

# THE POWER OF PLAY

Play, a way to learn!

Whitepaper by



Every child  
should have  
a childhood

# COLOPHON

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# INTRODUCTION OF | 01 TJEKO .

## Our story: Birth of Tjeko

The Tjeko story begun when Ferdi and Tatiana van den Bergh visited Uganda with their 14 months old daughter Maëlle in 2008. After working for 8 years with children from the ghettos of New York City with Metro Ministries, they moved to Uganda. During their time in Uganda, Ferdi could not find a place for their daughter to play, so they took her to a local orphanage, the Amani Baby Cottage. One day, in the garden of this orphanage, filled with colourful toys, they noticed the faces of children from the local community pressed against the fence from the outside with a look on them wishing they could be playing there too.

This sobering moment ignited a deep rooted conviction : **every child should have a childhood**. A few months later, Ferdi was committed to take development work from a different angle, while in the meantime satisfying a deep human need: the need to play - the need to have a childhood.



# INTRODUCTION OF TJEKO .

01

## Our mission

Tjeko is a social-profit organisation, committed to give children the chance to be children; to play and to laugh. That is how they develop into more resilient adults. Tjeko focuses on children faraway and closeby, currently in Uganda and the Netherlands

Giving every child a fun-filled childhood through social-profit business.



# INTRODUCTION OF TJEKO .

01

## Meaning of Tjeko

Tjeko is derived from the Swahili word “cheko”. Cheko means ‘laughter’, ‘hilarity’ and ‘amusement’.

## Tjeko manifesto

**‘Every child should have a childhood.’**

Our manifesto was inspired by the article 31 of the rights of the children meaning: **Every child has the right to enjoy being young and to experience the benefits of play (the rights of the children, art 31 of Unicef).**



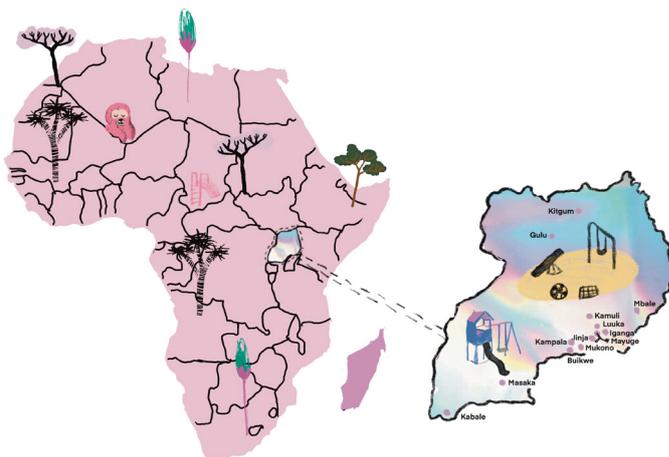
## PLAY IN HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT

### What is “play”?

The common definition used among childhood experts is *“an activity done for its own sake, characterized by means rather than ends (the process is more important than any endpoint or goal).”*

Play takes many forms but the heart of play is pleasure. If it isn't fun, it isn't play! We play using our body and our mind. We use words (humour and jokes) and props.

When the child plays, he explores his environment, expanding his catalogue of experiences. The child develops an emotional relationship with the world and gradually creates an awareness of the reality that surrounds him. A wonderful circle of learning is driven by the pleasure of play. The child is curious and the discovery of new things brings him pleasure that leads to repetition and practice.



Play has some immediate benefits, such as aerobic conditioning and fine-tuning motor skills. As well as long-term benefits that include preparing young children for the unknown and unexpected and giving them a sense of morality. Learning to play successfully with others requires **‘emotional intelligence,’** the ability to understand another’s emotions and intentions.

While playing, children can acquire the wide range of interpersonal, social skills, ranging from communication to cooperation.

Play has also been defined as a shaper of brain because it participates in the development of specific areas and allows it to grow. Play, more than other activities fuels the healthy development of the child and the ongoing development of adults.

## DEVELOPMENT

### Use it or lose it



When a child is born, the brain is a mass of neurons, ready to be wired or programmed through practises and experience (emotions). Some hard-wiring is already present to produce breathing and reflexes, regulate body temperature, and control heartbeat. Billions of other neurons are ready to be connected to other neurons but they must be used in order for connections to be made and circuitry to be formed.

When unused neurons do not survive, the potential trillions of connections are not formed and the child never reaches his or her full potential. Brain development is truly a “use it or lose it” proces.

Begley,1996 used to say: *“Early experiences determine which neurons are to be used and which are to die, and consequently, whether the child will be brilliant or dull, confident or fearful, articulate or tongue-tied “ (Begley, 1996).*

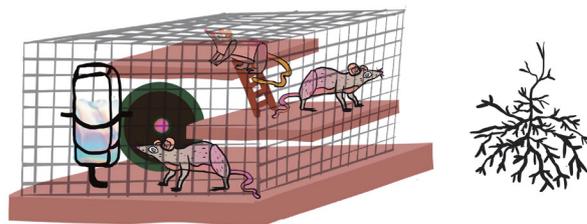
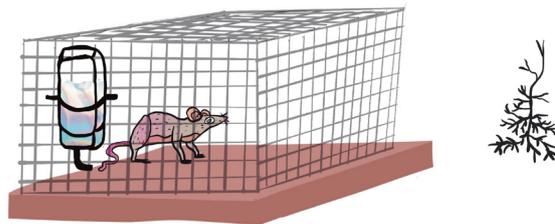
Play in the development of the brain can have an important role. Mister Fisher in 1992 said: *“Play enhances the progress of early development from 33% to 67% by increasing adjustment, improving language and reducing social and emotional problems” (Fisher 1992).*



### Study: Play changes the brain

In 1964, Dr. Marion Diamond of the University of California, Berkely, and her colleagues published a compelling paper about brain growth in rats.

There is a lengthy and landmark experiment in brain development. Rats who were *impoverished*, who were raised and lived in solitary confinement, had smaller and thinner cerebral cortexes than rats who were raised in *enriching* environments, environments where there were plenty of toys and tunnels for the rats to explore.



### Play literally changes the brain and is vital for child development

Baylor College of Medicine reported in 1997 that children who do not play much or are rarely touched, develop brains that are 20 to 30% smaller than normal for their age (Nash, J.M 1997).

An American study similarly reports the devastating effects of play deprivation on Romanian orphans. Brown et al (2001) state: "Brain scans of Romanian orphans clearly show that play deprivation results in biological regression of brain development."

### Theory

According to the theorist Sutton-Smith, a child who is not being stimulated, by being played with, and who has few opportunities to explore his or her surroundings, may fail to link up fully those neural connections and pathways which will be needed for later learning. '(Sutton-Smith 1997).

Neuroscientist Jaak Panksepp found that play stimulates production of a protein, 'brain-derived neurotrophic factor', in the amygdala and the prefrontal cortex, which are responsible for organising, monitoring, and planning for the future. In one study, two hours a day of play with objects produced changes in the brain weight and efficiency of experimental animals (Panksepp 2003, Rosenzweig 1976).

### Play deprivation

The notion that indoor and outdoor spontaneous play are a "waste of time" have contributed to the condition known as "play deprivation".

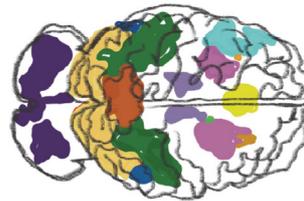
Thus, children who do not play or who do not have the opportunity to play are at increased risk for abnormal development and deviant behaviour with a consequent loss of their ability to care, to empathise and exercise compassion, or share the same reality as other children. Optimal learning, normal social functioning, self-control and other cognitive functions may not mature properly.

**One of the effects of play deprivation is a child being unsocial. This can be diverted by giving access to children to a quality play experience.**

### Play is the key to unlock imagination

#### Where is imagination located in the human brain?

Imagination is the door to all possibilities. Imagination is the source of all human great innovations. Our society needs children that would be trained today to imagine and be creative. Those skills will give them the edge and the competences that children need to face the future successfully.



Eleven areas of the brain are showing differential activity levels in a Dartmouth study using functional MRI to measure how humans manipulate mental imagery (credit: Alex Schlegel)

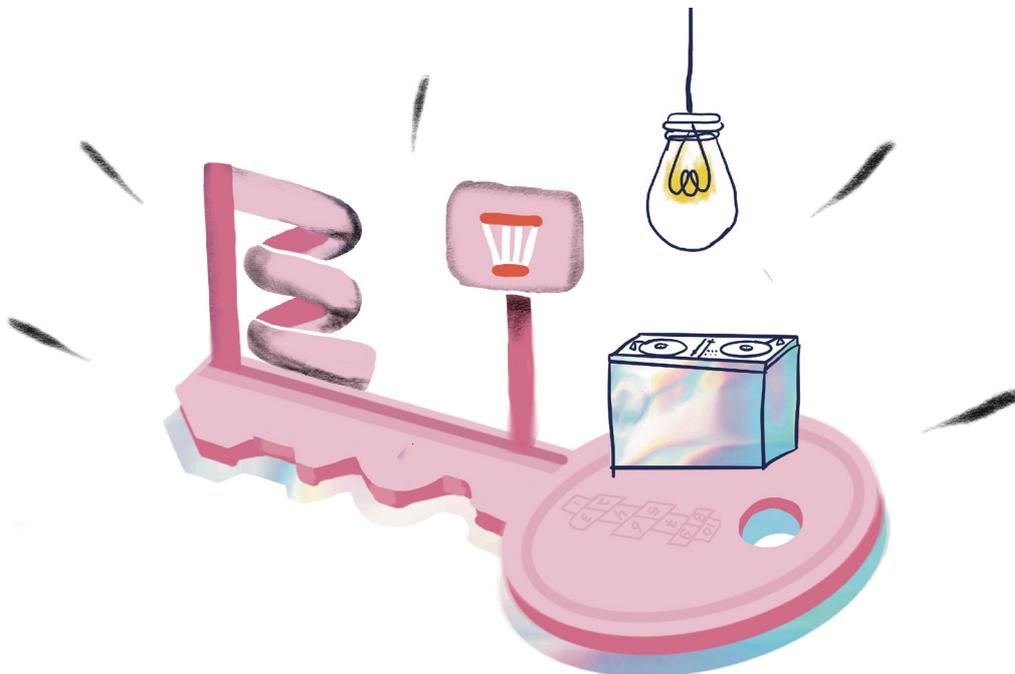
Play is the key to unlock imagination. It helps children learn many important skills. Often when offered a gift, we see a child playing longer with the wrapping paper, instead of the gift itself. This is because children pick up an ordinary object — like a stick — and imagine its potential for a sword or horse. They pick up a box and imagine a castle. They play being at school, pretending and acting as being the teacher. While playing they practice imagination, creativity, role-playing, social interaction and problem-solving abilities that they'll need when they will grow up.

Games like these are important for the brain and social development of the child. It helps them to tap into their imagination and much more. They imitate what they have seen in real life. This way, the more they play out all the different scenarios, the more they develop. Play is then a great medium that allows them to put in practice skills, situations and experiences.

## Benefits for everyone

Play is not just essential for kids, it can be an important source for adults as well. When adults play, they force their brain out of its normal patterns and stimulate new ways of thinking and abilities to create an idea, vision, object or solution to a known problem. The greatest innovative companies of our time have forfeited the cubicle and created awesome playground design in their office. From slides, scooters, basketballs, skateparks, DJ's and much more. Mark Twain once said, *"when we talk about the great workers of the world we really mean the great players of the world"*, resonates loud and clear. Play is a great catalyst for innovation.

**Play is the key for innovation.** Albert Einstein coined it when he said that *"Play is the highest form of research. It is not the one who learn to research that research the best, but the one who learn to play."* With the increase of the demand on innovation, it's crucial to educate people around the world about play and it's awesome benefits.



## Developed countries

In developed countries, we are already used to playing. We know that it is the best way for children to express themselves. Play is a part of every child's daily life. They have many opportunities to play at school and also at home with their parents.

## Underdeveloped countries

In the underdeveloped countries play and its benefits are not praised and valued. The common perception of play is seen as a waste of time. Consequently, all the places where our imagination can be stimulated, are simply not developed and too often despised. If we take an average child in Europe and compare it to an Ugandan child, we can see that children from Uganda have approximately less than 1 hour spare time to play on a daily basis.

It should not be this way. Play is a huge, important factor in the development of the children and also a children's right. Like artikel 31 of Unicef says: "Every child have the right to play".

Tjeko advocates: "Every child should have a childhood."

It is our commitment to ensure that children everywhere will be able to enjoy their childhood.



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## Play is serious business!

Play is very important for a child's development. When we allow children to be and play, we increase their chances of becoming resilient true adults. Play can engage motor skills, senses, language, cognition, and social interaction. The importance of play cannot be overstated. What they inherit in childhood, influences their development for the future.

Play contributes to the development of posture, motor skills, senses, language, thinking and social interaction. In this way, children can become active, resourceful, creative, problem-solving, sensitive to the input of others and aware of their own ideas. Children learn to think and think ahead. For that reason alone, we advocate! Let the kids play and let them play a lot.

Society should seek every opportunity to support play....Play is so critically important to all children in the development of their physical, social, mental, emotional and creative skills that society should seek every opportunity to support it and create an environment that fosters it...

The child's capacity for positive development will be inhibited or constrained if denied free access to the broadest range of environments and play opportunities.' - Welsh Assembly

