3. Public and Open Spaces

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**Bamboo Playspace: An inclusive playspace as part of 'Cycle of care' project**

Dhaka, Bangladesh

**Date Completed:** 03/04/2019

LEEDO

Bamboo Playspace is a temporary pavilion collaboratively designed for inclusive community building, for play, performances of theatre and dance, and a beautiful social gathering place for women and their children. Designed and built as part of Para’s radical new design course, CADSE, with Bamboo artisans, the children of LEEDO Peace Home and architecture students from Dhaka. A major impact has been bringing together the vulnerable children from the Peace Home, with their local neighbourhood children.

The need to play is inherent in all of us, and even more prominently in children; of all ages, genders and abilities. Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh, a sprawling dense metropolis of over 21 million people and under enormous strain to provide adequate quality of parks and play spaces. This particular project is unique in its design and development, and will act as a precedent for much more radical, collaborative design projects in the future. The site of the Bamboo Playspace is in Washpur Garden City, on the west side of the Buriganga River.

Para’s radical design course; CADSE; Critical Architecture, Design, and Sustainable Environments was borne out of the immediacy to address the need for widened critical design education and participation in the built environment through practical hands-on projects; the course is accredited in partnership with Independent University Bangladesh’s School of Life Sciences. The fundamental aspect of this course is that the students have to work with a community to resolve a spatial design challenge, learning about land access, materials, space-making, environment and the ethics and politics related to creating socially-just spaces.

Para has worked closely with LEEDO, a grassroots children's charity, who run a home, and also focus rescuing trafficked children in Dhaka and elsewhere. Their home houses 50+ children, many of whom are differently abled, and from 2 years old to 16+, and of mixed gender.

The charity secured land adjacent to its Peace Home for three years. CADSE students were involved in formulating the program for the space with the children of LEEDO Peace Home, using participatory methods learned in the classroom. The program was then turned into a competition, with over 27 groups participating. The children of the home chose 2 designs; these two groups along with the CADSE students, were mentored and supported to finalise the design, resolving technical aspects. This was then built in collaboration with a team of Bamboo artisans.

The playspace offers a central open space, where children can play or organize festivals and performances. The whole structure can accommodate around 200 people at three different levels. Specific features designed to include therapeutic exercises for differently abled children.

Younger children can engage in suitable play features, like swing, hanging rope-bridge, etc. in a safe place with elders’ supervision, while older children find themselves in a more adventurous zone of climbing wall and the spider web. The semi-shaded decks of the playspace can hold different sorts of workshops or hang-outs of people of the different age groups of the local neighbourhood.

For the opening of the space, Para curated and commissioned a children’s theatre production for a half-day festival of arts and culture and inviting designers, thespians, fine artists, musicians, and others, to explore ways they can interact with people and the structure. “ESHO KHELI” (Let’s play) was held to demonstrate the potential of the Bamboo space and the importance of the creative arts for holistic human development.