

Global Children's Designathon 2025: A Decade of Designing a Better Future

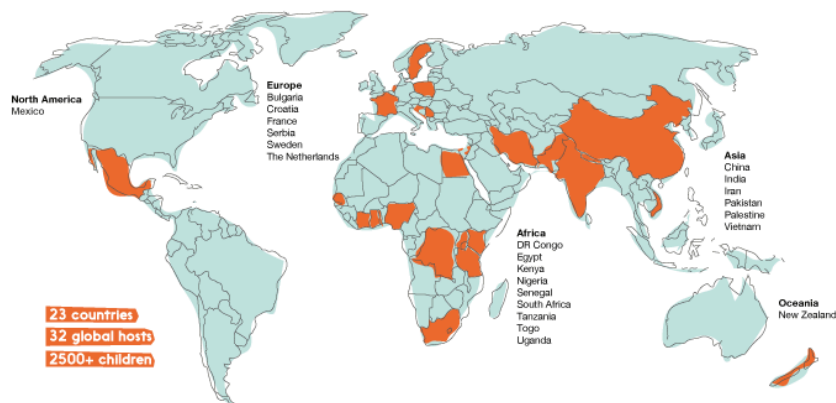
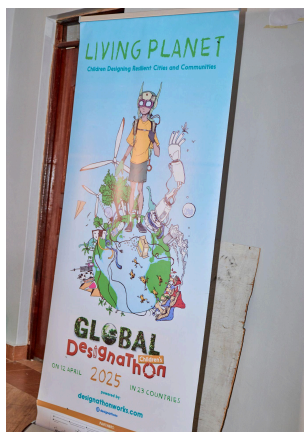
By Ina Conkic, Co-Founder and Global Coordinator, Designathon Works

In 2025, we celebrate a remarkable milestone - the **10th edition of the Global Children's Designathon**. What began as a bold idea in Amsterdam has grown into a worldwide movement that has engaged over **13,000 children from 52 countries**, all designing for a better world.

Each year, the Global Children's Designathon brings together children aged 8 to 12 from across the globe to **ideate, sketch, and prototype solutions to some of the most pressing challenges of our time** - from clean energy to biodiversity, and from circular design to food and climate action.

But perhaps the most powerful element of all was this: **children presented their ideas to adult experts, decision-makers, and local leaders**. The tables are turned and for a moment, **adults truly listened to children**, not only as learners but as visionaries.

For the 2025 edition, we're proud to be working with **23 countries**, some of whom have journeyed with us from the very beginning, and others who are exciting new partners. Each brings unique energy, insight, and a shared commitment to **empowering children to shape the world they will inherit**.



Why it Matters More Than Ever

The world is changing rapidly. Climate change, inequality, and technological disruption continue to shape our collective future. Yet amid these challenges, **children offer something truly extraordinary: unfiltered creativity, empathy, and hope**.

At Designathon Works, we believe children are not just future leaders - they are present-day problem solvers and that in each child lives a creative genius. **The Global Children's Designathon offers a podium for them** - for their ideas, voices and dreams for a better planet.

In a world so often divided by silos and separation, we wish to connect, not divide. Our in-person gatherings and online exchanges offer **opportunities for children of all socio-economic backgrounds and learning levels**. We call on all children to become active participants, and we teach them that no matter how small the first steps might look, every step contributes to a better future.





A New Theme for a New Era

Each year, we choose a theme that is current and relevant. And linked to one or more of the UN's 17 SDGs. This year, we dive into one of the most critical topics of our time: **How can we live in balance with the planet while building resilient, inclusive cities and communities?**

It invites children to explore and discuss their surroundings, whether in bustling cities or quiet rural areas. These problems include pollution, loss of nature, poor infrastructure, and socio-economic struggles. The goal is to rethink how we live in both urban and rural spaces and to make them work **for ALL living beings**.

This theme aligns with the Designathon Works' decade of focus on societal and environmental themes as it explores both - a *living city* isn't just about buildings; it's about creating a place where nature, people, and all life forms coexist in harmony. In rural areas, the challenges are different, but the goal remains the same: creating communities that are resilient, self-sustaining, and connected to the environment.

What the children created was truly inspiring — from floating neighborhoods and forest schools to solar-powered community hubs, safe transport systems, and even treehouses built on post-war ruins. Across continents, their ideas reflected a profound understanding of the need for healthy, connected, and resilient places where people and nature can thrive together.



Coordinating Across Cultures and Contexts

As **Global Coordinator**, I have the unique privilege of working (in)directly with hosts, educators, and children across continents. From bustling classrooms in big cities to humble setups in remote or underserved communities, I've witnessed firsthand the **power of creativity, resilience, and collaboration**.

Each host brings something special: a cultural lens, a local challenge, a way of learning or teaching that enriches the global aspect of this event. Some of them have been with us for many years, growing and evolving alongside us. Others are just joining, bringing fresh energy and perspective. It's a living, breathing network, united by one shared goal: **empowering children to shape a better world**.

What moves me most is **children's empathy**. Whether it's children in Sweden, designing a Friendship Square or children in the Netherlands designing a Post-War City rising out of the rubble of war, there's always an abundance of empathy and a deep understanding that their ideas matter and that they can make a difference.

One of the most moving aspects of the 2025 edition was the participation of **children from the Kakuma refugee camp** in Kenya. It was the first time we had the opportunity to include children living in such a complex and vulnerable setting. Despite limited resources, the commitment shown by the children, their local hosts, and the expert panel was extraordinary.

For me, the children of Kakuma addressed this year's theme of resilience not as a theoretical exercise, but as a **lived experience**, and their ideas were inspiring, insightful, and deeply moving. To me, they are a powerful reminder of the deeper purpose of our work: to **amplify the voices of those too often unheard**.

Their participation created a moment of shared learning, empathy, and admiration that we will carry with us into future editions of the Global Children's Designathon.



Coordinating this global movement is **both challenging and deeply rewarding**. We navigate time zones, languages, and resource gaps — but every message, call, and shared story reminds me that we are building something beautiful and important together. This isn't just about an event. It's about connection, dream, and a shared belief in the brilliance of children.

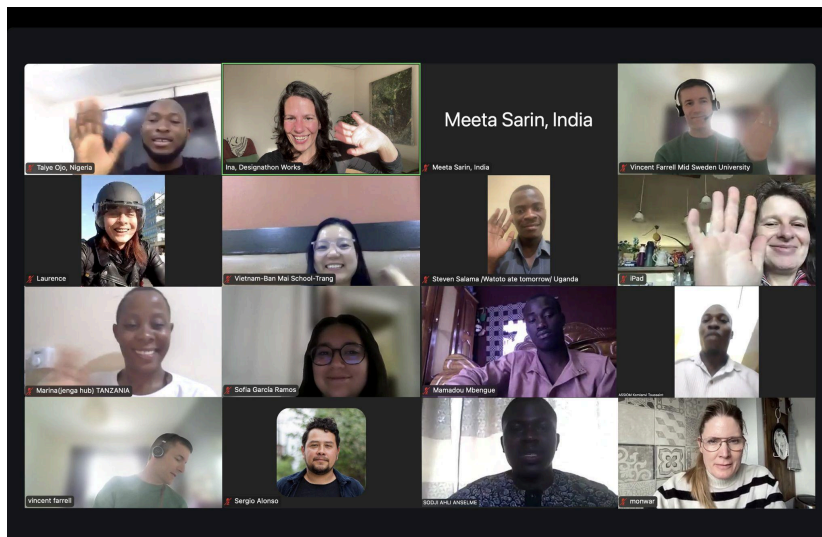
A Year of Uneven Realities — and Unshaken Commitment

One thing that stood out more than ever this year was how many of our hosts faced **real challenges in delivering their workshops** amid turbulent times. Some, like Serbia, had to postpone due to local instability; others, like our partners in **Palestine** and **Gatoto School in Kenya**, had to cancel altogether. Still, some persevered despite difficult circumstances - in places like the **Democratic Republic of Congo**, where Dean and their team went to great lengths to offer their children the experience of designing for a better world.



These situations speak to the reality of what it means to be a truly global community. If we truly care about equity, inclusion, and solidarity, **we must make space for these stories** — to listen, to learn, and to support. This should be an important focus for our **Community of Practice**: how we hold space for each other in difficult times, and how we can ensure no one is left behind.

Despite the setbacks, what emerged was a powerful sense of commitment. Even when the workshops didn't happen, the intention and effort were there. **This, too, is resilience** — and it deserves recognition.



A Global Day of Design — and Connection

The 2025 Global Children's Designathon took place in 23 countries, with children working in classrooms, community centers, and sometimes even outdoors. Though separated by geography, they were united by a **shared creative journey** — guided by the same process, theme, and spirit (the idea of it still gives me goosebumps every year!).

Looking back, the day was filled with energy, joy, focus, and agency. The hosts reported that children not only learned new skills but **felt empowered** and connected to a global community of young changemakers.

Looking Forward

The 10th edition of the Global Children's Designathon was a celebration of how far we've come - and a reminder of how much potential still lies ahead!

At Designathon Works, we remain committed to our mission: to **empower children worldwide** to take action for a more just, sustainable, and joyful world. We know that children are not only the future — they are **active agents of change today**.

To all our partners, facilitators, and especially the children - THANK YOU! You made the Global Children's Designathon 2025 a powerful, global act of hope.





Final Reflection

Looking back on this edition, I'm filled with gratitude. Coordinating across cultures and continents isn't always easy — but it is always worth it. Each story, each sketch, each prototype reminded me of the beauty of this work. The world our children dream of is not only possible — it's already being built, one idea at a time.

www.designathonworks.com

#GlobalDesignathon #ChangemakerChildren #DesignathonWorks #10YearEdition #LivingPlanet #SDGs
#ChildLedDesign

