Low-cost school and home for HIV orphans, Rakai, Uganda

The client is a non-profit organization named Mukwano, which means “intimate friends” in the local language of Uganda. Although the budget is limited to USD 30,000, the aim is to create a space where the orphans can develop their community like a family. By utilizing low-tech domestic construction techniques (brick wall and wooden roof structure), costs can be minimized and the orphans can participate and learn the building methods used on site.

A great deal of the site is without any infrastructure. The required spaces avoid modern zoning which is typically applied in urban situations and include small dormitories, lecture rooms, offices and a bathroom. Instead, the architecture is divided into four groups of huts and linked up to create a village-like shape as much as possible, while retaining a functional relationship between each hut.

Since the children gather and have classes under a big tree, the tree should be situated in the center of the new architecture. The 8 huts surround the tree and link with each other. The in-between spaces have canopies which connect all the huts and create triangular outdoor spaces, so the children can run and play there comfortably even with the harsh sunshine and heat in Uganda.

The center courtyard features a well and solar-powered roof for producing electricity. This encourages the independence of the site, particularly when the farming activities of the children are considered. They will be able to stand on their own feet here. In the future, as the population of the center grows, the orphanage can be extended with more huts and become Mukwano Village; I expect that this architecture shall be a focal point of the village.

A focal point for the community was needed because there were no shelters under which the orphans could gather. It is claimed that the strong center can make people have a strong community in the future, as the children grow, they extend this orphanage with a lot of huts and it will become a village that brings lasting change. This concept can be transferred to the architecture of any developing country as no special technology is necessary.

The project’s notoriety lies in its long-term social and contextual impact. The conceptual philosophy consists of creating new homes for orphans caused by HIV/AIDS that reflect the local social traditions and habits, provide shelter and offer health care, education and leisure amenities. The whole project strives for appropriate domestic technology and self-reliance; for example, the homes will be built by the orphans with local materials, utilize solar energy, and the community will produce their own food stuffs.

The very simple modular block geometry of the buildings with a wide cantilever roof will generate poetic and diverse internal spaces as well as external spaces. The project envisages the gradual evolution of the Mukwano Home into Mukwano Village through continuous additions of similar modular units as more children become integrated into the center. The older ones becoming adults will have the possibility to stay at the village with their families and thus contributing to the long-term development towards an organically grown and solid community.

Project description by author

Comment of the Holcim Awards jury Africa Middle East

This project aims to create a family-like community for children who have lost their parents to HIV/AIDS in Uganda. The architecture is divided into four groups of huts and linked up to create a village-like shape as much as possible while retaining a functional relationship between each hut. The center courtyard features a well and solar-powered roof for producing electricity, which encourages the independence of the children. The orphans assist and learn building techniques.

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Relevance to target issues by author

The project is based on volunteers and has a limited budget of USD 30,000 for 8 huts: In Uganda, building material prices are very high so no special technique for the structure is used and the use of windows is restricted and efficiently planned. The orphans also join the construction to learn the way to build houses for the future extension. This can also save money.

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Contextual and aesthetic impact

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