

# MCT Challenge Fund For Child-Centred Nursery Schools in Tanzania



Based on Montessori Architecture

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The MCT Challenge Fund gives dedicated Montessori teachers and architects in Tanzania the means to create new inspiring nursery schools based on Montessori Architecture and to provide equal access to child-centred education in their communities.

## Background

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Nowhere in the world is the population growing faster than in Africa. For a country like Tanzania, with a current population of 64 million and a consistent growth rate of 3 per cent, this means that, in the coming years, additional schools for millions of children need to be provided by both public and private actors.

To streamline the planning and construction of new schools, local contractors often rely on standardised plans. Architecturally, these blueprints frequently reflect the colonial legacy of frontal teaching, reinforcing a didactic approach where children are continuously monitored, guided, and corrected. As a result, these schools share characteristics with many in the Global North: segregation into classroom cells, restrictions on independent activities, limited spaces for focused learning, and minimal interaction with the natural environment.

In response, the Arthur Waser Foundation (AWF) has developed a globally distributed handbook and an open-access website, available at [montessori-architecture.org](https://montessori-architecture.org). These resources empower local architects and teachers to independently create beautiful “child-centred” learning environments. Additionally, a series of innovative model schools and nurseries has been realised in collaboration with the teachers’ association, Montessori Community of Tanzania (MCT).

Building on this foundation, MCT and AWF now invite partners to support equal access to child-centred education. Together, we aim to realise inspiring Montessori nursery schools across Tanzania—designed, built, and sustained by local architects, teachers, craftspeople, and communities.

# Montessori Community of Tanzania

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The Montessori Community of Tanzania is a local nonprofit NGO and teachers' association with a rich history that traces back to its founding in 1997 as the Montessori Training Association of Tanzania. For the past 28 years, the Community has been committed to promoting Montessori pedagogy in Tanzania, fostering children's natural development, potential, and individuality for the benefit of society.

With a vision of ensuring that all children have equal access to inclusive and fully child-centred education, MCT—working in partnership with the Arthur Waser Foundation and seven national Montessori Training Centres—has trained over 6,000 teachers. As the national coordination centre for Montessori stakeholders in Tanzania, MCT unites all Montessori actors in the country to drive systemic change in the education sector.

In collaboration with AWF, the Community has launched the MCT Challenge Fund, to provide financial support to trained and motivated teachers, empowering them to establish and run calm, inspiring, child-centred schools rooted in Montessori Architecture.



Fig. 01  
Niches for independent  
learning, exemplifying the  
principles of Montessori  
Architecture.

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# Arthur Waser Foundation

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Established by Arthur Waser in 2000, the Arthur Waser Foundation is a non-profit, private foundation based in Lucerne, Switzerland. The foundation is politically and denominationally independent.

Guided by a strong belief in the future of the African continent and its people, AWF focuses on education as a key driver of development. It prioritises child-centred and technical education as effective means for empowering children and young people to exercise their right to learning and reach their full potential. Beyond teacher education, the foundation is equally committed to ensuring access to quality learning environments.

AWF follows a partnership-based approach, collaborating with strong local organisations in Tanzania, Ghana, and Ethiopia. Its work is rooted in the research and exchange of scientific knowledge and shared practical experience.

## Montessori Architecture: A Design Instrument for Schools

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The name Montessori is widely and inextricably associated with a wholly child-centred approach to pedagogy and education. Maria Montessori (1870–1952), an Italian physician, reform educator, and philosopher, developed ideas and methods that have remained influential world-wide since the 1910s. Her educational concept encompasses the entire spectrum of development, from infancy to young adulthood. It is grounded in the belief that the child is a “builder of him- or herself,” emphasising open teaching and independent work within a carefully prepared learning environment.

Although Montessori never defined a specific architectural form, her educational philosophy inspired a worldwide repertoire of schools characterised by a remarkably positive atmosphere for both learning and teaching. To capture this phenomenon, a team at AWF identified 28 recurring architectural patterns from the most inspiring schools they studied across Africa, Asia, and Europe.

In 2019, the foundation called for two design competitions, open to all architects in Tanzania, to test the first prototype version of a 28-pattern ‘Design Instrument’. One of the resulting projects—the Simba Vision Montessori School in Ngabobo, Arusha—



Fig. 02  
Book cover of Montessori  
Architecture: A Design  
Instrument for Schools.  
Zurich, 2023.



Fig. 03  
The Simba Vision model  
in Ngabobo, Tanzania.

In 2023, the school was  
awarded the Dezeen  
Award for Architecture  
Project of the Year.



was awarded the prestigious Architecture Project of the Year title by the Dezeen Awards 2023 panel of judges. Today, the updated Design Instrument is available as a handbook and freely accessible resource on [montessori-architecture.org](https://montessori-architecture.org), offering practical guidance for the independent design of schools by architects worldwide.

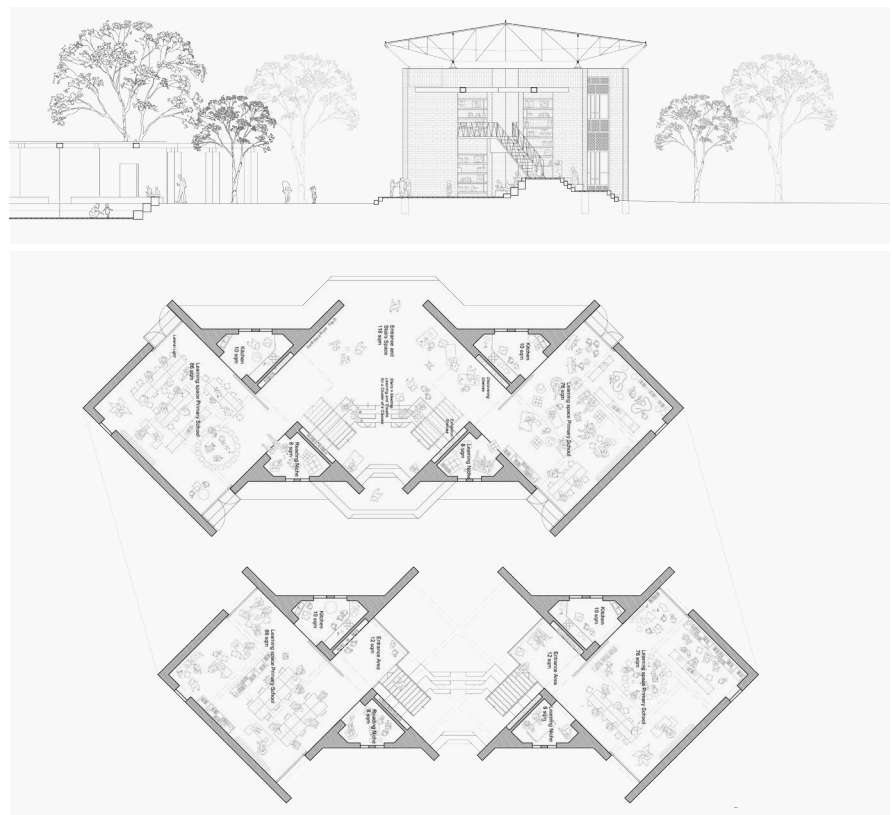
In Tanzania, these organised competitions and workshops on child-centred architecture led to the establishment of a group to be registered as the Pan-African Association for Montessori Architecture (PAAMA).

## PAAMA and New Architectural Blueprints

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PAAMA is a collective of Tanzanian professionals actively engaged in the design, planning, and construction of schools based on Montessori architecture patterns. Since the inception of competitions and workshops organised by AWF and MCT, the group has been dedicated to fostering a growing pool of qualified local architects and advancing child-centred architecture, “... designed by Africans in Africa.”

To support the creation of new child-centred learning environments, particularly in underserved peripheral regions of Tanzania, PAAMA partnered with MCT and AWF to develop a series of affordable Montessori architectural blueprints. These plans utilise local materials, techniques, and craftspeople and are tailored to suit different climatic zones in Tanzania. The modular and expandable learning spaces accommodate approximately 80 children, with each blueprint carefully designed to keep costs at CHF 50,000.



Figs. 04 and 05  
Examples of blueprints for modular, expandable learning spaces designed by Tanzanian architects. These designs integrate all Montessori architectural patterns and are made available to candidates participating in the MCT Challenge Fund.

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# MCT Challenge Fund for Child-Centred Nursery Schools

With a particular focus on early childhood education, the MCT Challenge Fund is designed to provide resources for the creation of child-centred learning environments, based on the patterns of Montessori Architecture.

Through this initiative, dedicated teachers in Tanzania can access grants to establish new nursery schools. Eligible applicants are trained Montessori teachers who hold a land title deed and can contribute 10 per cent of the building costs. Affordable school designs and architectural consultancy are provided by members of PAAMA.

To ensure long-term quality, all premises established through the Challenge Fund are co-owned by the teachers and MCT, proportionate to their individual contributions. In return for the grants, recipients contribute 5 per cent of their nursery school's annual turnover back into the fund, helping to cover repairs and ensure the fund's financial sustainability.

As part of the preparation for the Challenge Fund, AWF is currently financing the development of ten pioneering nursery schools in various regions across the country.

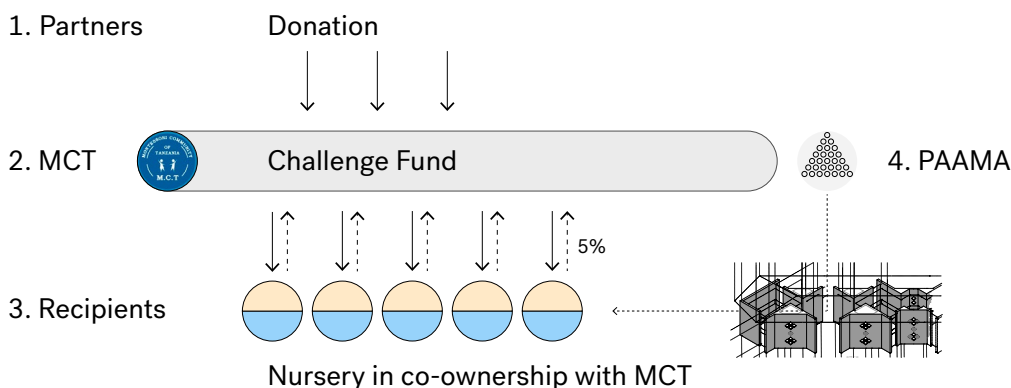


Fig. 06  
Schema of the MCT  
Challenge Fund:

1. Financial partners determine how many learning environments they wish to sponsor, with each nursery school costing CHF 50,000.

2. The teachers' association, Montessori Community of Tanzania (MCT), oversees the fund and is responsible for the qualification process, implementation, and long-term quality assurance.

3. Recipients are trained Montessori teachers who hold land titles and can contribute at least 10 per cent of the building costs. In return, each recipient contributes 5 percent of their nursery school's annual turnover back to the Challenge Fund.

4. Design approvals, consultancy, and construction supervision is provided by the Pan-African Association for Montessori Architects (PAAMA).

To prepare for this process, the Arthur Waser Foundation (AWF) is currently financing and implementing ten model nursery schools across various regions of the country.



# Call for Partnership

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The Montessori Community of Tanzania envisions a homeland where all girls and boys have equal access to quality education, characterised by self-directed activities, hands-on learning, and collaborative play. Trained teachers provide age-appropriate activities to guide the learning process, enabling children to work in groups and individually to explore knowledge of the world and realise their maximum potential.

Schools designed according to the 28 patterns of Montessori architecture offer beautifully crafted environments tailored to the developmental needs of children in specific age ranges. Each learning environment is designed, constructed, and maintained by local architects, teachers, craftspeople, and communities.

With the publication of the book and website *Montessori Architecture: A Design Instrument for Schools*, successfully constructed model schools across different regions of Tanzania, a robust local network of experienced architects, a set of architectural blueprints, and the framework of the Challenge Fund guided by MCT, significant groundwork has already been laid.

Building on these achievements, the Montessori Community of Tanzania, in collaboration with the Arthur Waser Foundation, invites individuals and organisations to join our shared mission by funding one or more child-centred learning environments in Tanzania. **With CHF 50,000, or the equivalent in your currency, a complete nursery school for 70–80 children can be realised.** Our goal is to secure 100 commitments by 2026.

For more information, please contact:

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P.S.: Smaller crowdfunding contributions are also highly welcome—thank you!

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Fig. 07  
Open learning space.  
Architectural patterns emphasise the utilisation of local materials, techniques, and craftspeople, and are tailored to accommodate diverse climatic conditions.

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“It is almost possible to say that there is a mathematical relationship between the beauty of his surroundings and the activity of the child; he will make discoveries rather more voluntarily in a gracious setting than in an ugly one... We must, therefore, quit our roles as jailers and instead take care to prepare an environment in which we do as little as possible to exhaust the child with our surveillance and instruction.”

Maria Montessori



Arthur Waser  
Foundation  
Education, Social, Culture

