Importance and relevance of the physical environment

Why the physical environment?

The close relationship between the physical environment and lives of children is well documented. Children live in and interact with their physical environment on an ongoing basis. Due to their size and vulnerability to their surroundings, children have a different type of relationship with their environment when compared to adults. The importance of the physical environment in children’s lives is not only documented in literature and research but also immediately acknowledged by persons who work closely with children in the field. During the workshops that we have conducted in Aceh and Medan, Indonesia, and Ampara, Sri Lanka, Save the Children (SC) personnel were able to generate a long list of environmental issues that affect children negatively in a very short time.

The disaster recovery work and attempts to strengthen the communities in these areas force the SC staff to struggle with issues related to the physical environment, on a daily basis. Yet, it cannot be said that most SC staff at this time do have the skills to address the physical aspects of children’s surroundings, as well as the personal, social, and economic dimensions.

This is not in itself surprising, since the gap between the social sciences and the physical environment has historically always been at the center of an ongoing debate. The field of “Environmental Social Sciences” has been established to close this gap. Most of the line staff of SC who work in tsunami-affected regions are likely to have backgrounds in social work, child protection, and other similar fields. As a result, they are not likely to have the skills to look at children’s physical environment in a critical way and integrate this dimension into their daily activities.

In fact, it is very easy to see the direct relationship between a disaster like tsunami and the physical environment. In addition to taking lives, tsunami destroys the
physical infrastructure of the areas it hits. Housing and schools collapse, and roads, service buildings, and other key structures are wiped out. Even an organization such as SC faces the necessity to delve into construction projects and assist communities in building shelters, housing, sanitation, safe play areas, and schools.

The second and equally important component of working with communities and children in issues related to the physical environment is the need to ensure genuine participation. Sheridan Bartlett, in her report assessing the shelter construction in Sri Lanka (“Bridging the Gap”) states that despite the overall interest in participation, in reality, the attempts to involve communities in the planning and design process were not done consistently and successfully. She implies that many of the problems that emerged in those projects could have been eliminated by an inclusive participatory methodology. We saw a similar picture during the new school construction projects in Indonesia.

The workshop in Ampara, with its focus on the physical environment and participatory planning, was the first step toward generating interest and providing skills to SC staff to integrate the physical environment into their work. The goal was not to turn them into designers but to provide them with enough knowledge and skills so that they can start a constructive dialog with the children about the physical environment and actually learn about physical issues directly from them.

The fact that children know about the physical environment of their communities better than the adults is usually overlooked. They roam around all day, go to school, utilize many spaces for play and have an in-depth knowledge of who is who in the community. In other words, they are the “experts” on environment. If used effectively, this knowledge can be turned into a very powerful planning and evaluation tool for most SC initiatives and projects.

Focus on the physical environment is not something that should be considered at the beginning of each project. Even after the completion of the large-scale construction, there are still a lot of avenues where the SC staff can use their skills and sensitivities in looking at the physical environment.

How can the staff benefit from being sensitive toward the physical environment?

*Physical environment as an entry point to understanding the everyday lives of the children*

Talking about their physical environment is much easier for children than talking about other aspects of their lives. One of the much-practiced methodologies is to understand the everyday lives of children by going through a “typical day” with them. This becomes even more powerful if children are allowed to tell about
lives by going to actual locations. This is why “tours” with children were incorporated into the agenda of the workshop in Ampara.

**Using the physical environment as a starting point for program design**

Since the qualities of the physical environment directly impact the children’s lives, analysis of the physical environment can be used to prioritize the issues and to design interventions that would have a positive impact on children’s lives. For example, after reviewing the living and hygiene conditions in the barracks in Aceh, Sheridan Bartlett recommends the following: purchase plastic buckets for latrines, build showers next to water tanks and plant vegetation in barren areas, create homework space in shelters, and design better recreational facilities. A closer review of these recommendations will reveal that all of these requirements are basically interventions to modify the physical environment. These recommendations emerged from close encounters with the children. Sheridan Bartlett is an experienced researcher sensitive to the issues related to the physical environment. Yet, there is no reason why the line staff cannot work closely with children on a daily basis to come up with similar programming options. This will require training through workshops like the one conducted in Ampara as well as a shift in the organizational culture toward more sensitivity to the physical environment.

**Participation and empowerment—breaking the culture of dependency**

Most of the line staff of SC who are working in tsunami-affected areas have been trained in key skills, including child rights, rights-based programming, and child participation. However, focusing on the physical environment has never been a part of these trainings, traditionally. A new training, combining a focus on the physical environment and child participation can create a new vision and allow the staff to gain a new perspective on their work. The pilot workshop in Ampara was the first attempt to test this assumption.

The whole idea behind involving the children and the community in planning and design efforts is to “make” them a part of the solution. Immediately after a disaster, aid agencies have no choice but to act on their own initiative to provide communities with basic supplies and services. In this stage, they have no choice (and time) to consult communities in a detailed way because time is of the essence, and the objective is saving lives.

Unfortunately, in many cases, this “aid mentality” lingers on, well into the recovery and reconstruction phases. It is important for the agencies to change their organizational attitude during these phases and to involve communities and
children actively in their projects in order to break the “culture of dependency” that emerges after the disaster.

This is easier said than done, especially in projects that require professional expertise and where there are no good models of participation. This is where the importance of the physical environment becomes apparent. People’s relationship to the physical environment is interactive. They easily understand the missing qualities and can act upon it. Using drawings, models, and other graphic methods, it is easy to communicate issues and allow participation in planning and design. Most important, it transfers decision-making power, partially, to children. When designing a new schoolyard, for example, the children can show the staff where the best location would be to build the seating area, and why. They will justify the decision through examples based on their own experiences: “it gets too hot there,” “too close to the latrines,” etc.

Another important aspect of participatory projects that target the physical environment is the immediacy of change. When the plastic buckets are put next to each latrine, the impact is immediate and visible. Community and children can immediately appreciate the difference and feel a certain amount of pride in being involved in the solution.

Construction projects such as those of schoolyards obviously take longer to complete. Yet, the results, being visible to the whole community, are incredibly powerful for the fact that the community and children start to see and believe that they can change things for the better through collective action.

**Importance of mapping**

One of the topics covered extensively during the workshop in Ampara was the importance of mapping. Mapping in itself is a very powerful tool that can be used not only for planning and design but also for data collection and evaluation. Children love to do maps and are very skillful in doing so. In Ampara, they created multiple maps of the community that reveal very strong clues about their daily lives, rights violations, and other key characteristics of their communities.

Learning to facilitate community mapping is critical for the staff who work in a disaster-devastated area on a daily basis. Through community mapping, it is possible to document key information that can be used for programmatic purposes. In Ampara, the staff walked around the villages together with children during the first qualitative phase of the mapping. On subsequent days, children jointly generated maps and indicated, for example, what they consider to be dangerous areas, where most of the child labor takes place and in what form, etc. The value of such information for child rights-based programming is irrefutable.
Maps are very powerful tools for monitoring and evaluation of projects, too. They show the progress made in an area very clearly. For example, physical mapping of child abuse cases in a community can reveal information that includes types, patterns, and relationships—information that cannot be captured by simple reports or lists.

Rationale for the Ampara staff workshop on physical environment

A different type of training

The most distinguishing aspect of the training in Ampara was its participatory and hands-on nature. We went out of our way to ensure that a significant part of a typical day was spent in the field, where the participants were directly working with the community, especially the children.

This was somewhat different from the other training sessions previously designed by SC and required a small adjustment period on the side of the participants. However, once they grasped the idea, their reactions were very positive. In other trainings, the participants are used to a large number of group exercises. As a matter of fact, they rarely get to work in the communities and then have the opportunity to report it back to the group during these trainings. The workshop in Ampara was different in this sense.

The workshop was designed in cycles, where brief training/theoretical sessions were followed by extended site visits where the participants found opportunities to directly implement what they had learned in the group sessions. At the end of each day (or the next morning), participants were given opportunities to share their experiences and discuss the issues with the rest of the group.

Integrating environmental issues into daily work

The SC staff witness issues related to the physical environment on a daily basis. The staff’s being sensitive to these issues and integrating solutions into their daily activities can have a significant positive impact on the lives of the children. The workshop in Ampara was an attempt to increase the sensitivity of the participants toward the issues related to the physical environment.
Methods of analyzing the physical environment

Throughout the workshop, the participants learned many new methodologies that allowed them not only to understand the physical environment issues but also to understand the daily lives of children. These methods included guided tours with children, community mapping and participatory design.

These methods are important not simply because they allow the children to participate in redesigning and rebuilding their physical environment: A multitude of projects illustrated that the more the children participate in the analysis of their communities, the more they become active in the community. In that sense, participation in projects that modify and improve the physical environment is not an end in itself but a starting point for grounded community action.

For example, in Ampara, the participatory design sessions for a schoolyard immediately generated interest among the children and the community. Even though there was no commitment from SC on funding any construction, teachers and students started to discuss what they can do with their own resources. This was mostly due to the rich discussion that took place during the design session and the new ideas that emerged for multiple uses in the schoolyard.

Construction efforts—bridging the gap

Most SC staff that we spoke to in the region agree that considering the way the organization is set up currently, it is not easy to have a close working relationship and organic connection between the people who are in charge of construction projects and the rest of the sectors. This is to be expected because the nature of the construction tasks, compared to those of the social sector, is such that a different and more technical approach is required. Furthermore, SC’s relative inexperience in construction also might have contributed to this gap.

Workshops on the physical environment are excellent opportunities to bring the construction sector and the other sectors together. This will have multiple benefits. First, as the workshop in Ampara clearly demonstrated, the staff from the construction sector will feel at home when the main topic is physical environment—they will not feel alienated. Second, they will understand that the topics covered and the skills that are taught are useful for their own work. Finally, and most important, they will realize that when other sectors get involved in participatory planning and design with the children, it is not meant to replace professional architects and designers and that the goal is to collect valuable information directly from the children and communicate it to the construction sector in order to increase the functionality and sustainability of projects.
Participants

Sectors that are most relevant

There is a big dilemma regarding how the workshops on physical environment should be organized and which sectors should participate. One option is to attempt a sector-based approach. In this approach, staff from one or two sectors can be invited at a time. Based on the sector, appropriate projects can be selected so that the staff can see the relevance of the training to their work. For example, the education staff can be invited for a workshop where the main activity is the participatory design of a schoolyard. Similarly, the protection sector staff can work on “safe play areas” or in the mapping of child labor in a community.

Alternatively, it is possible to organize a workshop where multiple sectors are represented. While, in some cases, this might be harder to organize, it is a fact that there are many benefits to this approach. The workshop in Ampara used a similar approach. Although all the sectors were not present, and not equally represented (there were many from the protection sector, compared to the other sectors), the benefits of bringing multiple sectors together were apparent. Throughout the workshop, people used their relative skills and knowledge in their areas of expertise in order to enrich the discussion, and participants benefited from the exchange of ideas. For example, during a class exercise where we were mapping the most common problems related to the physical environment, a rich picture that depicted health, safety, education, etc. emerged as a result of the contributions of different sectors.

Training of the trainers

It is important to decide on the extent to which the workshops on physical environment can be a training of the trainers (ToT). It is unlikely that after one short session of training, all members will reach the level to conduct the workshop individually (and without support) to their peers. There are many reasons for this. The most important reason is the nature of the topic. In a sense, it is so new and different from what the SC staff do on a regular basis that it would not be surprising if they took their time in adapting themselves to this “new” type of thinking. This should not be considered as a problem, however. What is more critical is that the participants use the knowledge that they gained from the workshops in real projects. At first, this can be minimal: a planning session in one topic, a mapping exercise in another, etc. The expectation is that the staff will build upon and enhance their skills through these “real” projects. As they build their confidence and expertise gradually through these projects, the participants, in turn, will be able to take the role of trainers themselves.
Managers’ commitment to the importance of the physical environment

The initiative on the physical environment cannot be successful if it is not understood and accepted by the SC managers. Since the training is time-consuming, it may not be feasible or necessary to have the managers attend the workshop which is basically designed for the line staff. On the other hand, it is critical that the key ideas on the importance of the physical environment are communicated to and discussed by the managers.

On one hand, a brief (one- or two-day) workshop can be designed for the managers alone so they can see directly the theoretical framework and methodologies used in the workshop. It will also be an opportunity for them to raise new ideas on the topic. However, this will not be enough to fully illustrate the value of the approach for SC.

The most valuable contribution for generating a commitment from the managers on the issues related to the physical environment should come directly from the field. If the staff who previously attended the physical environment workshops can demonstrate that they are using those skills and approaches successfully in the field with concrete results, this would be the best argument for continuing with and expanding the physical environment focus in SC.

The problem is how to highlight these “best practices” and be informed about the long-term effects of the workshops on physical environment. This is not easy. At the basic level, it requires continuing contact with the past workshop participants. In many cases, these staff who want to focus on the physical environment might be facing a lot of practical problems or might be in need of technical support. For SC, it is important to establish a country-based person to act as the “focal point” and a TA person on issues related to the physical environment.

Monitoring and evaluation

The value of using the physical environment and the methods associated with it for the purposes of monitoring and evaluation is usually underestimated. In fact, the physical conditions surrounding children are a very good indicator of how well the rights of the children are being respected and fulfilled. The conditions of home and school environments, location and quality of health services, and availability of play environments are all very good indicators.

Similarly, many of the methods used to evaluate physical environments can be used as tools for the monitoring and evaluation of various projects. Mapping is a very good example. Maps are generally used as baseline data. This may range from children’s access to school to numbers and locations of abused children in the community. As the projects move forward, it becomes possible to visually
illustrate where and how much progress has been made. Maps also illustrate the “gaps” and the areas where the project is least successful so that adjustments can be done.

**Expected goals of the workshop on physical environment**

**Workshop in Ampara**

Between the dates of 17th and 20th of July, 2006, the first workshop focusing exclusively on the physical environment was conducted in the Ampara district of Sri Lanka. The facilitators were Dr. Selim Iltus of the Children’s Environments Research Group of CUNY and Gabriella Olofsson from SC, Sweden. More than thirty SC staff participated in the four-day workshop.

**Expectations**

The organizers and facilitators had specific and quite ambitious expectations from the workshop. The primary goal was to expose the participants to the importance of the physical environment in children’s lives and in the work that SC is doing in the tsunami-affected areas of Southeast Asia.

The second goal was to provide an opportunity for the participants to work directly in the communities, with children, in a hands-on manner. This was to allow them to see and bridge the gap between theory and action through a set of field exercises that focus on the physical environment.

Finally, the workshop was to give the participants a set of skills and allow them to build these skills in the field, through direct practice. These included learning directly from children through guided tours of the community, community mapping with children, developing a functional program for the modification of a physical environment, and using plans and models to conduct participatory planning and design with the children.

It was very pleasing that the participants’ expectations from the workshop largely overlapped those of the organizers. At the beginning of the workshop, participants were asked to do a simple exercise and to write down their expectations from the workshop. The list they generated largely mirrored the main goals of the workshop. It included the following items:

- To understand how the physical environment can be used to improve child rights programming
- To learn about the basics of constructing child-friendly environments
- To understand the relationship between CRC and the physical environment
• To learn how to design functional and low-cost schoolyards
• To work with children in order to understand their concerns related to the physical environment
• To understand how armed conflict influenced the lives of children

The only item on this list that the workshop failed to focus on was the last item: to understand the impact of armed conflict on the lives of the children. Interestingly, during the participatory sessions, both the children and adults were reluctant to discuss this issue in-depth. There may be many reasons for this. The memories may be too painful, there might be concerns about prosecution by the authorities, or it could be some other deep-rooted social and psychological reason.

Hands-on approach

The hands-on quality of the workshop was one of its most outstanding characteristics. Any workshop focusing on the physical environment not only needs to include a set of exercises but has to utilize real cases and real environments. Though it is possible to simulate environmental characteristics through visual images and videos in a meeting room, this is no substitute to working directly with children in a real setting.

This is one of the big issues in organizing a workshop that focuses on the physical environment. Organizers need to find a location with easy access to a meeting setting with facilities as well as communities close-by.

In Ampara, the group stayed in a hotel in the town of Ampara and conducted all the hands-on activities in three villages that were about an hour away by bus. In the first two days of the workshop, this allowed the group to divide into three sub-groups and work in three different villages simultaneously.

Hands-on work is extremely powerful as a learning tool. Once the participants were given the opportunity to implement what they had learned in the classroom directly in the field on the same day, they became more involved and excited about the work.

Another point of strength was that the methods allowed them to produce something very concrete at the end of each day. These were slides, stories, maps, or models. This way, different groups had the opportunity to communicate and discuss their experiences using concrete products that they themselves had created.
What was achieved?

It is hard to judge what the long-term impact of the workshop will be on the participants. However, we have two ways to judge the immediate outcomes of the workshop. The first is the involvement, participation, and reactions of the participants to the messages and activities in the workshop. The second is the quality of the products generated during the workshop.

As regards the participants’ reactions and involvement, the outcomes were very positive. They immediately grasped the main idea and started to elaborate on it. This was probably related more to the strength of the message rather than to the skills of the facilitators.

The quality of work that was produced during the workshop was also a good indication of how much the participants took this seriously. In some exercises, like the tours of the community with the children, they went out of their way and prepared digital slide shows to illustrate their points, even though they were not required to do so. Similarly, a closer inspection of the maps created during the workshop illustrates how much work went into them.

Detail from a map created by children.
Aside from all this, what really matters is the long-term impact of the workshop on the thinking and behavior of the participants and the programs of SC in general. This will be harder to assess. It is recommended that SC establish the necessary feedback systems to track and evaluate this initiative.

Why focus on a schoolyard?

During the last two days of the workshop in Ampara, the group focused on participatory planning and design of a schoolyard in one of the villages. In this work, the schoolyard was conceptualized not purely as an area where the children in the school can play but as a possible resource for the whole community. In our exercises conducted in Ampara, this conceptualization was proven to be true. In the village that we conducted the focus groups and design sessions, it was revealed that the schoolyard was being used for multiple purposes: for community-wide organized sports, festivals, religious meetings, play spaces for young children, etc.

Focusing on schoolyards as a community resource seems appropriate for a range of other reasons. In the aftermath of tsunami, schools generally serve as the focal point of community revitalization. Through the schools, it is possible to access a large number of children for a variety of projects. In most villages, schools’ “school management committees” (SMCs) bring together the teachers, principal and key members of the community who are involved in issues related to children. This will give SC a good entry point into communities.

Finally, rebuilding schoolyards is a relatively low-cost activity. Great play spaces can be created with the help of the community and with small donations from sponsors. This makes schoolyard design and construction an attractive method to illustrate the power of participatory planning and design with children.

The practice of centering the activities in schoolyards is not applicable only to Sri Lanka. In Aceh, Indonesia, SC is involved in building many new school buildings. Most of these schools are now completed and ready for operation. However, no planning or construction work was done in the yards of these schools. Building the schoolyards in Aceh was set aside as the responsibility of the individual schools and the SMCs. Undoubtedly, to do this, they will need technical support from SC. In the light of this, developing the participatory design skills of the SC staff who will be involved in these projects is critical.
Participants’ reactions

Positive response

Overall, we found the reactions to the workshop very positive. Many of the participants stated that they enjoyed the hands-on quality of the workshop and found the subject and methods very beneficial for their future work. These sentiments were also reflected in the evaluation forms filled by the groups.

The participants were less clear about giving us concrete examples of how they will be using this knowledge in their work. However, there were a few exceptions. For example, one participant, a member of the SC construction team in northern Sri Lanka, stated two days after the workshop that he has already instated participatory design teams in his project and changed the way he has been working as a result of this workshop.

Involvement

One key observation made during the workshop was the high level of participation by all participants. We did not witness any person as being consistently quiet and inactive. Because each activity was unique, every participant found an opportunity to put to use their skills needed by the group.

The level of participation is always high in most SC trainings. What was extremely encouraging during the workshop in Ampara was the fact that some of the participants had undergone a positive transition in their attitudes as the workshop progressed. The increasing interest and involvement of these previously skeptical participants can be construed as proof that the workshop in general was on the right track.

Time limitations

As with many other training programs, the duration of four days was not enough to introduce the whole group to, and involve them in, a relatively new subject such as physical environment. The participants also raised this point and said that they wished there were more time to follow up on many of the exercises.

On the other hand, it should be noted that the workshop was quite draining for both the participants and facilitators. Each day, the group spent significant amount of time, traveling in crowded minibuses and walking around in the villages with the children. Realistically, it would not be practical to extend the duration of these workshops beyond 4 or 5 days. Even for this time, it would be a
good idea to break up the load by distributing the responsibilities among multiple facilitators.

**Not enough theory**

In connection with the issue of time limitation, some of the participants said that they would have liked to have more time to discuss theoretical issues and to reflect upon the work that they have been doing during the exercises. This criticism was well founded. Due to the need to cover all the field exercises in four days, not enough time was allocated to discuss all the qualities of the physical environment and how they are related to the lives and rights of children.

During the workshop, it was not possible to allocate enough time for the groups to reflect on their work in the villages. This was done usually at the end of the day, after the field visits. The discussion was limited to methodological and process-related issues, but could not uncover the real content of the information. For example, during the discussion after the community mapping exercise, participants explained how children reacted, what the best ways were to involve them, how the maps were created, and what worked and what did not. There was not enough time to discuss the actual information that was on the maps, which might have been frustrating for some of the participants.

**Constraints**

*Logistical arrangements*

Arranging the workshop in Ampara was no easy task. One big challenge was to identify a location where there were reasonable facilities for staying over and conferencing, together with easy access to communities that are suitable and willing to participate. The SC team was able to solve this problem in Ampara. The farthest of the three sites that the group worked in was within an hour’s drive from the hotel. This required two hours to be allocated for travel each day.

Given that much travel time was required, we also needed to consider skipping regular lunch breaks and take box lunches with us to serve the participants of the workshop as well as the villagers and children who work with us.

It was also necessary to arrange meeting spaces in the villages. Since most of the work that we were doing was related to schools, this did not turn out to be a problem. We simply met in the classrooms. However, it was necessary to adjust our meeting time according to school hours, which was mainly after 2:30 pm when the school was over.
**Group size**

One of the main problems in working directly with communities during a training workshop is related to the number of persons participating in a workshop. Typical SC workshops are conducted with relatively large groups. The strength of our group was also around thirty persons—too large to act as one group in a village setting.

It is important to be sensitive to the ecology of a village while visiting and conducting exercises there. A large outsider group will inevitably disrupt the daily life in a village, no matter how careful they are. Even a group of ten is too much if one wants to work directly with children.

We were lucky to solve this problem in Ampara. First, we had access to three separate villages. We divided the workshop participants into three groups, and for the first three days, each group visited one village.

Once in the village, we usually worked with three groups of children. These were the boys, the girls, and the relatively young children. On a few occasions, parents were also included as a separate group. This arrangement allowed us to have no more than ten participants in a village at a time, and groups of three to four participants to work with one demographic group (e.g., girls).

**Minimizing the influence of adults during fieldwork**

A common occurrence during fieldwork in communities is the involvement of adults who try to force children to perform better. This usually well-intended interference may result in pressuring and stressing the children during the workshops. We did not face this problem in Ampara. During one occasion where the parents were present, it was possible to generate a separate “parent’s group” on the spot, and so they were all involved separately as an individual group.

**Establishing an agenda in advance**

Working in the field requires careful advance planning. It is important to finalize the schedule and inform the communities so that the groups of children can be prepared prior to the visit. In some sections of Sri Lanka, communication facilities with the villages are very limited. As a result, the organizers need to inform the communities about the exact times of arrival and departure of the workshop participants as well as the nature of the activities to be conducted. In Ampara, after a false start, we understood the importance of this and finalized our schedule in a way that is agreeable to the communities.
Tools and equipment

A workshop on physical environment requires a lot of materials such as paper, markers, cardboard, scissors, masking tape, rulers, measuring tape, etc. In many cases, these materials may be difficult to obtain from local sources. The SC staff were very resourceful in obtaining these materials and equipment during the workshop in Ampara. On many occasions, we needed to be creative and substitute what is available locally. For example, in order to create very large sheets of paper, needed for mapping exercises, we taped smaller sheets together.

Safety concerns

Safety is always a concern in Southeast Asia. We were careful enough to follow the necessary precautionary tips, have our travel routes checked and adjusted accordingly, avoid travel after dark and have a security briefing during the workshop. These measures undoubtedly had an impact on the schedule and should be considered during the planning phase.

Future challenges and recommendations

The physical environment workshop in Ampara was the first attempt by SC to start a long-term process that would include increasing focus on the physical environment in tsunami-affected areas. Preliminary assessment of the workshop indicates that it was a successful attempt. The challenge now is to develop a strategy that will allow the expansion of the idea and would involve as many staff as possible. The most likely approach is to continue with a series of other workshops, using a ToT strategy.

Another challenge is to convince the managers about the importance of the physical environment and to ensure their ongoing support. This can be achieved by short workshops targeting managers and by documenting and disseminating best practices in connection with the sub-projects that are related to physical environment.

Documentation efforts, inevitably, will require a careful follow-up. It is necessary not only to document efforts related to this area within SC but also to keep the lines of communication open with the already trained staff at all times. They should be reminded of the skills that they have learned during the physical environment workshops and should be provided with ideas and support to encourage them to use these skills during their work. This is best done by establishing national “focal points,” manned by well-trained staff members with interest in physical environment.
It is very important that the future workshops are related to some real projects. It is not feasible to conduct “simulations” of exercises designed just for workshop purposes. Bringing an environmental focus to some current SC projects will allow the staff to grasp the importance and value of these workshops much more easily.

There is also an ethical dimension in relating workshop activities to real projects. During the workshop in Ampara, this was a major concern. Spending four days in a village and raising a lot of hopes and excitement on a physical topic such as the redesign and rehabilitation of an existing schoolyard inevitably generate a moral commitment to act on this issue. We were fortunate that there was already an existing initiative in the school that we selected for the workshop. If the physical environment workshops can be tied to “real” SC projects, then ethical issues will be resolved and projects themselves will benefit significantly from the added value generated through the work of the workshop participants.

**Day-by-day agenda of the workshop: activities and achievements**

**Main idea and the structure of the workshop**

The main idea behind the workshop was to design a four-day participatory workshop that would increase the awareness and knowledge of the participants in areas related to the physical environment. The workshop was designed to get more complicated each day; the participants were made ready to handle it by familiarizing them with a range of planning and design methodologies. The final target of day four was to complete a collective conceptual design of a schoolyard with the help of the children, using modeling techniques.

Considering that well-planned common space could contribute to the objectives of a number of sectors, it was felt that support for local participation in this area could promote the integrated efforts that the organization was striving for. (School grounds, for instance, can contribute to children’s learning, environmental health, availability of “safe spaces,” and participation and citizenship on the part of children, as well as to the more obvious end of contributing to children’s overall development through play and recreation, thereby lending itself to the objectives of education, health, and safety.)

The Ampara-based workshop was planned to include staff from all sectors. It was designed so that a significant portion of each day was spent in the field, working directly with children and communities. In between these hands-on sessions, the facilitators introduced new methodologies to be used during each field exercise. The beginning and the end of each day were reserved for reflection, presentations, and group discussion.
Below is a conceptual agenda: goals and activities for each of the four days of the workshop. For a more detailed workshop agenda, see Attachment A.
Day 1: Introducing concepts, and learning from children about their communities

Topics of interest

The main goal of the first day was to introduce the participants to the basic concepts and to get them thinking about why physical environment was critical for the lives of the children. This was done through a series of presentations. The presentations highlighted how the physical environment affects children’s lives, and how children are different from adults, due to which they can be affected negatively by the deficiencies in their environment.

The link between children’s rights and physical environment was established.

Methodologies introduced

The participants were introduced to conducting informative tours of the community under the guidance of children. In this methodology, a small group of children acts as “guides” and takes participants around their community. The participants ask questions along the way to understand where things happen and why. As much as possible, the group stopped along the way to meet and ask further questions to various members of the community.

This method serves to give first-hand information to the participants about the daily lives of children, which areas they use, and which areas they avoid in the community and why.

Hands-on work in the field

In each of the three villages, the participants broke down into subgroups. Each group walked around with boys, girls, or younger children. This way it was possible to understand the activities and concerns related to age and gender.

Through this exercise, the group gained valuable insights about issues related to play, recreation, conflicts between age groups, places restricted due to safety and armed conflict, gender separation, and child labor.
Children cooling themselves in the channel—from the tour with the children.

Day 2: Children’s everyday life: learning about children through community mapping

Topics of interest

The main goal of the second day was to build on the experiences of the first day and to allow the participants to establish what they experienced during the tours. From this discussion, the participants developed a comprehensive picture of the issues related to children in the villages that they had just visited. This was done through an interactive session. A graphical representation of a village was used and annotated by the facilitator to illustrate the points in a graphic format.
Graphical representation of environmental issues and problems faced by children in the villages.

**Methodologies introduced**

A new methodology, environmental mapping with children, was introduced. The participants were shown how to facilitate a mapping session with the children.

Before moving to the field, the participants conducted an in-house mapping exercise to familiarize themselves with this methodology.

**Hands-on work in the field**

In each of the three villages, the participants facilitated two mapping sessions, one with the boys and another with the girls. During the mapping, the children used markers on a large sheet of paper taped to the floor to generate a map of their village. Once the maps were complete, they marked where they go and what they do during a “typical” day. Children also marked other key environmental attributes on the maps including safe and dangerous locations, areas they work and play in, locations of water sources and garbage, and places that are important for them.
Girls developing a map of their community.

Day 3: The concept of the functional program, programming physical spaces, and a schoolyard

Topics of interest

Any design project needs to start by developing a detailed functional program. The goal of the third day was to introduce the participants to the concept of the functional program and to the basic design concepts related to schoolyard design.

Methodologies introduced

To achieve this goal, the participants were asked to divide the schoolyard into smaller activity zones, such as a “seating area,” a “play area for young children,” an “outdoor classroom,” a garden area,” etc. For each of these zones, the participants were to generate a program sheet. Each sheet included one activity, and included details and design information for that activity. Each of the sheets had the following headings:
Hands-on work in the field

The basic methodology used for the development of a functional program was to have focus groups, which were conducted by children and other community members. As a result of these focus groups, the participants identified the key activities desired in the schoolyard by these groups. The work also included a detailed analysis of the schoolyard.

Annotated diagram showing the physical layout of the selected schoolyard.
Day 4: Participatory design: Designing schoolyards using modeling techniques

Topics of interest

The last day of the workshop was allocated to participatory design of a schoolyard in one of the three villages. The basic concepts of the participatory design were introduced during the morning session.

A large number of various schoolyard images from all around the world were presented to the participants using a PowerPoint presentation. The goal of this was to expand their vision and understanding of alternatives for design.

Methodologies introduced

The methodology to be used was a participatory design using a large base-map of the schoolyard and a range of templates and models representing the various elements that were to be included in the design.

The participants were introduced to concepts such as scale, and they spent most of the morning preparing templates and small models to be used during the design session.

Hands-on work in the field

In the afternoon, the participants met with students, teachers, parents, and the principal in the village. The large base-map and templates were used to facilitate a design session. A conceptual design slowly emerged as the children moved different elements to different locations in the schoolyard. The participants took careful notes about the reasoning behind these moves. In the end, a consensus on a particular conceptual design was achieved. This design can now be used as the basis of further professional design activity in the schoolyard.

Caption: Participatory design session for the schoolyard using templates and scale models of various design elements.
Summary recommendations

- Many of the recommendations of this initiative are already built into the text of this report. Below is the bulleted list of summary recommendations:

- Considering the success of this pilot workshop, it will be a good idea to conduct additional workshops that focus on the physical environment.

- Ideally, workshops should be attended by representatives from all the sectors. It is particularly important to include the construction sector.

- A separate, relatively brief workshop targeting managers should be designed and implemented.

- As much as possible, the workshops should be tied up with real SC projects.
• Multiple facilitators should be hired to distribute the load and to ensure that each group/subgroup has sufficient supervision and technical support.

• All the new projects should be assessed to make sure that they take the factors related to physical environment into consideration.

• A follow-up procedure should be established to ensure that workshop participants get the necessary support and technical assistance as regards the physical issues in their daily work.

• In each country, a person should be identified and trained as the physical environment “focal point.” This individual should promote, coordinate, and provide TA.

• Upcoming workshops should be well documented. A training CD or DVD can be developed from this documentation.