

# EMPOWERKIDS DESIGNATHON IN KAKUMA

## Pilot's learnings and key recommendations

The pilot of the EmpowerKids Designathon workshops held in Kakuma Refugee Camp represents a significant milestone in Designathon Works' mission to empower children as changemakers and involve them in co-designing shared futures. This report captures the insights, observations, and learnings from the workshops conducted in July 2024, highlighting the potential of children to drive community-centric solutions and the pathways to scaling this impactful program. We extend our gratitude to our on-the-ground partners, Discover, for their dedication, and to the participating children, whose enthusiasm and creativity have been truly inspiring. We also extend our heartfelt thanks to Contribute for helping us bring the dream of Designathon to the children in Kakuma.



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## Background of Kakuma Refugee Camp

Established in 1992, Kakuma Refugee Camp is one of the world's largest refugee settlements, currently housing over 201,000 individuals from diverse backgrounds. People in Kakuma face challenging socio-economic conditions, including significant education, healthcare, and employment barriers. Children aged 10 to 12 in Kakuma are particularly vulnerable, grappling with displacement, trauma, and limited prospects. These challenges adversely affect their well-being and potential, including insufficient access to quality education, recreational opportunities, and skill development programs.

## EmpowerKids Designathon

The EmpowerKids Designathon was created to address the challenges faced by children in Kakuma by engaging them in a dynamic learning environment. During the workshops, participants gained insights into the given theme and developed 21st-century skills such as problem-solving, creative thinking, and teamwork. These competencies empower them to pursue educational and career opportunities, foster meaningful relationships, and positively contribute to their communities.



### Workshop Theme: Enhancing the Living Environment in Kakuma

The EmpowerKids Designathon actively engages children in addressing real-world challenges within their environment. By involving them directly, the initiative encourages meaningful participation and helps them navigate the limitations imposed by their circumstances. This theme was carefully developed

in collaboration with our local partner, Discover, and insights from discussions with the community, to ensure its relevance to the context of the Kakuma Refugee Camp. Topics addressed during the workshop:

- Opportunities to play
- Opportunities to learn
- Safety & health

During the Designathon workshop, the children were guided through the seven steps of the Designathon: Inspire, Research, Ideate, Sketch, Make, Show, and Reflect. They discussed areas for improvement within their community, worked in teams to brainstorm and sketch their ideas, and then built prototypes of these ideas. The workshop concluded with presentations and a group reflection.

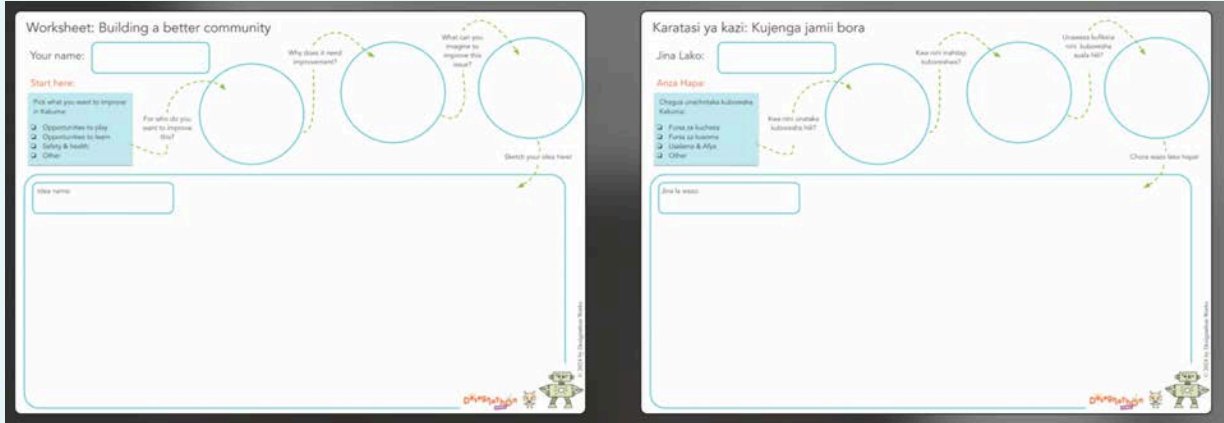
Seven steps of the Designathon process:



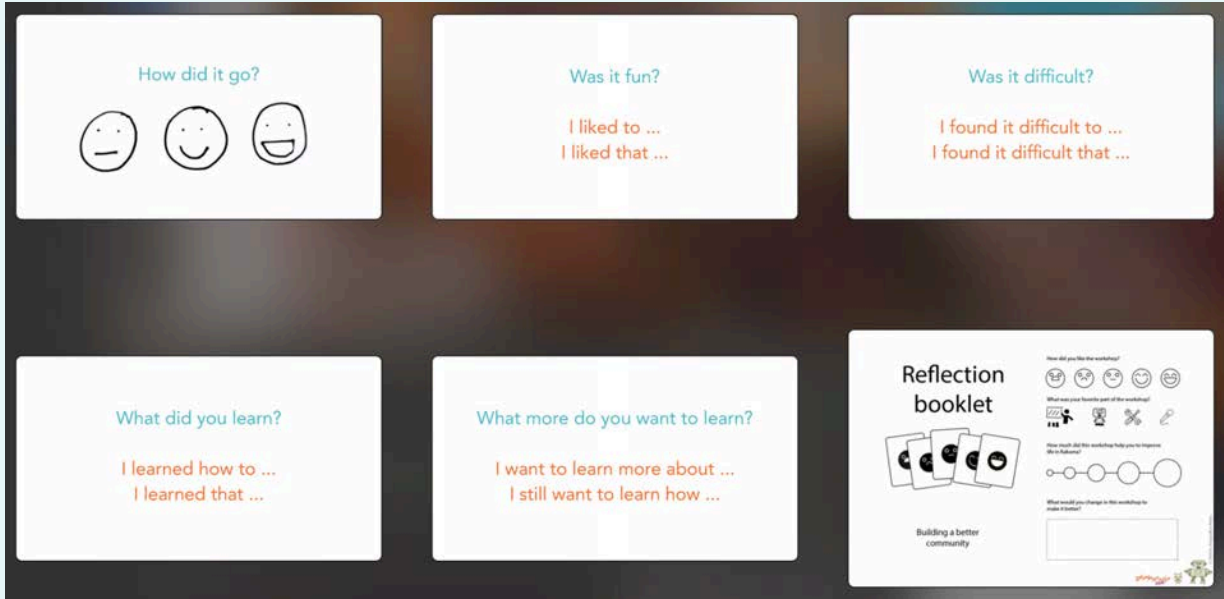
Theme slides:

The theme slides are arranged in a 3x3 grid. The top-left slide is the title slide: 'DESIGNATHON WORKSHOP Kakuma'. The top-middle slide shows a group of smiling children. The top-right slide is an aerial view of the Kakuma refugee camp. The middle-left slide features a globe with icons for a camera, a person, a house, and a gear, with the text: 'What will you imagine to make Kakuma a safe and happy place for everyone?'. The middle-middle slide shows three photos of children engaged in various activities. The middle-right slide asks: 'What can you imagine to make Kakuma a safe and happy place for everyone?'. The bottom-left slide shows colorful drawings and paintings by children, with the text: 'PLAY & LEARN: ART'. The bottom-middle slide shows photos of children building a structure, with the text: 'PLAY & LEARN: BETHU'S CLASSROOMS'. The bottom-right slide asks: 'What can you imagine to make Kakuma a safe and happy place for everyone?'.

Worksheets:



Reflection & evaluation materials:



Long-term Vision

Our vision is to foster an environment where children’s intellectual development (mind), emotional well-being (heart), and practical skills (hand) are interconnected. By promoting self-reliance and a strong community spirit, the project aims to create a lasting impact. The EmpowerKids Designathon seeks to lay the foundation for sustainable change in Kakuma through child-driven creativity and innovation, contributing to community development. We aim to instill positive behavior and community engagement from a young age, setting the stage for lifelong learning and inclusivity.

Insights gained from the pilot phase will inform the expansion of the program, enabling us to reach more children, train additional educators, and implement impactful initiatives. This pilot provides crucial data to enhance and scale up the program for maximum effectiveness.

## Core Target Audience and Main Objectives

### Target Audience: Children and Community

The main audience for the EmpowerKids Designathon workshops are the community children, aged 8 to 14, in the Kakuma Refugee Camp who actively participated in the workshops. Additionally, their parents were involved through information sessions to ensure a supportive and informed community environment. We recruited two local facilitators, Seth and Joseph from Discover, who were trained on designathon methodology and how to run the workshops. They played a crucial role as facilitators.



### Program Objectives

The EmpowerKids Designathon program is designed with specific objectives to ensure a meaningful and lasting impact on the community. These objectives include:

- Empower Children: Enable 50 children to actively contribute to creating a sustainable and inclusive community.
- Educational Program: Provide a program that equips children with 21st-century skills, aligned with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Idea Implementation: Support the implementation of two of the children's ideas within the community.
- Long-term Vision: Lay the foundation for sustainable change by promoting self-reliance and community engagement.

### Community and Parental Involvement

By involving parents and the local community, we aim to cultivate a spirit of social responsibility and community engagement, generating a positive ripple effect within Kakuma Refugee Camp.

## Children as Changemakers

At the heart of the EmpowerKids Designathon is the belief that children, regardless of their circumstances, have the potential to contribute meaningfully to their communities. The pilot workshops in Kakuma have reinforced this belief, demonstrating that children possess a deep understanding of their environment and are eager to contribute. Their creative ideas, ranging from creating more opportunities to play and learn to fostering a healthier and safer environment, underscore their capacity to envision and work towards a better future.



## Implementation

### Workshop Execution

We have successfully conducted two pilot workshops in Kakuma on July 24th and July 27th. Initially, we planned for 25 children per workshop to participate, but the enthusiasm was overwhelming, with 33 children aged 8 to 12 joining the first workshop. In the second workshop, 25 children aged 12 to 14 participated, an age group that is crucial for fostering creativity and problem-solving skills in Kakuma.

Each workshop lasted 6 hours, guided by 2 facilitators who worked closely with the children to explore creative and practical solutions for their living environment. The overwhelming interest highlights the demand for more such programs in the future.

## Facilitator Training and Community Engagement

Designathon Works collaborated closely with our local team from Discover, who were trained as Designathon facilitators to deliver these workshops effectively. The team also engaged with parents through informational sessions, ensuring they understand the value of the 21st-century skills their children will acquire. Additionally, we sought to understand the educational needs and concerns of parents with refugee children, using this feedback to refine the program.

## Workshop Outcomes and Feedback

The pilot workshops revealed high levels of engagement and enthusiasm from the children. The varied learning paces required additional time, extending the workshop to 9 hours. The involvement of parents highlighted the importance of fostering strong support networks, ensuring the program's success.

## Implementation of Children's Ideas: Tree Planting Initiative

**Tree Planting Initiative** One of the children's ideas from the EmpowerKids Designathon has been brought to life through a tree planting initiative at the Discover community Center and Gambella Primary School. The event was delayed due to school closures caused by teacher demonstrations across Kenya. The children participated by planting trees and were awarded certificates for their contributions to improving the environment in Kakuma Refugee Camp. Despite the challenges, they gained valuable knowledge about environmental stewardship and expressed enthusiasm for future community-driven activities.





## Main Observations

### Overcoming Challenges

There were many unforeseen challenges during the course of the project, from our travels being canceled due to floods and then due to civil unrest in Kenya. However, we believe every adversity also presents an opportunity. So, we decided to focus on building the skills of a local partner and training facilitators from within the community itself. Interestingly, we pivoted towards a more scalable and sustainable approach to pilot implementation, keeping future expansion in mind.

### Children's Engagement and Capacity

The children demonstrated a high level of engagement and enthusiasm, with more participants than initially expected. This enthusiasm highlights the importance of fostering an environment where children feel empowered to share their ideas and take part in community projects.

### Gender Participation

Interestingly, the workshop saw a higher number of girls participating compared to boys. This is not the usual scenario in Kakuma, where boys typically have higher participation rates. The girls displayed a high level of enthusiasm, which contributed positively to the workshop's dynamics. This enthusiasm could be leveraged to encourage more balanced participation in future workshops.

## Learning Styles and Group Dynamics

The workshops revealed the need to accommodate varied learning paces and styles to ensure that all children can benefit from the program. Smaller groups (15-20 children) are recommended for better engagement and facilitation.

## Workshop Design and Facilitation

Simplifying the 7-step designathon process explanation is crucial for better understanding. Additionally, a wider range of materials is necessary to stimulate creativity, and enhanced facilitation skills are needed to manage diverse personalities and energy levels.

## Parent and Community Involvement

Parents showed keen interest in the program and its impact on their children. The potential for children-led initiatives to positively impact the community is significant if well-explained and showcased.

## Insights Gained from the Children

The workshop successfully captured the attention of the children, with the majority eagerly participating and sharing their ideas. While a few children were initially shy, they gradually became more engaged as the sessions progressed. The activities were closely aligned with real-life situations, which helped to build strong connections. This relevance, combined with our efforts to translate instructions into Swahili for those who struggled with English, ensured that all children could fully participate and understand the tasks at hand.

The children particularly enjoyed the interactive group tasks and the creative problem-solving activities. These elements of the workshop were not only fun but also deeply engaging, allowing the participants to explore solutions to challenges in their community. The higher-than-expected attendance underscored the strong interest in the workshop, and facilitators' ability to remain flexible helped accommodate the varied interests and needs of the participants.

Feedback from the children was overwhelmingly positive. They expressed that the workshop increased their confidence and motivated them to see themselves as future leaders and agents of change. This response highlights the workshop's impact on the children's self-perception and their aspirations for contributing to their community.



## Insights Gained from the Parents' Focus Groups

During the pilot, several focus groups with community adults took place. The sessions were conducted to inform the parents and caregivers about the workshops, ensuring they understand the value of the 21st-century skills their children can acquire. Additionally, we aimed to gain insight into the needs and concerns of parents with refugee children regarding their children's education and to better understand the level of knowledge of children in Kakuma. The findings from these focus groups will be used to fine-tune the program. These sessions were conducted by our partners from Discover, assisted by a block leader and a youth representative. The designathon workshop and its potential impact were clearly explained, helping parents feel comfortable sharing their views and suggestions for their children's improvement.

### Parent comments and views

1. Mugisha Suleiman:  
*Kakuma education is good, but it is not enough for solving community problems. The designathon workshop could add value. However, a one-day workshop is not sufficient; more time is needed for children to fully grasp the topic and develop their solutions.*
2. Salima Hannah:  
*I don't believe in Kakuma education. The teaching methods and resources are inadequate. There are no proper tools or safe places for children to play and learn collaboratively, both at school and in the community.*
3. Selemani Oredi:  
*The education in Kakuma is lacking. Additional subjects like ICT and hands-on courses would be beneficial. Practical skills training should start early. I have little hope for my children's future with the current education system.*
4. Harerimana Violete:  
*The education in Kakuma is insufficient. Teachers lack materials, and children are not encouraged to solve community problems. My child has potential, but there is no support to nurture it.*
5. Samuel Omiti:  
*Kakuma education can be good if children pay attention and review their lessons at home. There should be a follow-up strategy to guide and support children's ideas after teaching them.*
6. Chance Kiza:  
*My children need to learn problem-solving strategies, which are not covered in the camp's education. Continuous, step-by-step teaching is required for clear understanding.*
7. Zawadi Gode:

*Our children need practical education. They are brilliant but need proper teaching to shape their skills. Introducing digital skills like coding and computer use at a young age is essential.*

## Pilot's Learnings and Key Recommendations

### High Engagement

One of the most significant learnings was the high level of engagement from the children. They demonstrated eagerness and capability in contributing meaningfully to their community. This enthusiasm highlights the importance of fostering an environment where children feel empowered to share their ideas and take part in community projects.

### Diverse Learning Styles

Another key observation was the diverse learning styles among the participants. The workshops revealed the need to accommodate varied learning paces and styles to ensure that all children can benefit from the program. Tailoring the workshops to meet these diverse needs will enhance the overall effectiveness of the sessions.

### Facilitation Skills

The importance of continuous training for facilitators also became evident. To handle diverse groups effectively, facilitators need ongoing professional development to refine their skills and adapt to the unique challenges presented by different groups of children.

### Resource Management

Lastly, resource management was identified as a critical factor in the success of the workshops. Providing adequate materials and examples is crucial for stimulating creativity and ensuring that children have the tools they need to explore and express their ideas.

### Recommendations for Program Enhancement

- **Smaller Groups:** Limit group size to 15-20 children to ensure optimal engagement and personalized attention.
- **Process Simplification:** Simplify the 7-step designathon process and clearly explain it to improve understandability.
- **Materials and Tools:** Provide a wider range of materials to stimulate creativity and offer sufficient tools to effectively explore and express ideas.
- **Facilitation Skills:** Enhance the training and development of facilitators to better guide diverse groups and continuously improve their skills.



## Conclusion and Way Forward

The pilot EmpowerKids Designathon in Kakuma has been a resounding success, showcasing the immense potential of children to act as changemakers within their community. The insights gained from this pilot provide a robust foundation for scaling the program, ensuring long-term sustainability, and maximizing community impact.

Moving forward, the focus will be on deeper community integration by collaborating with schools to incorporate Designathon workshops into the curriculum. This approach will ensure that the program becomes a lasting part of the children's educational journey. To secure long-term sustainability, we will explore partnerships with organizations like UNHCR and continue strengthening our relationships with local partners like Discover. These collaborations will be vital in sustaining the program's positive impact for years to come.

Building on the success of the pilot, we aim to scale up the program, reaching more children and training additional facilitators to expand its reach. Ongoing support and refinement of the program will be prioritized, driven by continuous feedback and the evolving needs of the community.

At Designathon Works, we are committed to nurturing the next generation of innovators and leaders in Kakuma, empowering them to create a better, more sustainable future for themselves and their community.

## Acknowledgment/Partners

We want to express our deepest gratitude to the incredible children who participated in the workshops. Your creativity and enthusiasm leave no doubt that you are the future architects of a better world. We are also immensely thankful to our partners at The Discover for their support and collaboration, throughout this journey. This pilot project was made possible by the generous contributions of Contribute.

### Collaborating partners:

Contribute: The entire team

The Discover: Seth, Joseph and their dedicated team

Designathon Works: Anne, Ina, Vithika and the entire team

Together, we are shaping a brighter future!