Creating Great Public Spaces in Accra. Mnofra Foundation develops programs, products and inspiring environments outside the classroom to benefit of children living in Ghana and Africa who are depending on such experiences to become capable and creative change makers for a better world.
Child Play Spaces in Malata & Nima Markets

In Ghana, the public markets are a female dominated space. As a result, a large number of children between the ages of zero to five spend a significant part of their early childhood in the formal and informal public markets with their mothers or primary female caregivers. Mallam Atta (Malata) and Nima are examples of large, well-established markets in Accra, with hundreds of young children who spend up to 10 hours a day, individually or in small groups, around their mothers’ stalls. It is known that stimulation in the earliest years of life has a direct impact on the development of young brains and the markets are not child friendly, lack developmental structures, and can be hazardous.

In Accra we addressed these major concerns by creating early childhood micro-play spaces in two public markets with the participation of the vendor community and local authority. With the support of market leaders, we focused on Malata and Nima as test site so the lessons would be transferable to other markets.
BEFORE INTERVENTION

Much of the space in Accra markets is characterized by stalls rented to and held by individual market women. It also includes ‘informal’ or temporarily repurposed structures. This environment posed a few challenges that required creative adaptations. As a result of the participatory design workshop, we developed interventions that were adapted for the realities on the ground.
Results of the workshops were successful and participatory in nature.

Community engagement, capacity building and infrastructure change strategies were used to achieve our objectives.

Activities included:

1 Minecraft workshop with 23 community members participating. It was inclusive in nature and allowed for the healthy discussion of issues affecting the market like security issues and solutions were gathered from the participants.

61 meetings with approx. 114 participants which included municipal officials, market leaders and market women.
The meetings were intended to build trust among Mmofra, market leaders and other market women. This created an openness and allowed new ideas to be presented and accepted.

We also developed excellent collaborations with other local NGOs: Soronko Solutions, Foundation for Contemporary Art, Spread-Out Initiative.

In total we added 150 structures, installations, play-enabled surfaces and loose parts to the two markets. Many of the materials needed for creating prototype play items were intentionally sourced from and around the markets where the project was implemented.

Minecraft was used to design interventions.

Partnerships helped ensure that girls participated in the design and implementation.
Mallam Atta Market Installations were located in 15 m x 1.5 m passageway within a roofed shed.

It accommodated 50 vendors & was accessible to 200 regular child users per week.

**Installations**

- vertical surfaces for 3-dimensional play;
- multiple use seating and climbing units;
- interactive art installations on walls and ceilings for visual stimulation.
Nima Market installations were centred upon a principal shed occupied by the market leader. An area within the shed was defined as a play space.

It accommodated 12 vendors & was accessible to 100 plus child users per week.

**Installations**

- writing and drawing surfaces;
- interactive local games like ludo or oware;
- manipulatives for learning coordination skills;
- wire mesh demarcation of the play area;
- multiple use seating & climbing units;
- interactive art installations on verticals and ceilings;
- micro-library units made from recycled tires;
- colorful “play boxes”.
Installations
Mallam Atta & Nima Markets
Our Results

The project achieved its goal in creating safe play spaces for the children of market vendors and users of limited means. The most vulnerable children in the market, the children of the female head porters, have access to the play spaces.

There was a formal inauguration of both spaces and we hosted an information meeting between market women and an early childhood education specialist at the end of the project to discuss early childhood development with mothers and caregivers, using the completed projects as a demonstration model.

Children are using the playspaces enthusiastically. During our follow-up visits, vendors report that the space is always packed with children on “market days” which is a designated day of the week when specific markets experience the highest commercial activity.

Most urban markets in Ghana have similarities in their dense physical layout, organizational culture and presence of young children in proximity to their mothers or caregivers. The design strategy we used serve very efficiently as demonstration sites for thousands of market users.

Educators from nearby schools and influencers in other markets have made inquiries about replication.

Over 1,200 child engagements per week at Mallam Atta and over 250 child engagements per week at Nima are estimated.