

# Social Design and Food Security

20<sup>th</sup> January 2015

**Lilac Osanjo**  
**School of The Arts and Design**  
**University of Nairobi**

**Email: [lilac.osanjo@uonbi.ac.ke](mailto:lilac.osanjo@uonbi.ac.ke)**



Social design

Social design puts human needs at the centre and consolidates design activities around it.

# Introduction

- Social design complements many of the characteristics of good design e.g products that have meaning, value, environment ally conscious production, not harmful/dangerous, functional etc.



- Development is a public good that should benefit everyone. Poverty, inequality, illnesses, environmental pollution and ***poor design*** are public hazards that affect everyone.
- Social design does not operate in a political vacuum but at the very forefront of societal change.



Food shortage





Negative Ethnicity



Regional Marginalization





Water Scarcity





Unsustainable Environment



Diminishing wood fuel





Crime





Poor Infrastructure



Social design puts human needs at the centre and consolidates design activities around it.

Social design

# Design future

- “If progress is to continue, we now have to put the elimination of poverty, the protection of the environment, and the recognition and celebration of our human diversity at the center of public policy and social design.”



# Responding to NEEDS

Most design interventions that we know result in products/services e.g interior, fashion, ceramic, graphics...that arise from design process. There is a risk that designers can fill the earth with products that humans want but do not necessarily NEED. Products that respond to the whims of restless individuals and society.

The outputs from social design are not necessarily the traditional design products that we know.

# Outputs from Social design

- Social design outputs could be a redirected mindset or behaviour change. It could be e.g
- A set of attitudes imparted over a period of time that leads to improved well-being of the individual or community.
- It may be a dietary intervention that provides the community with a new nutritious food that improves their health.

# Social design practice

Social design therefore:

- Is conscious of human needs (not wants).
- Is not (physical) product oriented.
- Is profit oriented.



# Human well-being

- Social design contributes to improving human well-being and livelihood. Designers focus on those needs that promote individual and community well-being as opposed to responding only to the whims and wants of a few. Ezio Manzini emphasizes that designers must respond to human needs (not wants)... and must ask themselves, “What is the need?”

# **Is conscious of human needs (not wants).**

- **What is the question to which the designer must respond?**
- Victor Papanek, who authored "Design for the Real World" (1971), is among key proponents of social design. Through his work, it can be seen that designers can bring change to the world.

# Social design roles

Social design proponents can take various forms:

- activism,
- moral responsibility,
- political crusaders of human dignity and
- environmental police.

All aimed at bringing social change.

# Is not (physical) product oriented.

- Away from the traditional design outputs that we know, the list is endless. And the benefits even more.



# Is profit oriented.

- Social design outputs are profitable when the totality of the effort is computed. Economic gain alone does not define social design. When you focus on humans, there is a lot of value in maintaining a healthy community, devoid of diseases, with enough food, gainfully employed and engaged in peaceful co-existence with nature.
- Benefits include energy and water savings, reduced waste, improved indoor environmental quality, greater user comfort/productivity, reduced health costs and lower operations and maintenance costs.
- The profit from social design must be computed with the totality that it benefits bring. So, it is a profit.



# Tools of Social Design

Social design is participatory design. It involves working in teams. You cannot undertake social design without the participation and involvement of:

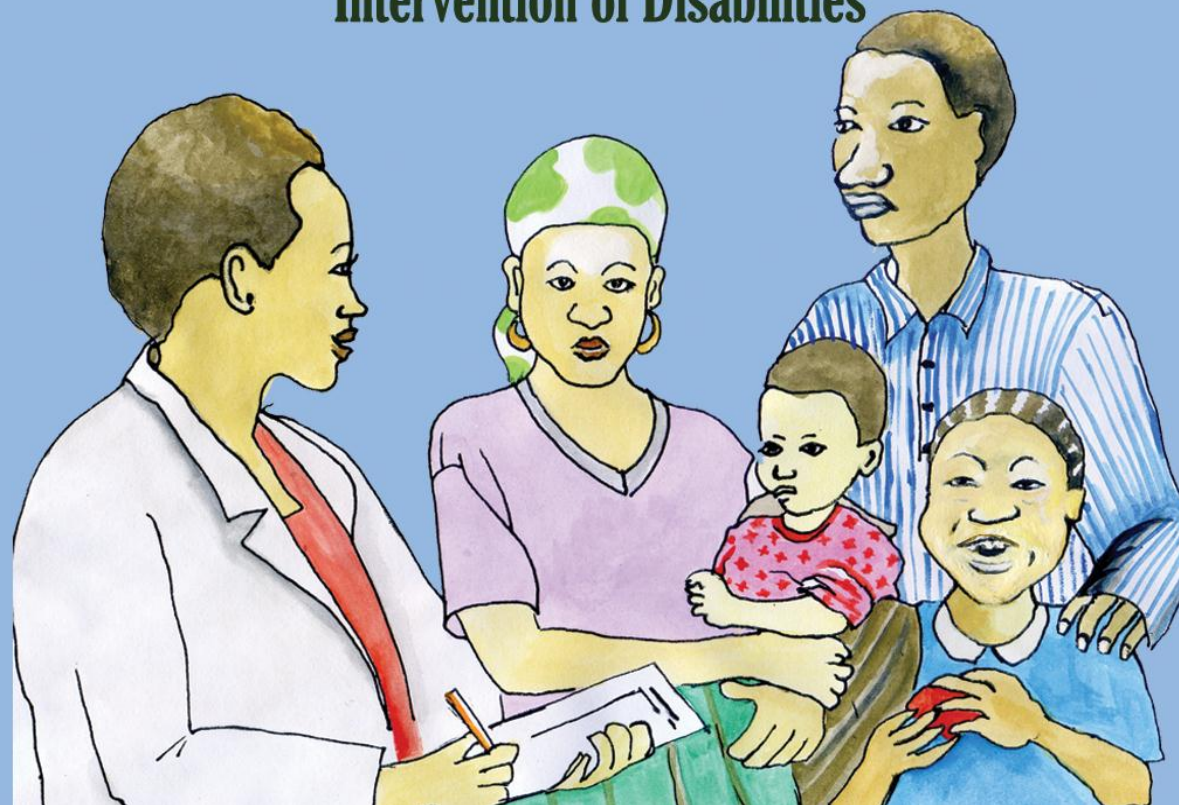
- the users/consumers. They are the drivers and principle co-designers.
- Sociologists, engineers, architects, psychologists, psychiatrists.



Republic of Kenya

Ministry of Public Health and Sanitation  
Ministry of Medical Services

# TRAINING MANUAL FOR HEALTH WORKERS ON Prevention, Early Identification and Intervention of Disabilities



# Tools ...*cont.*

- **Inquisitive mind:** In many ways the social designer is required to respond to a need even before it is articulated or clear to the community. The Social designer has the ability to envision and give form on material and immaterial products even before the users verbalize their need.
- **Ethnography:** A constant systematic research and inquiry into social behaviour. Ethnography enables the designer to interpret the particular culture of a community and to apply this information to the design process.

# Tools ...*cont.*

- **Scenario building/ Experimentation:** Scenario building is undertaken by designers to answer the question of, "What if?" as part of the design process. In many regards it is not about the reality now, but the "aspired for reality." We can construct our own city or town now as "it should be" not as it is (presently).
- **Ideation:** To quote Nigel Cross, designers have "designerly ways" of knowing. There exist '*designerly*' ways of knowing, thinking, and doing. This is the distinct knowledge that designers are called upon to exploit to solve social problems.

# The Workshop Brief

## Food Security:

- Food security is a global challenge as the world grapples with how to feed its growing population amid **depleting resources**. In Africa it is particularly critical because of for example, **over reliance on traditional methods of food production**, unreliable rainfall patterns (El nino, Lanina), **reduced yields**. In many areas there has been **consistent crop failure, crop diseases** and **over reliance on certain crops such as maize**.



# Interventions

- The government and NGOs have tried out several models to secure sustainable food production with mixed success. Some of the approaches have been:
- The promotion of alternative food crops;
- Promotion of traditional food crops;
- Introduction of new varieties of crops that are more resistant to drought;
- Promotion of appropriate farming practices;
- Use of technology and innovative production models;
- Promotion of organic food production methods.

# Research and social design methods

- Students are required to select any small aspect under the theme "Food Security". Apply appropriate research and social design methods (participatory design, co-design, ethnography, cultural probes etc).
- Gather information and come up with scenarios, experiments, prototypes, technologies etc to mitigate the problem within a cultural/community context.