of the Child-Centered Urban Resilience Framework, an extension of the CRF (Arup & The Rockefeller Foundation 2014). The first of these guiding concepts, urban systems thinking, highlights the importance of understanding “the impact the city’s physical and social urban systems have on the well-being of children and youth” (Arup & Plan International, 2016: 1). The second guiding concept is a strength based approach “recognising and leveraging the resilience already shown by children” and “offers ways of building their resilience and contributing to the resilience of the city” (Arup & Plan International, 2016: 1). The third guiding concept is a rights-based approach where urban stakeholders must ensure child and human rights are enshrined in resilience building efforts” (Arup & Plan International, 2016: 1). We are hoping that this report might encourage urban stakeholders to write urban resilience policy that includes this rights-based approach.

Play is a powerful resilience building

strategy which benefits children by supporting the development of language, social skills and relationship building whilst expanding their knowledge about the world (Unesco, 2019: 14). Play also fosters prosocial behaviors, empathy and emotional security, and buffers the effects of post traumatic shock disorder (PTSD) (Unesco, 2019: 14). The importance of the design of child friendly cities is an ongoing area addressed by initiatives such as the Real Play Coalition, who specifically focuses on activating play. One such project took place in Khayelitsha, Cape Town (Arup, 2021). Because of the importance of play in promoting resilience in children (Unesco, 2019) this project views resilience through the lens of play. As the terms ‘shocks’ & stressors’ have a very specific meaning within urban resilience research, this research focuses on enablers of play, and vulnerabilities experienced when playing as an indicator of urban resilience.

## MAIN & SUB RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**How might participatory and art-based research methods be used to understand and communicate the enablers and vulnerabilities experienced by children of under-resourced urban communities, in the environments where they play?**

1. What enables and hinders young children in Philippi in the environments where they play?
2. What are the benefits and challenges of using a participatory and art based research design with children in an under-resourced urban community?

## OBJECTIVES

- Identify enablers and vulnerabilities related to the environments where children play.
- Make recommendations for mediating challenges when facilitating a participatory and art-based workshops with children.
- Translate data and findings into actionable outcomes by identifying priorities for intervention and further research.

## OUTCOMES

- An improved understanding of how young children in Philippi experience enablers and vulnerabilities in their play context might allow stakeholders to plan for needed interventions.
- The first iteration of a participatory and art-based research design to capture, communicate and understand children’s perspectives, and recommendations to mediate identified challenges.
- Insight into children’s relationship with their environments might have an impact on planning and strategies required for the fostering of healthy and resilient urban communities, and influence policy makers and urban planners to take a child-centered perspective on safety and resilience in informal settlements.



## RESEARCH APPROACH AND METHODS

The project focused on the play experiences of children from two different age groups in one of Cape Town's largest townships, Philippi. The population was chosen, because they form part of a community that endures a high level of chronic and everyday stresses such as poverty, a high unemployment rate, a lack of education, violent crime, substance abuse, and environmental degradation. The child participants were recruited on a convenience (non-probability) basis with the guidance of the project's community gatekeepers, the South African Education Project (SAEP). Because of the vulnerable status of the child participants in this study, as well as the outsider status of the researchers, the project relied on a partnership with the SAEP, who offers educational support programs at township schools.

This partnership enabled community stakeholders to be involved in the conceptualisation, design and facilitation of art-based research workshops with children. The workshops were co-designed with SAEP staff and volunteers, ECD teachers and the researchers. The participatory and art-based methods were supported by group discussions, participant observation, fieldnotes and reflections. The outcome of the co-design session was a three day workshop design for both the pre-primary and primary school children.

### PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN WORKSHOPS

The workshops were conducted over a three week period with three different groups of students. In total approximately 116 (hundred and

sixteen) 8-11 year old children participated. The workshop activities were incorporated into the normal schedule of the after school literacy program usually delivered by the SAEP. In the first workshop the art based method used was drawing with discussion. Children were instructed to make drawings of the places where they play. Children sat in groups and facilitators and researchers moved between groups and entered into discussions with the children to provide an opportunity to share their drawings. All facilitators were given a field note guide with specific prompts for observation. These prompts related to how the workshop aims were introduced to the children, how consent was negotiated, how activities were explained as well as observing any insights. The second workshop involved a two-dimensional mapping activity where children were asked to work in groups to create a map of the areas in which they play, in relation to the area in which they live. They were then asked to mark things that they like and dislike. Children were given the opportunity to share their maps. If all members of the group consented, the discussion was video recorded (without faces, camera on drawings and hands). These recordings were translated and transcribed. The final activity involved an imagining and visioning activity through physical mapping and modeling. Children used 3D modeling on top of the 2D map they created in the second workshop.

A range of modeling materials were supplied, such as paper and card, ice-cream sticks, pipe cleaners and tape. Their task was to turn their play areas into their ideal version using the materials provided. The reasons for their choices were recorded in writing with the assistance of the community volunteers and SAEP staff members.

## **PRE- PRIMARY SCHOOL CHILDREN WORKSHOPS**

Three workshops were conducted at Bonisa ECD Centre in Philippi, CPT over a three day period with a group of 20 children, ages 4-6 years. The facilitation of the workshop rested mainly in the hands of the teachers.

The art based methods were woven into activities that are familiar to the children for example “circle time” and “show and tell”. The teachers divided the children into smaller, more manageable groups of 4 or 5, so that the groups could engage in the art activity on a rotational basis. This system gave the teachers and the researchers the opportunity to observe each child and provide assistance when needed. Afterwards, everyone gathered in a circle again to discuss and share what they had done in the art activity. This discussion was facilitated by the teachers in conjunction with the research assistant who speaks isiXhosa.

The first workshop used the drawing with discussion method and the children made drawings of the places

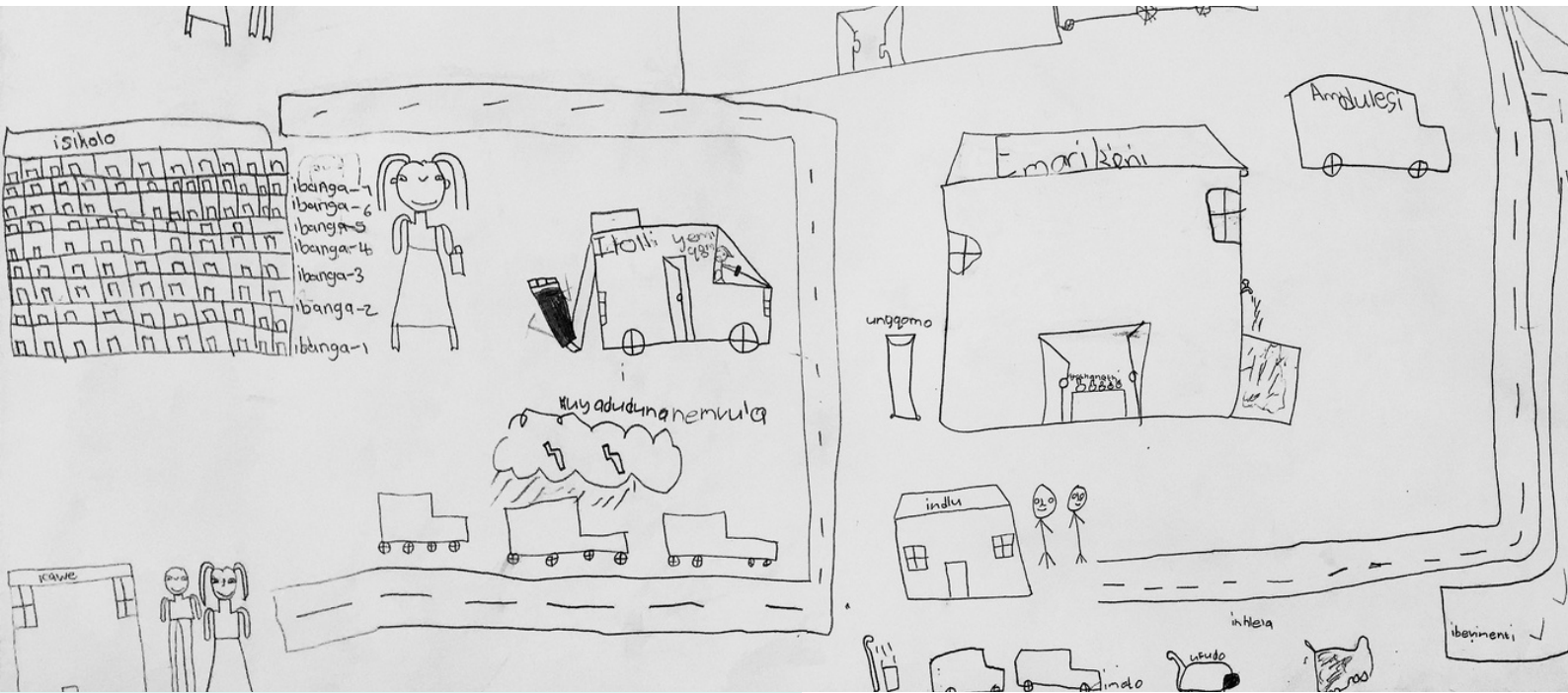
where they play, and then discussed what they drew. For this activity the children used wax crayons (variety of colours), thick grey pencils, and kokis (variety of colours) on white paper. The intended outcome was for the children to express where and how they play. The second workshop used collage and children could choose from a wide variety of existing images to create a collage artwork of their ideal area(s) for play. The existing images consisted of images of a variety of play areas sourced from the internet by the researchers as well as from magazines. The intended outcome was for the children to express what their ideal play environment might look like. The final workshop used physical mapping and modeling with visual markers. The physical mapping activity entailed that the children use clay modeling to visualise play environments. For this activity the children used playdough, cookie cutters (variety of shapes), and rollers. As an extension of this method the children used colour as visual markers, to indicate their dislikes.

## **ETHICS**

This project took into account the significant ethical challenges related to doing research with a vulnerable population, such as children in under-resourced areas. While collaborative work can broaden learning opportunities, the shifting roles and trusting relationships that develop from it, can result in role uncertainty (Dunn & Mellor, 2017). For this reason,

special attention was given to the ethical and safeguarding protocols that underpinned the project. The project was guided by the ethical procedures and protocols as outlined in the SAEP's Child Protection Policy and Child Protection Code of Conduct. The SAEP regulated access, and a child psychologist (SAEP staff member) was present. Informed consent for participation in workshop activities, and to take photographs and publish children's artwork was obtained from the child participants (oral consent), and their parent/guardian (written consent available in English and isiXhosa). The following additional strategies were used to negotiate ethical concerns and consent:

- Age appropriate language was used.
- Consent was treated as an ongoing process and negotiated verbally at several stages of the research process.
- Children were encouraged to participate in the language of their choice.
- An interpreter was present for translation as and when necessary.
- Community volunteers and NGO staff members were compensated for their time outside of work hours.
- Children were treated to some cake at the conclusion of the project to thank them for their time and participation.



## CONCLUSION

### ENABLERS AND VULNERABILITIES IN PLAY

Enablers and vulnerabilities for play are mainly related to activities, social dynamics, and the natural and built environment.

- The primary school children often incorporate play into everyday activities and responsibilities such as visiting the spaza shop or a market place. Conversely children also indicated that these activities can lead to them feeling vulnerable, for example when going to the shops they might get robbed, or even exposed to violence such as shootings.

- The pre-primary school children did not refer to everyday activities but indicated educational activities, playing with toys and siblings as their main enablers to play. These were mostly indicated as activities that happen in and around the home environment.
- Access to parks was an important enabler for play for both groups. Children indicated that they see it as a place to relax or destress, to have fun and most importantly to meet with friends. On the other hand the park was often mentioned as a dangerous place in terms of the equipment that is often not serviced, risky play behaviour that goes unsupervised and the presence

of criminal elements within the park.

- Educational facilities and activities provide safe spaces for play in and after school time.
- Physical activities play an important role in play. The primary school children drew and discussed physical activities in the form of sports and games. Both groups often drew soccer fields, however, in discussion they sometimes clarified that they play soccer in an open field or in their yard.
- Physical hindrances to play were identified by both primary and pre-primary children. For the pre-primary children recurring hindrances to play indicated as dislikes were broken glass, stones and playground equipment. Primary school children drew and discussed busy roads and heavy traffic.
- Access to natural environments and greenery is important. Children indicated that they like to climb trees and sit in its shade. Some also indicated that it provides access to herbs that are used when they are ill and fruit when they are hungry.
- Dirty water & lack of sanitation were also identified as having a negative impact on play in the built environment.
- Some primary school children are attracted to risky play behaviour.

Children mentioned playing on moving trains, riding on garbage trucks and seeking out dilapidated cars. Conversely, dangerous or risky areas that were marked as being fun spaces for play, would also be marked as being disliked by others.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR PLAY**

The primary school children used the two-dimensional maps created in Workshop 2 and were asked to recreate their play environments in the way that they would like it instead. Afterwards, they worked with the facilitators to create a list of the changes that they made, and the reasons for making them.

Children envisioned interventions in the following four categories

- Improved municipal services: Electricity; Sanitation; Secured water sources
- Improvements in built environment and infrastructure: Safe & comfortable play areas and equipment; Secure, dedicated play spaces; Safe roads and controlled traffic, Warning and safety signage
- Enhancement of natural environment: Access to clean bodies of water; More greenery
- Policing of unlawful behaviour

The most mentioned interventions related to the built environment and infrastructure and indicated a need for safe roads and controlled traffic, secure and dedicated play spaces that

are fenced, and ergonomically designed and serviced playground equipment.

Pre-Primary children created a collage with the intention of showing their ideal play environment. They indicated that they would like their play areas to have:

- Water to drink
- Chairs to sit on
- Toilets
- Food
- A swimming pool to swim in when it is hot.

## BENEFITS & CHALLENGES OF A PARTICIPATORY AND ART-BASED RESEARCH DESIGN

The use of participatory and art based research methods in this project contributed to participation and children’s rights, but also held particular challenges that were often difficult to mediate. The benefits and challenges identified relate to operational, contextual, methodological and ethical aspects.

### BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES RELATING TO PARTICIPATORY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN

- Co-design & co facilitation can result in dynamic partnerships and mutual learning. Benefits include collective decision making, sharing of knowledge and expertise and being



able to run the project within existing structures that are familiar to the children. Operational challenges include the difficulty of maintaining communication channels between community members and researchers, as well as keeping a balance between meeting research outcomes, maintaining the ethics of community work as well as considering the mandate of the NGO gatekeepers.

- Further operational challenges related to managing a project with a high need for flexibility within a tightly regulated system. This was especially challenging with regards to gaining access to funds. Delays in payment to stakeholders by university structures resulted in embarrassment, and negatively influenced stakeholder relationships.
- Using co-design & co facilitation had both methodological benefits and challenges. Community members and NGO staff provided translation for language differences and cultural nuances. It was however challenging to ensure that consistent instructions to the children were given by the researchers, the NGO staff and the volunteers.
- The need for further training for co-facilitators became apparent,

especially in ensuring their ability to remain objective. Objectivity is especially important when working with children.

#### BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES RELATING TO ART-BASED ASPECTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN

- The use of art-based methods can help young children communicate concepts and ideas that they are unable to communicate with language alone. Discussions during and after the art activities were however extremely important in navigating the challenges related to interpretation of the artifact, as well as a means for accessing additional information.
- Art-based research methods contributed to the ethics of the project because it is a child-centered research method that allows for inclusion of the child voice. Communicating & keeping track of consent was a challenge, especially as we did not want the children to be aware of a divide between participants with, and without consent.
- The benefits of art-based methods were increased significantly by the co-design process, because it allowed for the research-methods to be informed by local knowledge. Art methods that are familiar to the children and teachers were easier to implement, whilst methods that are foreign to them for example 3D modelling and

mapping, requires more input from the researchers who are well versed in a variety of art and design disciplines.

- In addition to providing rich data, art based research methods offer several developmental opportunities for the children such as physical development (hand-eye coordination and fine-motor skills), social interaction (sharing resources and group work) and the development of imagination, creativity, experimentation and problem solving through art. The methods can however be resource heavy and require adequate time, space and materials.

- The validity of the use of art-based methods in a group setting is challenged when children copy each other's work or use imagination instead of personal experience. These challenges could be mediated to some extent through discussion.





## RECOMMENDATIONS

This section identifies the key areas for strategic intervention and further research, as well as make recommendations for mediating methodological difficulties.

### PRIORITISE THE CREATION OF SAFE PLACES

The findings indicate that the creation of safe places is a priority area for both pre-primary and primary school children. Three priority areas for intervention are identified for primary school and pre-primary children

Primary school children's requirement for safe spaces extends into public space, and their reliance on available play spaces in the immediate vicinity of their homes is reflected in their call for

safe roads and controlled traffic. Additionally they are highly reliant on public parks as well as open fields for play, but have limited spaces that are fenced or where there is controlled access. Lastly, as they often play unsupervised there is a need for safer, more ergonomically designed playground equipment. Pre-primary children indicate the same need for safe spaces, however their immediate needs are closer to their home as their need for supervision is greater. As older children are often responsible for providing supervision for younger siblings an argument can be made that interventions would meet the needs of both age groups. In addition to the need for supervision, pre-primary children also indicated the need for playground equipment that is safer for them to use and which is placed in a well-kept, clean environment.

It is recommended that further participatory and co-design strategies are used to:

- Identify areas that might benefit from additional traffic control strategies.
- Investigate the possibility of creating yards for play, or closing of certain streets from traffic.
- Identify parks or open fields that could be fenced off.
- Identify existing community initiatives that might be extended to provide access control or supervision in public play areas.
- Evaluate current play equipment available in public park areas for its ability to provide ergonomically appropriate and safe unsupervised play.
- Co-design playground equipment that meets the local needs.

## **MEDIATION OF CHALLENGES OF A PARTICIPATORY AND ART-BASED RESEARCH DESIGN**

### **PARTICIPATORY ASPECTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN**

- It is recommended that flexibility should be embraced and made space for in order to mediate

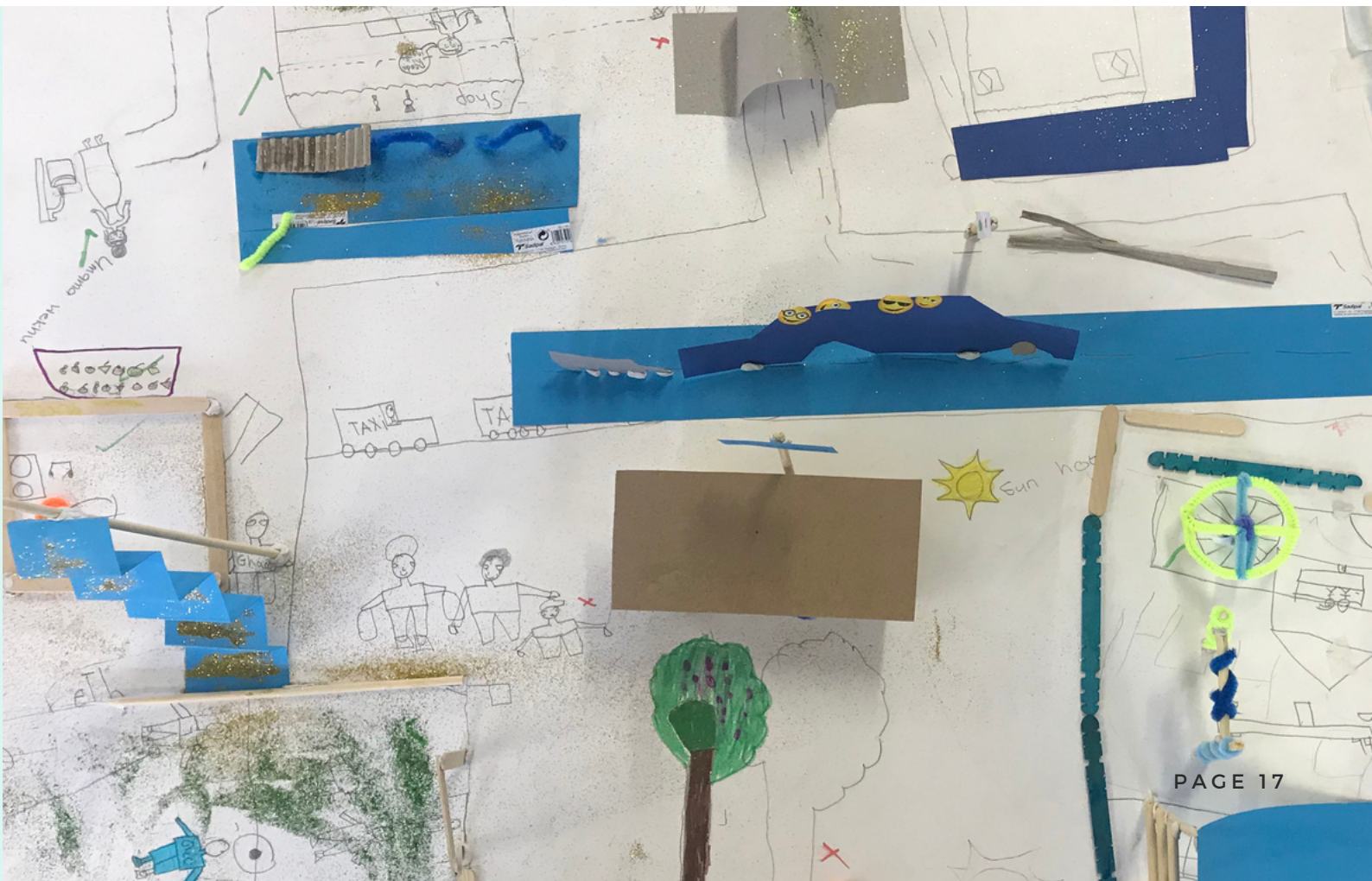
challenges arising from co-facilitation and partnerships. Outcomes might have to be adjusted to meet the needs of multiple stakeholders.

- Because of the need for flexibility a cash kitty for sundries should be included as a budget item.
- A 'bridging person' that speaks the language of the child participants should be included as part of the research team.
- Where community volunteers or NGO partners are expected to give instructions to children, the instructions should be available in written format and translated into the home language.
- There is a continued need for the training of community volunteers and NGO staff members to facilitate a viable research project, thus some form of iteration of workshops should be considered in the research design so that initial concerns can be addressed.

### **ART-BASED ASPECTS OF RESEARCH DESIGN**

- Where community volunteers or NGO partners are expected to facilitate art activities that they are not familiar with, an exploration of the activities and materials should be included in training/preparation for the workshops with the children.

- Use a variety of art methods and materials as it allows for inclusion of different child voices and mediates varying developmental needs. Researchers and facilitators should keep in mind that the child participants may find this very exciting and therefore workshop planning should include discussions around how this excitement will be managed for example introduce art materials only once instructions have been given.
- Discussion during and after the creation of artworks is integral to the collection of good quality, reliable data. Therefore, adequate attention should be given to how discussions will be facilitated and documented. A written list of discussion prompts could be useful here.
- Adequate time, space and materials should be allocated. When unforeseen events place a burden on these resources the researchers should be willing to be flexible and to place the needs of the children above the needs of the research.



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## BUDGET

	Planned Expenditure	Actual Expenditure	Variance	Reasons for variance
Art material	7766.1	5731.1	2035	Art material was less than anticipated
Stipend for Research Assistant	12000	9000	3000	Contract took longer to finalise than anticipated
Travel	5000	1813.84	3186.16	ECD an Literacy Programme facilitators did not need to travel outside of their normal work routine and therefore did not have to be reimbursed.
Food	10000	4944.98	5055.02	Did not have to provide food for primary school children and no debriefing session (COVID)
Exhibition set up	5000	0	5000	COVID - no event
Exhibition event	4000	0	4000	COVID - no event
Facilitators	7740	5100	2640	COVID - did not have a debriefing as planned
Translation	5000	0	5000	In progress: translation of community report
Dissemination	5000	0	5000	In progress: editing of report CHEC report and printing of community report
<b>Total</b>		<b>26589.92</b>	<b>34916.18</b>	

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