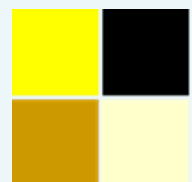


Rooftop Playground

Zinath Munzala



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IFD Policy Paper Series
Paper 4



Although all our previously published Policy Papers were quite lengthy and produced after an extensive research, the fact is you don't really need to be a Rocket Scientist to write a Policy Paper for IFD.

All you need is a creative mind with a unique idea that is not practiced widely now a day, and can be replicated in the local context. The idea can be original or borrowed from somewhere else. One condition is that the idea has to have the power to create some degree of impact in the society.

Zinath's paper on "Rooftop Playground" is one such classic example. The paper describes a simple idea that can be replicated easily, without much effort, yet it has the power to create an impact in the way we live in urban life today, particularly in Dhaka city.

Enjoy reading, and if you think it is something doable, then take initiatives to implement it!

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The author is alone responsible for the content of this paper

Rooftop Playground

I. Introduction

If anyone asks us which time was the most wonderful and exciting phase of our life, then most of us will reply, “The Childhood”. During childhood, we don’t have to care about the future, we are not aware of competitions and we don’t know the meaning of hard working. Exploring new things, playing, chasing, and running all around - that’s all we care in our childhood.

But now particularly in the modern urban life, the meaning of childhood has changed. Actually, it is better to say that we have changed the meaning of the childhood for our children by ourselves.

Now a child starts his day with a very strict routine. The whole school hour is full of quizzes, class works, mental stress, and absence of activity and playing. After a dull and long school hours, the child comes back home with a full load of homework.

After taking a short break, he goes back to study again! The rest of the day he passes it whether by watching TV or playing mobile or computer games. In the whole routine of the day, there is no time or place to be a real “kid”.

When urbanization in a society gets momentum, open spaces become scarce and people start to lose open grounds to relax. It happened in every mega city in the past. To meet the demands of ever-growing population in a mega city, multi-storied buildings fill most of the open spaces; skyscrapers block uninterrupted view of the blue sky. This is obvious. We cannot stop this continuous process.

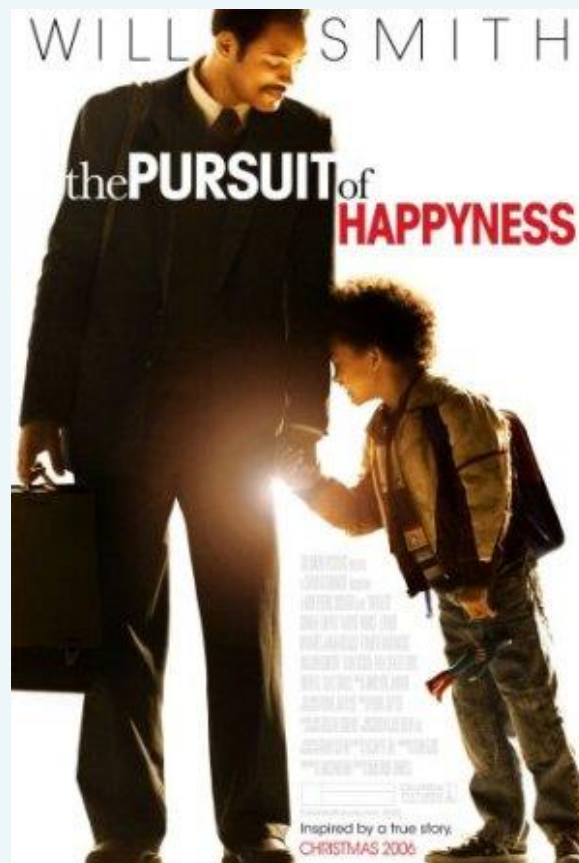
However, despite such trends of urbanization, we have to allocate spaces for playgrounds so that children get the opportunity to be connected with the nature. But at present, particularly in Dhaka city, locating a suitable

small piece of playground where the children can roam freely is the last thing we can discover.

To resolve this problem of urbanization, we are describing in the following section a concept named “**Rooftop Playground**”, which can provide a solution to an extent.

II. The Origin of the Idea

This idea first came to my mind while watching the movie “Pursuit of Happiness” sometime back. In this movie, there is a scene where the father (Will Smith¹) and the son (Jaden Smith) were playing basketball in a roof top basketball court of a skyscraper in the down town of San Francisco city of USA.



The Poster of Will Smith starred “The Pursuit of Happiness”

¹ Will Smith was nominated for Academy Award and Golden Globe Award for Best Actor for playing this role. The movie was released in 2006.

That rolled my mind. Then I did my own research, and finally found that this idea can be easily replicated in Dhaka city where absence of suitable playground is becoming a common phenomenon.

Rooftop playgrounds are available in Thailand, Hong Kong, Singapore and many other countries where mega cities evolved. It is not an expensive idea to replicate. Only a small amount of investment, little initiative, some creativity and above all, a deep sympathy towards our kids - that's all we need to materialize this concept in Dhaka's context.

III. Features of Rooftop Playground

In the following sections, we are providing some of the basic features of a rooftop playground:

Space Utilization

Space Utilization is the most desired element of modern apartment designing; roof top playground can be a classic example of such space utilization in the perspective of Dhaka city.

Although we have scarcity of spaces in Dhaka city, we sometimes discover that due to poor design of the apartments and the buildings, many potential spaces remain underutilized. Roof of each apartment building is one such space.

There are thousands of modern apartment buildings in Dhaka city and each of them has a roof. Most of the apartment dwellers keep such roof barren doing nothing.

However, with proper planning, we can easily convert the barren roof of each apartment building to a rooftop playground that can be an exciting place for all, especially for the kids who are living in those apartments. The roofs of the shopping malls can also have similar rooftop playgrounds as well.

Now a day, many owners of the buildings are utilizing their rooftops for growing vegetables and fruits, which is a welcome move. Similarly,

besides their gardens, a small space can be allocated for playgrounds for the children. The size of such playgrounds can be minimum 1/3 of the entire roof space. The remaining space can be utilized for fruit and vegetable gardens or just keeping open for relaxation.

Small Investment

There is no need for large investment for developing a rooftop playground. It only needs a surrounding fence, which can be easily constructed in local foundry shops, a soft floor made of either rubber or artificial grass, and some playing devices made of either plastics or steel rods. All these materials are now available locally. The local plastic companies are already producing some of these playing devices, and some are being imported from China.

Safety

Unless the rooftop playgrounds are made safe for children of all ages, such concept will not be popular. There is a need for a surrounding high strong iron fence, supported by the steel columns around the roof, making the entire playground area safe for children of all ages.

Meeting the Demands for All

In order to meet the demands of children of all ages, we can divide the rooftop playground into two sections:

The first section will be for the age group of 1-10 years. In this area, we can put artificial grass mat on the floor and add playing devices for swinging, climbing, sliding and some other activities that are suitable for this age group.

We can put 2-3 benches where parents or guardians can enjoy the fresh air while looking after their kids. If we grow some vine plants around the iron fence, then after some time it will cover the whole fence and will make it a beautiful place to pass the afternoon.

The second section should be for the kids of 10-16 years, where there will be facilities for playing football, basketball, skating, badminton, tennis and table tennis.

If there are good numbers of kids of this age group, then there can be arrangement of intra-building football or basketball tournaments. In such occasions, we can invite all the dwellers of the buildings in a tea party. In this way, rooftop playground can act as a place for socialization.



Samples of various types of rooftop playgrounds

Different Timing for Different Games

It is natural that kids of different ages might have varying preferences of what to play during a particular time. To meet such varying needs of playing different games, apartment management committees can fix the timing of the playground and prepare a schedule for each game.

Other Uses

For small kids, such as age group of 1-5 years, the apartment committees can place a small portable swimming pool made of plastic or rubber. The timing for the swimming can be fixed like every Saturday from 10 am to 12 pm. This will be a further addition to the entertainment of the children of this particular age group.



Samples of Portable Swimming Pools that can be placed on the roofs of the apartment buildings in Dhaka City

IV. Potential Impacts of the Idea

The following section describes how in different ways the concept of “Rooftop Playground” can add synergies to the urban life by providing a natural environment to the children that can contribute to children’s health and development:

Learning Opportunities

Playing and moving are essential to the young children’s lives. Allowing the children to experience the natural and man-made elements in their living environment would generate cognitive, physical, and social skills development (Azlina, W and A.S. Zulkiflee, 2010).

Natural environments are outdoor spaces that are open to the sky and contain plants, sand, mud, and other natural elements. Seminal research by Moore and Young (1978) found that these natural environments provide learning opportunities, which are unobtainable indoors.

Brain Development

There is strong research that supports the connection between brain development and children having the opportunity to participate in recess during their school day.

One example is how the children develop their fine and gross motor skills as well as their dexterity and balance all through exploring and risk-taking and having fun on the playground.

Games using balls help children develop anticipation and prediction skills. Figuring out which way will the ball roll or bounce relies on a child having many experiences with different shaped, sized and textured balls.

Physical Fitness

For infants, lack of physical activity is a risk factor for many health problems such as high blood pressure, weight gain, excess body fat, bad cholesterol, respiratory difficulties, cardiovascular diseases and bone health problems.

Moreover, the health benefits of physical activity extend well beyond physical health, having a positive impact on the domains of motor skills, psychological well-being, cognitive development, social competence and emotional maturity.

Building Self-confidence

Dr Kathleen Alfano, former Director at Child Research at Fisher Price said, “Toys that require balance and coordination, such as skates, scooters and bikes teach children new skills, encourage the development of self-confidence and satisfy their interest in exploration. Choose sports equipment that has a grow-with-me feature, going from beginner to advanced, so children have the opportunity to master skills at their own pace.”

Emotional Development

Playing in an outdoor environment has huge benefits for young children’s emotional learning and development. While playing outside, children learn how to get on with others and manage their feelings. Children also tend to develop a more positive attitude to learning when they are

Quotes on the Impacts of Outdoor Playing

“The best classrooms and the richest cupboard is roofed only by the sky.”

- Margaret McMillan,
Educationist and Theorist of
Nursery Education

“The more you keep children sitting, the less attentive they become.”

- Dr Tony Pelligrini, American
Education Researcher

“Limiting the right of children to be active throughout the day (and in all weathers) can lead to early signs of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). It is important to understand the concept of upside down before understanding the difference between a letter “b” and a letter “p” or a number “6” and a number “9”.”

- Marjorie Ouvry, Education
Consultant and Author

outdoors. They are usually more active, absorbed and involved, and they see a purpose in what they are doing.

V. Recommendation

Although this Policy Paper targets the general audience, we believe there are still some areas where it needs the Government interventions to popularize the concept. The following are some of the recommendations in this respect:

Impose a Regulation

The Government, through Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (RAJUK) and other City Corporations, can impose a regulation requiring every apartment building in Dhaka city some space in the roof that should be converted to a rooftop playground. Under the regulation, at least 1/3 of the roof space can be allocated for establishing such playgrounds.

The regulation should also specify minimum safety requirements so that children can play in the roofs safely without any possibility of accidents. Such safety requirements might include items, amongst others, the requirement to erect a high iron fence surrounding the playground, strong pillars and columns so that they can withstand wind and other pressure, materials to put on the floor such as rubber mat or artificial grass, materials for making playing devices so that children don't get hurt, etc.

Encouraging the Investment

Such steps are expected to boost the import of playing devices from abroad or production locally. Plastic and other related industries can be provided with fiscal incentives so that such playing devices are available in the market at affordable prices.

The End Note

There is no doubt that the children of Dhaka city at this moment are leading a very unnatural and unhealthy life. Eating too much junk food, no physical activity, sitting in front of TV and computers for hours, excessive load of study without break – all these elements are destroying their natural power of learning and creativity. Now many of our children are learning elements from various satellite channels and video games, which are not conducive to proper mental development.

When we see a child running around the dining table, jumping on the bed, or chasing each other from one room to another, we sometimes think that the kid is very naughty. But we don't consider that this is his mind that wants to jump; this is the age to chase. Thus if we don't provide him/her the proper place or time to release his energy, then he will definitely find no place to exercise his emotions.

How would you feel if you see your child sitting at the corner of his room during afternoon when it is the time for playing? I am sure you won't feel good. In order to have a good feeling for our children in this urban life, our little effort thus can bring some color and some excitement in their dull daily routine.

With the proper implementation of "Rooftop Playground", our children will have the opportunity to enjoy their childhood as we did in the past when there were abundant greenery and space. Let them have fun as we did in our childhood, let them live their best time to its fullest, and let them take selfies as much as they can. Who knows may be after 20 years, we will all burst into laugh eliciting those happy memories of the past.

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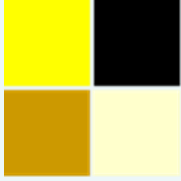
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About the Author



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IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT (IFD)

IDEAS FOR DEVELOPMENT (IFD) is a virtual think-tank. This initiative was first conceptualized through an email on January 18, 2007. This think-tank does not have any office; its website and email address are its identity. Mr Mabroor Mahmood, an expatriate Bangladeshi national living in Saudi Arabia, is the founder of this think-tank. IFD is his brainchild.

The prime objective of this think-tank is to ensure the welfare of the humanity through the exchange of development related ideas with the help of the Internet. This is the mission statement of this think-tank.

This mission statement is also reflected in its logo. The logo comprises four colored blocks, denoting four dominant races in the world. IFD believes that the persisting inequality amongst nations is the root of continuing global tension and absence of peace all over the world. Therefore, IFD believes that such tensions will be significantly reduced if this inequality can be resolved.

Nevertheless, we need new development ideas to resolve such inequality. At present, the developed nations are consistently formulating new ideas with the help of research and moving forward through their successful implementation. However, the less developed countries are lagging behind due to either the lack of resources or indiscriminate wastage of such resources. This phenomenon causes the gradual expansion of inequality between the developed and less developed nations, and as a result, poverty and exploitation are increasing all over the world.

IFD has been created with a noble aim to reduce this disparity amongst nations with the help of generating new ideas. IFD wants to be the platform for exchanging ideas of all thinkers and creative people of the world. We expect the thinkers all over the world would exchange their ideas through this platform.

A potential thinker will receive some specific benefits if he/she exchanges his/her ideas through the IFD.

First, the generation of an idea only is not sufficient to ensure development; in fact, it is only the beginning of a long process. A thinker should not stop after generating

an idea; rather he also needs to describe in detail the solution of the problem in the form of a model. This model has to be implementable as well. Otherwise, this idea will not have any value.

We actually don't have any shortage of people having new ideas. However, we really lack people who can provide us a nicely presented idea, which is also worthy for implementation.

To resolve this problem, IFD would guide a potential thinker on how to present an idea in a logical fashion. IFD will also give necessary guidance in this respect, and provide the required assistance to make a potential yet immature idea presentable.

Secondly, one does not need any qualification to send an idea to IFD. Any person can send an idea to IFD from anywhere with the help of any medium.

Thirdly, although IFD is temporarily focused on exchanging economic ideas only, eventually its activity would also expand to cover other disciplines as well.

Fourthly, if an idea is publicized by the IFD, everybody would be ensured of its reliability and its power to change the society in the right direction. It will enhance the credibility of the idea itself. It has to be highlighted that IFD will not publicize any idea that it will receive. The selection of an idea for publication would entirely depend on its ability to contribute to the welfare of the society.

Fifthly and the most important benefit is that, the potential thinkers will not have to spend any money for sending an idea to IFD, except for the charges for email or postage. He/she will not also have to give any money to IFD if the idea is eventually published in IFD website.

One might ask, if a potential thinker gives us a valuable idea, it might eventually be stolen. As a result, the true inventor of the idea would lose his/her proper recognition. Then what is the protection for the owners of the idea?

In this connection, we assure you that we will not publish your idea anywhere else under a different name without your permission. We strongly believe that an idea generator can be properly valued only by another idea generator.

IFD believes that an idea is properly valued when it is implemented, either partially or completely, and benefits the people. IFD has a limitation from this perspective. It is because in order to implement an idea successfully, one needs assistance from Government bodies or other organizations. Therefore, IFD cannot guarantee that the circulation of an idea through the IFD would ensure its successful implementation.

IFD intends to act as a platform for circulating and publishing the ideas only. IFD will not be responsible for implementing these ideas.

But IFD's activity will not be limited only to generation and publication of an idea. In order to generate new ideas and ensure its successful implementation, we not only need prospective thinkers, but also need proper political leadership, strong Government apparatus, modern education system, and above all, a peaceful political and social climate.

Prospective thinkers will not be born unless proper environment is ensured, and their ideas will not be properly valued and implemented in an unstable social and political atmosphere.

So besides circulating development related ideas, IFD would also act to ensure an environment where the number of prospective thinkers will increase, they will be properly valued, and their ideas will be successfully implemented. To serve this purpose, IFD will publish special articles highlighting various social issues.

At last, we want to say if you are confident on any prospective idea, and firmly believe that this idea, if implemented, would benefit the society to an extent, then we request you to send us this idea. You can primarily send us an email in our address. You can also visit our website to know more about us.

We believe such exchange of ideas would help to develop prospective thinkers all around us. Everybody would also be benefited if his/her ideas are eventually implemented successfully. Therefore, we need cooperation from all for moving forward. We thus welcome any cooperation in order to exchange these development related ideas through the IFD.

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