ImagiNation Afrika’s mission is to promote critical thinking and to transform how children in Africa perceive themselves and their ability to contribute to development. We believe in a world of African children changemakers, solving the problems of development. We imagine Africa of 2050 powerfully led by young people who can critically think and creatively problem solve.

**Urban95**

Urban95 is the Bernard van Leer Foundation's initiative to make lasting change in the landscapes and opportunities that shape the crucial first five years of children's lives. Urban95 is rooted in the belief that when urban neighbourhoods work well for children aged 0-3 and the people who care for them, they also tend to nurture strong communities and economic development.

Creating environments that enable nurturing care, is crucial for urban planners, designers, developers and cities in order to understand how children’s and caregivers’ surroundings influence their needs and experiences – physical, social and emotional, cognitive and spatial.  

https://bernardvanleer.org/solutions/urban95/

**Acronyms**

IA- ImagiNation Afrika  
WWA- Walking With Amadou project  
BvLF- Bernard Van Leer Foundation  
YUX- Yux Dakar
ImagiNation Afrika uses a working definition of advocacy that is inspired by a systems thinking approach to creating change in our communities. Systems are a set of interrelated or interconnected elements. System elements often work together toward a goal or an objective.

In recent years, social scientists, economists and leadership experts have begun looking at how humans work together from a more holistic approach. As opposed to thinking about just individuals, leadership experts have been considering and rethinking our relationship with our environments.

This appreciation for how different system elements can work together to achieve the goal of supportive environments that allow African children to thrive is integral to our work.

ImagiNation Afrika maps and unpacks the systems that surround young children to develop advocacy tools for the different elements of the system around children. Concretely this approach allows our advocacy efforts to be focused on 4 key areas:
1. public spaces
2. institutions
3. communities
4. social values
ImagiNation Afrika has worked since 2011 to change African children’s perception of themselves and help them develop the skills they need to be the change makers of the 21st century, equipped to solve Africa’s biggest challenges. With the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation’s Urban95 project ImagiNation Afrika is working to advocate for better environments for children aged 0-3 in Dakar, Senegal.

The project included data gathering using human centered design methodologies, short videos of children exploring the city with their caregivers and, a series of workshops, discussions with the media and exhibitions in 3 communities in Dakar and its close suburbs.

This Creative Advocacy Toolkit is developed in response to the ever increasing need to take an ecosystem approach to children’s development, placing children at the center and advocating on their behalf to all the major stakeholders who impact their lives. The Toolkit provides a set of practical tools to help organizations like yours with little to no budget, tackle the challenge of space-making for young children and their caregivers in Africa’s rapidly urbanizing cities, particularly ages 0-3.

Use what we have done to build new and creative ideas. We encourage you to innovate and evolve our project to make it your own. This toolkit is a blueprint for advocacy that can be followed exactly or altered to fit the needs of your organization.
Are you concerned about the current environment for children in Africa and seeking a structured approach to deliver change? Then this Creative Advocacy Toolkit is perfect for you. Africa currently has the youngest population in the world with 60% of its people under 25 years of age. African policy makers and civil society actors are all counting on this demographic dividend to lift the region out of poverty.

The tools are particularly relevant to anyone who wants to expand their understanding of the social and economic landscape of young children and their caregivers in urban spaces like Dakar and how to use innovation and creativity to advocate for change with little to no budget.

**WHO IS THIS TOOLKIT FOR?**

**CREATIVE THINKING**

With particular respect to the Senegalese context, and the particular strengths and experiences of ImagiNation Afrika's child centered approach, we placed emphasis on the following guidelines for advocacy in the *Walking With Amadou* project:

1. Involve young children so that their own voices and experiences can be seen and heard from their perspective;
2. Developing partnerships/coalitions/alliances to diversify the range of organizations and actors who can articulate the message of change and reach non-traditional audiences for child-related advocacy;
3. Data collection to illustrate the underlying issue and co-creation workshops with communities to develop tactics that address the main challenges;
4. Awareness raising, communications and media work to deliver key messages to the public, decision makers and stakeholders;
5. Campaigning within impacted communities to educate, change perceptions and build capacity for self-directed advocacy within communities;
6. Events that target specific audiences who can influence stakeholders or decision makers, provide follow-up to support concrete action.
1 involve young children

Why is this important?
Children are competent, capable and can fully participate in sharing their experiences. This is one of ImagiNation Afrika's core beliefs. All our work is based on the lived realities of young children in Senegal. Advocacy on behalf of children must pull its credibility from on the ground, tangible experiences of children. Children’s own voices and experiences should lead the narrative where possible.

In practice:
We partnered with 3 year olds Soukeyna, Antou and Amadou to film a series of videos to showcase the city from their point of view as 3yr olds, and that of their caretakers. The video series captured the experience of young children in the marketplace, at the mayor’s office, in the health center, in a public play-space, at the beach, interacting with local commerce, trying to navigate the streets, on a bus and in a private childcare center.

What you need:
Permissions from Parents/Caregivers - Making sure they understand the project and how images will be used.
Multimedia technology - We used GoPros, but this could mean smartphones
Locally sourced materials - Boxes, Paint, Bottles, Bottle Caps, Shells and Sand.
Expressive arts facilitators - In addition to local artists we also work with young people in communities to facilitate these spaces.

Going the Extra Mile
Children can be involved in advocacy at a variety of levels. Beyond participating in data collection, you can aim to present the data to children in accessible ways. With well trained facilitators and appropriate support children themselves can be advocates for more nurturing environments. Using pop-up play spaces, ImagiNation Afrika shows how children react positively to more play spaces in their neighborhoods. Caregivers and local municipalities often witness this engagement with children aged 0-3 and become champions themselves for more play spaces.
Why is this important?
This approach helps us to diversify the range of organizations and actors who can articulate the message of change from their perspective and reach non-traditional audiences for more child-related advocacy. We like to take an ecosystem approach to child development. We build links around the lives of children and among local, regional and international partners to encourage mutual learning and create real momentum for an environment that helps children to thrive.

In Practice:
YUX Dakar, a Human Centered Design (HCD) company was our main partner for the WWA project. Yux's innovative approach allowed us to leverage the expertise and knowledge from the technology sector. Because we know Dakar is home to many tech startups, we know they are working on many innovative solutions to daily urban problems. Yux brought new and creative solutions to paint an accurate portrait of a 3 year old's experience and that of their caregivers. For example, Yux used an application that allowed them to pre-record questions taking into account the literacy limitations in some of the target communities. Yux's technology allowed us to gather information that can inform solutions to truly serve the needs of children and in a short amount of time across a large area.

What you need:
Mapping the partners who touch children. This means thinking broadly and beyond schools like, bus drivers, bank tellers, shop owners, etc. Who else are working on problems of the environments?
If environments are better for children and parents who else stands to gain?
Clear asks: What support do you need? How does it meet the need of your partners?
Time to meet regularly to talk, listen and manage and evaluate the partnership
3 data collection and co-creation workshops

Why is this important?
To use facts to illustrate the underlying issue and work with communities to develop tactics to address their concerns.

In practice:
A data centered approach brings credibility to any advocacy effort. It is the impartial proof that is needed to influence and spur both communities and decision makers into action. The YUX Looka application allowed ImagiNation Afrika to gather quantitative data in the 3 target communities in a record 4 days. The Human Centered Approach also supported our values of inclusiveness and co-creation. Practically this meant immersive afternoon sessions with respondents, the creation of user experience maps and the development of personas to give a fuller picture of the community and their needs over different periods of time. In order to bring our information back to the communities, ImagiNation Afrika and Yux coordinated co-creation workshops in each of the communities to review the data that was captured and create an environment in which communities could develop solutions they felt comfortable championing.

What you need:
Previous data collected from your study, community involvement, partners and representatives, location in the community to hold the workshop.
In practice:
ImagiNation Afrika made extensive use of social media to promote the videos of the city viewed from the point of view of a 3yr old child and their caregivers. Traditional media outlets: print, TV and radio were all represented at the co-creation workshops held in the communities. ImagiNation Afrika also held panel discussions notably with the technology sector to look at new ways of using technology to solve some of the challenges highlighted by the data about children and their caregivers in Dakar. Their consequent sharing of the key messages around access to public space and children’s development builds momentum around this key issue. The way that the project results is presented to the communities is also indicative of the values of the organization, ie. accessibility, transparency and cultivating agency.

**What you need:**
- Creativity - How and where are communities already communicating? What are they communicating? How can you latch on and respectfully join in the conversations?
- Innovative - You don’t need a budget. Partner with local or community media outlets and local social media influencers. Find partners who are already advocating for the same cause and work together towards your common goals.

**One Step Further**
Use a unique hashtag to organize all of your social media communication in one place. You, your partners, and your supporters can share data and ideas using the unique tag.
Plan your key messages in advance so that you have new information to communicate to the media at each phase of the project:
- Project launch
- Early results and co-creation workshops with communities
- The role of the environment in children’s development, what does the final data reveal?

Tools & Materials
Multimedia material: video cameras, editing software
Develop a social media plan to target key audiences with your data

Why is this important?
To deliver key messages to the public, decision makers and stakeholders. This is a lynchpin of advocacy work, a clear understanding of where decision makers and stakeholders get their information helps to tailor communications objectives, messages, audiences, channels and tactics. Awareness, clearly communicated calls to action and credibility from media sources all contribute to positive decision making around some of these key issues affecting young children.
Why is this important?
We strive to educate, change perceptions and build capacity for self-directed advocacy within communities. Advocacy is only sustainable if local communities pick up the mantle and lead their own groups to serve their interests. This is why we work to share our results and data with the communities we surveyed. It is important that they are a part of the project from beginning to end. This is the key way to ensure that any solutions developed truly respond to the expressed needs of the population. It also fosters ownership of a solution and commitment to seeing it through.

In practice:
In particular, we used co-creation workshops with the initial participants of the study from across a range of sectors: healthcare, local governance, media, education specialists, technology experts. We also created exhibitions within each of the three communities to bring the dialogue about public spaces for children to a wider community audience. It is essential to seek out champions and allies like yourself who have the credibility and expertise to carry the message in support of a nurturing early years environment more forcefully.

We also organize pop-up play spaces around the city of Dakar frequently, at local events, expos, and at local public spaces to educate community members on the importance of the different types of play. These spaces bring community adults and children together to discuss community needs and solutions.

What you need:
- Creativity - What and where and how do campaigns need to happen? What are you asking for clearly?
- Clear roles and responsibilities - Who among team members and partners can hold important tasks and inputs? Who can be responsible and accountable for logistics
- Be aware! Timing is critical! Think of local events like religious or cultural holidays, elections as bad times to plan campaigns or media interventions.

Tool for Thought
Storyboard template to develop and plan exhibitions
6 events that target specific audiences

Why is this important?
Advocacy events are great opportunities to reach out to specific audiences (stakeholders/decision makers) with tailored messages. The ultimate goal is to brainstorm solutions with these stakeholders to allow them follow-up to support concrete action.

In practice:
In June of 2019, we targeted the technology sector with a tailored panel discussion on the use of technology to serve the needs of young children. Our strategy included inviting journalists covering technology, leveraging technology partnerships for maximum reach and developing engaging content that enables participants to take a solutions based approach to young children’s needs in Dakar.

What you need:
Strong partnership model to promote cross communication and align on event objectives, outcomes and method of evaluation. Share a unique hashtag during the event so that media representatives, partners and participants can share information, ideas and photos all in one place.

A Deeper Dive
Organise regular planning meetings leading up to an event to boost attendance, prepare data to be shared with the audience and handle follow up with any participants and media. Always prepare a press kit for each event with data and information about your organization tailored to the audience. Include photos/videos, research overview, quotes and additional resources for journalists. Finally, check the potential audience's main sources of information: Who or what do they listen to? What do they read? What do they watch?

Here’s an Idea
Make a budget for each intervention at the planning stages
Give ownership of the advocacy strategy to a key person or team and maintain strong internal communications with all colleagues.
Remember to be creative! Great campaigns are not always costly but wise investments of resources and talents. Strong partners are often our greatest resources.
The day you are leaving is not the time to start your preparations.

NIGERIAN PROVERB

Our research for the Walking With Amadou project was conducted under two themes:
Public Spaces
Mobility

Stakeholder interviews were conducted along with focus groups in the first two months of the process to gain a clear vision of what data we wanted to collect. Next, we fully immersed ourselves in the daily lives of local children, spending the day at their home and accompanying them through their daily activities alongside their caregivers. The results are a combination of data obtained by the qualitative and quantitative research phases, combined with the return of ideation by creative workshops. A total of 371 people were surveyed during the February phase of the project. In the final phase, creativity workshops were organized in order to inform community members on the data uncovered during the project and hold community lead brainstorming sessions to find solutions for community needs.
Additional Resources

Walking With Amadou Study Presentation - Presented by ImagiNation Afrika founder and director, Karima Grant at the panel discussion on technology for early childhood development.
https://youtu.be/UyyvRYNrqwI

Press Kit - View the press kit for examples on how to present your data to the media.
https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/16Jd4r20V-H6A01N7pFePg-z-7r6f1dEj?usp=sharing

Hashtag - Use and search #Villebicilabok, which translates to 'I am a part of the community', to share and discover content related to the Walking With Amadou project.

Exhibition Storyboard - Our easy to follow storyboard will give you a visual idea of what our child environment study captured in Dakar, Senegal. Use this example to share data and visuals or, start planning your own exhibition.
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1fli0AM3rGDg6UcLO6nwixmCwzgQP0iK/view?usp=sharing

Walking With Amadou Videos - View the videos of 3yr olds Antou and Soukeyna in Dakar with their caregivers.
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLd9GNfIk0vcj2mCWAFL3og_uMrXFAVUD
Acknowledgements
AND CREDITS

ImagiNation Afrika would like to thank the Bernard Van Leer Foundation for their generous support of the Walking With Amadou project. This project has provided essential data to understand the environment impacting children ages 0-3 in Dakar and helped to develop the advocacy tools needed to initiate change. This project also benefited from the strong partnership with ImagiNation Afrika's technology partners Yux Dakar who lead the way in showing how technology can serve the early childhood sector.

Overall Guidance and Direction
Karima Grant (Founder/Director, ImagiNation Afrika)

Input and Review
ImagiNation Afrika Communications and Programs teams, with particular thanks to Magor Dia, Aida Sene, Martha Cisse and Mamadou Ba

Editing
Chakera McIntosh

Design
Desja Fagins

Photo Credit
Ibrahima Pouye