



FOUNDATION

PARTNER PAPER NO. 9

**NATURAL
PLAYGROUND
COMPILATION**

**Examples from Southern
Africa and Switzerland**



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Editorial

Why do children need playgrounds?

Playgrounds are fun and exciting, which means children love spending time there. When children enjoy themselves, they learn more and faster. Children also need to have different spaces in which to learn, also outside the classroom. On a playground with many different structures, children can learn many skills, just like indoors. This includes learning the alphabet and how to count (literacy and numeracy). Playgrounds are also important because they allow children to run, jump and climb. This helps the children to build small and big muscles (minor and major motor skills).

What is the difference between a traditional playground and a natural one?

Many elements in a natural playground can be used in different ways, which means that children can learn many skills by playing with/on one structure. Natural playgrounds are built using locally available materials such as wood, stone, clay, tyres, parts from old cars, bottles, etc. The key advantage is that the playground can be and is built and renovated by the community members themselves without any external donor support. It starts small with one or two play elements and can be extended over a longer period of time. Importantly, when community members build a playground together, they contribute to their children's education. This is something they can be proud of!

What do the communities need to build natural playgrounds? The top things they need are hard work and their imaginations. The materials for most of the structures shown in this compilation are sourced for free from the community or companies in the region.

How communities can use this compilation

The structures shown in this document are used for inspiration. We encourage them not to copy any of the structures exactly and to combine a number of structures. And if they come up with new structures that are not shown, that's great!

Points for the communities to remember:

- **Mix up different elements:** Make sure that your playground has various structures so children can learn many different skills. Make sure that the chosen structures allow children to learn skills from all the learning domains.
- **Make sure that you have enough structures for the number of children:** As many children as possible should be able to play at the same time.
- **A playground is never finished:** If there is enough space, you can continue to add elements for months or years to come. Also make sure to do maintenance regularly.

We wish the communities much success as they design and construct their playgrounds! Happy building!



Kitchen, Lesotho (see page 23)

Climbing frames

What the children can learn:

Skills

- Gross motor skills (climbing, jumping, balancing, coordinating hands and bodies)
- Fine motor skills (gripping)
- Cognitive skills (reasoning, remembering)
- Social-emotional skills (cooperating, roleplaying, competing, gaining confidence)
- Numeracy

Types of play

- Social play
- Solitary play

High monkey bars, Zambia



Low monkey bars, Zambia



Climbing frames

Tyre tower, Lesotho



Tyres with numbers, South Africa



Hanging tyre wall, Namibia



Climbing frames

Climbing frame with slide, Malawi



Slide, Malawi



Climbing frames

Long zig-zag frame, Zambia



Climbing frame with towers, South Africa



Climbing frames

Climbing tower 1, Zambia



Climbing tower 2, Zimbabwe



Swinging bridge, South Africa



Structures for riding

What the children can learn:

Skills

- Gross motor skills (climbing, jumping down, balancing)
- Fine motor skills (steering, gripping)
- Cognitive skills (reasoning, remembering)

- Social-emotional skills (imagining, roleplaying)

Types of play

- Social play
- Solitary play

Rocking bikes, Zambia



Tractor 1, Lesotho



Structures for riding

Tractor 2, Zambia



Car, Zambia



Structures for riding

Seesaws, Malawi



Zambia

Zebras, South Africa



Structures for riding

Horses and cart, South Africa



Tricycles, Malawi



Swings

What the children can learn:

Skills

- Gross motor skills (climbing, jumping, pushing, balancing, coordinating body)
- Fine motor skills (gripping)
- Social-emotional skills (cooperating)

Types of play

- Social play
- Solitary play

Group swing, Lesotho



Barrel swing, South Africa



Swings

Tyre swings, Namibia



Rope swings, Malawi



Traditional games

Many of the games shown here are played across Africa, sometimes with variations. If there are other popular games in your region, be sure to include them. This can include strategy games but others too. For example, you could make sure that there is an open area to play with stockings, play tag and/or play ball games.

This is an incomplete list of the various games and their different names:

Lesotho

- Diketo
- Morabaraba

Malawi

- Bawo

Namibia

- Onyune/Owela
- Chukulu/Ndota

South Africa

- Diketo/Magave/Upuca/Puca
- Morabaraba/Mabalaba/Mmela/Muravava/Umlabalaba/Ncuva/Morula
- Three Toti

Zambia

- Chiyato/Ichienga
- Nsolo/Chisolo

Zimbabwe

- Nhodo
- Tsoro

Morabaraba, South Africa



Traditional games

What the children can learn:

Skills

- Fine motor skills (moving pieces, throwing items, coordinating eyes and hands)
- Cognitive skills (rational and strategic thinking)
- Numeracy

- Social-emotional skills (cooperating, competing, gaining confidence)

Types of play

- Cultural play
- Loose parts play
- Social play

Bawo 1, Malawi



Diketo and Morabaraba, South Africa



Traditional games

Checkers, Zambia



Chess, Bawo 2 and Hopscotch, Malawi



Traditional games

Nsolo, Zambia



Bawo 3, Malawi



Huts and roleplaying areas

What the children can learn:

Skills

- Gross motor skills (lifting/ carrying items, climbing)
- Fine motor skills (stirring, mixing, sweeping)
- Cognitive skills (reasoning, remembering)
- Social-emotional skills (cooperating, roleplaying)

Types of play

- Cultural play
- Drama play
- Loose parts play
- Social play
- Solitary play

Treehouse, Switzerland



House on stilts, Zimbabwe



Huts and roleplaying areas

Kitchen, Lesotho



Leafy hut, South Africa



Ground-based elements

What the children can learn:

Skills

- Gross motor skills (crawling, jumping, balancing)
- Cognitive skills (reasoning, remembering, recognising colours)
- Social-emotional skills (imagining, roleplay)
- Numeracy & Literacy

Types of play

- Construction play
- Sensory play
- Social play
- Solitary play
- Water and sand play

Tunnel 1, Switzerland



Tunnel 2, Switzerland



Ground-based elements

Hopscotch 1, Lesotho



Hopscotch 2, South Africa



Colourful tree, Zimbabwe



Ground-based elements

Letters & numbers, Zambia



Pillars – wood/concrete, Zambia



Ground-based elements

Letter wheel, South Africa



Balancing planks, Zimbabwe



Brick path, South Africa



Ground-based elements

Artificial stream, South Africa



Maze, Switzerland



Ground-based elements

Sand pit, Lesotho



Trampolines, Zambia



Fantasy and other elements

Stage for puppet shows, Switzerland

What the children can learn:

Skills

- Gross motor skills (e.g. lifting watering can)
- Social-emotional skills (imagining, roleplay)
- Cognitive skills (reasoning, remembering e.g. with garden)

Types of play

- Cultural play
- Drama play
- Loose object play
- Social play
- Solitary play



Sitting area, Zimbabwe



Fantasy and other elements

Doorway, Switzerland



Swans, South Africa



Fantasy and other elements

Dragon, Switzerland



Crocodile, South Africa



Fantasy and other elements

Tortoise and crocodile, Lesotho



Hippo, South Africa



Fantasy and other elements

Herb garden, Lesotho



Flower & herb garden, Switzerland





MASTHEAD

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