GROWING UP URBAN IN EAST ASIA

A conversation with Mayors on Making Cities Safe and Sustainable for Every Child
Foreword

East Asia has seen enormous growth and change over the past few decades. Urbanization stands out as one of the most visible signs of progress: the urban population has grown by more than a billion people since 1980 – a number which broadly corresponds with the reduction of people in extreme poverty in the region. Cities in the region are a success story: they attract and generate wealth, jobs and investments that benefit millions in the pursuit of a better life.

But, the world continues to change fast. The skills and demands required for continued economic growth are not necessarily those that served progress well even a decade ago. Growth and progress in the next 15 years will depend on how effectively the regional labour force can meet the demand for new skills, on how new technologies are used and on how the information revolution is leveraged. Countries, cities and people will require the ability to change, to learn and to innovate in order to drive the next wave of growth.

Urbanization is one of the most powerful, transformative forces in the world today. Children, at the centre of urbanization, make up more than one third of the total urban population; and experts predict that by 2030, East Asian cities will be home to 800 million children. Sustained economic growth in the years ahead will depend on the cognitive capacity of the future labour force, which, in turn, depends on the health and well-being of today’s children.

UNICEF strongly believes that every single child has a right to survive, to thrive and to fulfil his or her potential. These are rights. They are not negotiable. When these rights are delivered to all children, something amazing happens: societies change for the better and productivity increases. Improving children’s lives transforms the future. When I travel around the region’s cities I see skyscrapers and freeways and universities and hospitals that are first class. I see well-dressed, well-fed children in school uniforms studying on their computers, or talking animatedly about the world and their place in it. I see social welfare programmes that are efficient and well-designed, and health care systems that are the envy of the world.

But - because it is important to UNICEF and it is important to our future – I also look under the freeways and the sky-trains and I let my eyes wander to the vacant spaces on the fringes of the schools and factories. Too often what I see there is children who have not yet experienced any benefits of growth and progress. I see children who are too small and too thin and young people whose potential is not being realized. I see boys and girls who are not in school. Just as modernity and economic strength and growth are part of the story of the new Asian century, so too are those children and adolescents.
UNICEF is committed to working directly with the mayors and urban administrators who are the frontline providers of services for children; the influential political leaders who can address unsustainable energy consumption and air pollution – factors that contribute to climate change and damage children’s health – and promote sustainable urbanization, improved public services, social stability and future economic growth.

Every child has something to contribute. The health and well-being of children in cities must be central to urban planning and municipal administration. Global commitments, made by national leaders, should help to make this happen. The 2016 New Urban Agenda, adopted by world leaders in 2016, tasked every government with thinking differently about the way cities are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed and managed. The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted in 2015, put in place measurable targets for urban progress and for economic, social and child development.

What we must do is find practical ways to make these global commitments an urban reality. This meeting, Growing Up Urban, provided the opportunity to talk, to listen and to exchange advice about what works and what does not. I am ambitious about what we can achieve, especially if we work together. Cities can be greener and healthier places, and children and families, especially the most disadvantaged, can reap what economist call the urban advantage.

On behalf of the UNICEF Regional Office for East Asia and the Pacific, I would like to thank Mayor Ibu Risma, a vocal champion of social justice for children in Indonesia and the world, for hosting Growing Up Urban, a milestone meeting for UNICEF and cities in the region, in Surabaya on 7-8 May 2018. I would also like to express gratitude for the contributions made by cities represented at the meeting, whom we rely upon to take forward the child-responsive urban development agenda.

- Karin Hulshof, Regional Director, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific, Bangkok, 29 June 2018

Tri Rismaharini ‘Ibu Risma’,
Mayor of Surabaya,
host of the Growing Up Urban meeting

Karin Hulshof,
Regional Director,
UNICEF East Asia and Pacific
Growing Up Urban

East Asia is one of the most highly urbanized regions globally. Home to both vibrant growth and emerging challenges, there is an inextricable link between the growth of safe and sustainable cities in East Asia and the well-being of the region’s children. Children and adolescents – whose personal, cognitive, physical and socio-emotional development is influenced and ‘sculpted’ by the new urban experience – should be the clear winners of this urban century.

The East Asia Region has undergone a process of fast-paced urbanization in the past few decades, and is home to nearly half of the world’s urban population. In 2018, more than 56 per cent of the region’s population lived in cities, including some of the largest cities in the world. Of the twenty most populated cities in the world, nine are in East Asia. Rapid urbanization has been an engine of development in the region. Urbanization has been a key driving force behind East Asia’s impressive pace of economic growth in the last three decades. Real per capita growth has averaged nearly 7 per cent over the period.

The region has leveraged this growth to produce rapid advances in overall living conditions, as evidenced by the fact that it went from scoring low to scoring high on the Human Development Index in less than three decades (1990–2015).

Urbanization has also brought with it new challenges, and exacerbated existing ones. Higher population density in coastal urban centres in the region means that an increasing share of the population is exposed to climate-related shocks and other high-impact events, such as earthquakes. Existing inequalities between urban and rural areas are exacerbated, and within cities, the rate of population growth often exceeds the pace of growth of public services, quality housing and employment opportunities, resulting in increased intra-urban inequality and creating new groups of disadvantaged populations in urban and peri-urban centres. Poor migrants tend to settle in informal settlements and marginalized neighbourhoods that are disconnected from services. According to the World Bank, in Phnom Penh and Yangon the urban population living in informal settlements, was 55 per cent and 41 per cent, respectively.

While all cities face the full range of challenges presented by urbanization, the relative intensity of those challenges varies with the stages of urban growth. Small, emerging cities, such as Chiang Mai in Thailand and Surakarta in Indonesia, face challenges related to creating services and infrastructure (in education, health and transportation) at the rate required by their growing populations. At the other extreme, megacities such as Changsha, Ho Chi Minh City and Shenzhen, face issues such as environmental quality and access to public and green spaces (playgrounds, parks, etc.), overly dense traffic and road injuries, and mental health care. Medium-sized but rapidly growing cities, such as Phnom Penh, Yangon, Bangkok, Surabaya and Da Nang, struggle from various forms of inequality alongside social issues such as addiction and sexual exploitation.

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1 World Development Indicators, data include the Pacific and exclude Japan and the Republic of Korea.
“Youth are the bridge, they can describe how children see the world….There is a lack of participation among youth, we need new approaches to engage youth using social media and other innovative solutions.”

Fildzah Husna Amalina (21 years), youth representative & founder of Nekropolis, a platform for youth on urban activism and inclusive urban planning

Urban leaders must listen to what children themselves have to say. Understanding urban vulnerabilities for children and how to address the physical/spatial, social and economic barriers that prevent access to services requires a child-specific lens, strong evidence and data collection with a child and gender focus as well as participatory approaches. Poor information and feedback reduces the ability of municipal administrations to provide adequate social protection and improve access to quality services, specifically early childhood development, quality education and urban water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). City administrators increasingly recognize the importance of the participation of girls and boys in city planning and of collecting frequent and accurate data with urban stakeholders to make planning and targeting of services more evidence-based and help improve service provision across the region.

1. The urban paradox and investments in children

The urban advantage fuels economic growth and poverty reduction; cities are centres of opportunity, population growth and economic prosperity. They attract and generate wealth, jobs and investments. Due to their higher population density, connectivity, proximity of services, lower transport costs and flexible, large labour markets – known as ‘agglomeration economy effects’ – cities tend to enjoy a considerable edge over rural environments in terms of income, access to services, infrastructure and growth opportunities for their citizens. Indeed, the strong economic growth, increasing labour productivity and higher income growth over the last decades in East Asia have largely been the result of people moving from jobs in rural agriculture to employment in urban manufacturing and service sectors. A World Bank analysis of 17 cities in East Asia and the Pacific has shown that city-led growth has helped lift more than 650 million people out of poverty over the last two decades. However, inequity and exclusion can lead to the urban paradox in which disadvantaged urban citizens fail to benefit from the urban advantage. Income inequality weakens the beneficial effects of poverty reduction and access to key services and infrastructure. Moreover, the urban poor often lack access to safe water, proper sanitation, housing and quality education due to social barriers and/or unequal rights related to citizenship, ethnicity and/or residency status. A UNICEF supported global analysis, based on data from nearly 70 Multiple Indicator Cluster Surveys (MICS) and demographic and health surveys (DHS) carried out between 2011 and 2016, across nine child welfare indicators, illustrates that children do not benefit from the ‘urban advantage’ once the effect of household wealth is removed from the equation. The impact of unplanned urbanization, environmental, social and health hazards, lower resilience and exclusion through informality and insecure tenure may derail, block or counteract the potential beneficial effects of urban environments for children in low and middle-income countries (see Figure 1).

This global analysis suggests a tendency for higher national income to reduce wealth-related disparities in the nine indicators. However, this effect is anything but an iron rule: countries at similar levels of gross national income often show very different results. This attests to the importance of integrated social protection and effective public financial management systems as most of the countries have national programmes to facilitate access to basic social services for children. An example is the city of Surabaya’s Education for All initiative, which grants free schooling from preschool through high school for all children, including those living with disabilities. In addition to education, the city provides free meals and supplementary food for nearly half a million children and pregnant women, and also provides vaccinations and free health check-ups to youth and pregnant women.

Sustaining growth in the region will require stronger investments in human capital. The most important cognitive and non-cognitive skills, known as cognitive capital, are established in early childhood and adolescence. In the twentieth century ‘human capital’ was considered the result of fertility and formal education. Now, brain science adds to the understanding of cognitive capacity: early neural connections in the brain have lasting windfall effects and lay the foundation for human capability throughout the lifecycle. The intellectual and socio-emotional skills that build collective intelligence and which jointly enable creativity, flexibility, and ability to work collaboratively are chiefly established in early childhood when the brain develops and shows high plasticity (see Figure 2). It is therefore of utmost interest that all children have access to the support and services needed in this period to build the skills that are necessary in today’s world and will be even more important in the future. Adolescence offers a second chance for interventions with lasting effects. As body growth accelerates, plasticity of the brain increases again and structural changes occur in the human brain during puberty.
While decision-makers in Asia fully recognize the importance of human capital, supporting all families and children during the earliest years is often not sufficiently prioritized. Access to nutrition, health, early childhood and welfare services is particularly important for children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds. This is not just good social policy – it is also good economic and urban policy. As Figure 3 shows, the earliest investments in cognitive capital generate the highest returns: the return on investment ratio could be as high as 1 to 18 in this period. Moreover, returns are not just high but also multi-dimensional and long-lasting. Improved brain development results in improved health and well-being, educational outcomes, skills, employment and quality of life. By contrast, “negative stimuli lead to depreciating cognitive capital, poorer mental and physical health and educational outcomes, and decreased life chances.”

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Cognitive capital is behind the success of rapidly growing twenty-first century economies, and cities provide the best environment for nurturing these key skills. Cities can support the development of cognitive capital by addressing the challenges faced by pregnant mothers, young children and caregivers and developing strategies to improve their safety, health and mobility and create information feedback loops. Investing in programmes that target the prenatal and early years as well as adolescence is instrumental to ensure children grow into healthy, strong and smart adults who also have access to a knowledge-oriented labour market.

Participating cities provided several examples of how to enhance investments and reduce disparities in early childhood. Shenzhen makes universal access a reality for all. The city introduced policies, which guarantees education, health and social security for its citizens. Thanks to health and social insurance, medical and preventative (immunization) services are delivered effectively, and over 95 per cent of children are enrolled in a child health-care programme. In schools, more than 72 per cent of seats are provided to non-registered (migrant) students, including an allowance of RMB 1,500 per year for the healthy growth of preschool children. In Surabaya, the city provides subsidized social services to needy families that reduce stress for parents and caregivers and allow them to focus on positive parenting.

Building on the key takeaways around cognitive development, the Bernard van Leer Foundation illustrated the effect of spatial design of the built environment on child well-being. Densely populated urban environments can pose certain risks and stresses for children and families, such as loneliness and isolation, congestion, a general lack of places to play, and concerns around safety. However, when planned well and from the perspective of a child, cities can also offer opportunities for stimulation, improved access to services, infrastructure and mobility, which in turn improve quality of life for all. For example, Surabaya has dedicated 133 hectares of land for parks and public spaces that incorporate features to accommodate the disabled and hearing impaired. Opportunities for traditional and digital literacy and learning are integrated in public spaces, within public health centres and government offices.

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2. Confronting the urban paradox: improving equity and access to services

While political, social and economic factors influence equity in access to services, the geography and spatial layout of a given city greatly impact the delivery of services. The urban poor, who often live in peri-urban and informal neighbourhoods, are vulnerable to exclusion and neglect with spatial inequalities worsening marginalization. Cities should leverage the economies of scale made possible by high population density to provide greater access to quality services. Unplanned urbanization and/or silo planning of social services and infrastructure indeed often place a burden on social protection services that could have been avoided by more integrated and coordinated advance planning.

For children, spatial inequalities can be observed in three dimensions: in the provision of urban services, in the built environment and in the distribution of land and urban space.\(^7\) Urban services critical for children include green spaces, transportation, water, sanitation and waste management, clean energy, healthy food and access to information and communication technology networks. For the built environment, the concentration of poverty and the characteristics of the physical environment contribute to socioeconomic and environmental vulnerabilities. Children from urban poor families are most vulnerable to shocks from poverty. The distribution of urban spaces in the built environment also help to define spatial inequalities.

The City Form Lab’s analysis on spatial accessibility, or the ease of getting from one place to another using a given travel mode, considers the following five dimensions when measuring access to services. These five dimensions of accessibility can be used to develop indicators for measuring how child-friendly a city is in providing services for children and their caregivers:\(^8\)

- **Cost of travel:** In determining the accessibility of a destination using costs, distance and quality of the route will most likely be a determinant. A physical map that indicates the location of the child population and the key destinations that need to be reached could help in calculating the distance of services to where children live in a city.

- **Destination attractiveness:** The attractiveness of a destination is determined both by the quality and quantity of services from the perspective of children’s needs.

- **Transport options:** For a child living in a city, walking, biking and transit are the main modes of movement. It is critical to develop these modes of mobility in a city to improve safe and independent access for children.

- **Individual characteristics:** The willingness to walk, bike or use any form of non-motorized transport is dependent on a child’s or caregiver’s characteristics, as well as the quality and safety of the built environment.

- **Built environment:** The built environment influences the extent to which children can participate in society.\(^9\) Proper planning, design and construction measures can improve access to urban services for children and their caregivers while also reducing urban-specific environmental health problems.

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Pedestrians, cyclists or passengers, and children are vulnerable road users, especially those who are disabled. The World Health Organization (WHO) and UNICEF report that in most countries, road traffic injuries are one of the top two causes of death from unintentional injury, with the highest rates among youth age 15-19 years. Globally, children age 5-14 years suffer the highest incidence of road traffic injuries, and two thirds of all child road traffic injury deaths take place in South-East Asia and the Western Pacific. There are proven interventions that help reduce road traffic injuries and cities can be effective by putting in place child-responsive transport infrastructure. Changsha is a leader in China in creating better transport infrastructure for children. As a part of its Long-term Development Plan, the Changsha Urban Planning Bureau has committed to improving walking spaces, crossings, traffic organization and public spaces around schools. Recognizing the importance of child road safety, the Changsha Bureau of Education has allocated adequate resources and budget for children under its Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) to improve not only road safety but also other child-friendly infrastructure. Planning urban spaces should be participatory; children, caregivers and urban local stakeholders should co-produce solutions for child-responsive cities.

Comprehensive and integrated approaches are best to achieve complex outcomes, and cities can offer the best mechanisms for delivering equitable and quality services for children. Cities should build bridges across service delivery sectors to tackle development challenges, promote child and youth opportunities, reduce inequalities and sustain economic growth. While East Asian cities have prospered, there are still many pockets of child malnutrition, stunting, youth unemployment and inequality. Combined and adequate investments are needed in multiple sectors to achieve positive outcomes in reduced stunting and greater human capital development and overall child well-being.

Child grant and family support programmes, such as the Child Support Grant in Thailand, the Philippines' cash transfer Pantawid Pamilyang Pilipino Program (4Ps), Myanmar’s universal Child and Maternal Grant and new child-focused grants in Cambodia and Viet Nam are a very important part of the integrated social protection systems that cities should embrace. Impact evaluations have found that child and maternal cash grants make a tangible difference in strengthening and deepening the impact of health, nutrition and other early childhood development interventions. Integrated social protection systems have the potential to strengthen planning and service delivery, achieve common goals and have a direct impact on the stability and prosperity of the region.

City planning and budgeting structures and processes need to be spelled out and well understood to increase horizontal collaboration among sectors, to encourage institutional change, and to establish modalities for joint implementation. The cross-cutting aspect of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presents an opportunity for collaboration and setting up frameworks for joint implementation.

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12 Ibid.
For example, planning ministries and national councils on sustainable development can engage stakeholders in the creation, implementation and monitoring of national strategies and help build consensus and ownership of plans. Beyond intra-governmental cooperation, other groups such as civil society, the business sector, academia and non-governmental stakeholders could be a part of this process. While the SDGs and other global goals are cross-sectoral, the challenge lies in the fact that each goal is tied to separate ministries, separate government offices with separate budgets and levels of expertise. There is a need to find ways to create joint frameworks and action plans that incorporate overlapping targets and goals. It is also important to ensure data are collected in an integrated manner with the national statistics offices.

3. Unpacking urban governance, policy and fiscal space

Ensuring each child can develop to his or her potential is an ambitious agenda which requires unwavering support and investment from parents, families and communities. Because urban areas enjoy comparatively high levels of gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in every country, one could assume that urban households and urban governments tend to be in a good position to bear the costs of raising children in cities. Indeed, globally 80 per cent of GDP is produced in urban areas, mostly in services and industries that benefit from population density.14

Cities tend to be net contributors to the general government budget and could be penalized by unclear expenditure assignment and management. The literature on decentralization frequently identifies the problem of so called ‘unfunded mandates’ in which the central government transfers responsibility for service provision to cities without transferring adequate funds and/or policy space to raise and use revenues locally, such as property/business taxes and user fees to finance health and social welfare provision. Information collected before the Surabaya meeting, however, suggested that the 14 city administrations participating at the meeting share central priorities and receive considerable transfers from their central government, and are not thereby facing the issue of unfunded mandates. Nonetheless, the presentations and discussion led to a more nuanced picture, which highlighted the need for better information systems and clearer mapping of central and local accountabilities for child outcomes.

Cities are leading poverty reduction in East Asia. As illustrated in Surakarta (Figure 4), cities in East Asia tend to have lower rates of extreme poverty than neighbouring rural areas and are, indeed, leading poverty reduction.


Even though average urban poverty rates are lower than rural rates, they can hide deep pockets of poverty in urban areas, especially among populations that face specific barriers. Working and living in urban areas is often a household coping strategy with mixed results: parents may earn better wages but face worse conditions for family stability and child-rearing. Most young urban families will, therefore, need public services and support from local governments; especially when confronted with expensive private services and weak urban family networks. Therefore, good policies, attentive and caring public administration and adequate fiscal space for services matter to urban children and families.

Managing urbanization requires a coordinated approach and clear policy directions. According to the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), "this is lacking in many countries, where several government departments are in charge of dealing with different aspects of the urbanization challenge". Indeed, urbanization policy is inextricably linked to all major policy areas such as economic growth, industrial development, poverty reduction, security, migration, employment, property rights, the environment, health, education and social protection. Decisions made in these areas tend to have far reaching implications for the speed and quality of the urbanization process; and urban leaders are nearly always confronted with the need to manage the aggregate, dynamic result of all these central economic and sector policies. Meanwhile they will often have limited authority – so-called ‘policy space’ – to shape the quality of people’s lives and the development of their cities.

Problem awareness, objective setting and attentive action are key to delivering results. Despite the intricate urban policy map, governments’ public financial management could help families most effectively by creating and sustaining a feedback loop that monitors child outcomes and analyses causality. In a results-based budgeting system, decision-makers and implementing agencies need outcome information to adjust inputs (resources) and manage the process of service delivery (outputs). When parents and their network or employer fail, it is local governments that are best placed to assist children. Local outcomes monitoring, awareness and action are essential because the asymmetry between better-off and disadvantaged groups in terms of income earning opportunities, social networks and access to information on services and benefits can deprive large numbers of children of developmental opportunities. This could perpetuate negative social outcomes in health,

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15 Available from https://unhabitat.org/urban-initiatives/initiatives-programmes/national-urban-policies/.
education and income earning capacity leading to a reduced pace of progress in human development nationwide.

A child-specific lens is needed at local as well as national levels. Local action works best when it is supported by and reinforces central government policies and programmes. As Figure 5 illustrates, raising children requires good governance – cooperation and collaboration among many actors and duty bearers. Therefore, classic input-centred approaches (such as line item budgeting) tend to not be very effective in reaching and producing adequate results for each and every child. The risk of elite-capture and exclusion of vulnerable groups is high when planning and implementation lacks feedback loops based on information from multiple sources. These latter could take several forms – administrative and survey statistics and reports, digital ‘big data’ sources, citizens’ card reports, feedback from representative bodies and so on – but too often information systems do not work effectively enough to ensure the most efficient and effective use of public resources.

**Figure 5: Resources and governance for children**

- Governance: the way agencies interact, relate to citizens, and how decisions are taken
- Financing agencies for children
  - Parents (coping strategies)
  - Employers (civil serv./corporates)
  - Children themselves
  - Other private carers (relatives):
    - NG0s/donors (external/internal)
  - Local government
  - Central government
- Information on effort and results


Evidence-based priority setting in public budgets is required to improve results for children, at both the central and local level. If municipalities start planning with flawed data – for example, without clarity on how many children actually live in the geographical area and under their accountability – the risk that vulnerable children will have unmet needs runs high. Ideally, each municipality should periodically carry out a child situation analysis, combining quantitative and qualitative data to reveal gaps in services and child outcomes. Information provided by city administrations in advance of the meeting in Surabaya identified, for example, ‘green and safe environments for children in urban areas, adequate child care, and the availability of social care and welfare services for high-risk children and youth’ as priority areas where more attention is needed.

Lack of money is not always the main cause of urban policy failure. Urban leaders and senior city administrators agreed that cities could command sufficient resources to secure services for children. Furthermore, if further investment is needed, the city has the power to mobilize resources from the private sector and/or form partnerships with employers to address gaps in services. In addition, it is crucial to track and correct gaps and issues across the budget cycle. The public financial management cycle could be used as a tool to investigate and correct failures in securing the desired child outcomes.
Participatory approaches and city budget negotiations should complement top down approaches to planning and priority setting. While the degree of decentralization varies across East Asia, the information provided prior to the meeting suggest that maternal and child health, and education (including preschools) are high in cities’ lists of priorities. Cities have indicated low priority for issues such as clean air, care for children under two-year-olds, and support to high risk groups. These issues – which are very important for early childhood development and national cognitive capital – feature strongly in the SDGs. However, it may require more time to ensure these goals and targets are well-established as subnational priorities in the region. City budget negotiations with central authorities would be livelier, better founded and more successful with stronger, well-prepared participation of families, children and adolescents. Participation in decisions affecting children and young people was reported as a low priority in most cases by city administrations at the meeting. However, there are several initiatives in the region to nurture child and youth participation. For example, the Jayapura City Children’s Forum was established by a 2017 Jayapura Mayor’s Decree to “popularize and fight for child rights, provide a platform for children to be creative and able to express their opinions openly”, under a nationwide initiative to create Child Forums in Indonesia. It is clear that without strong support from urban leaders, children and adolescents will find it difficult to influence cities’ decision-making.

UNICEF offers the following principles for children and young people’s involvement in public decisions:16

- Place the main emphasis on children and young people’s involvement in decisions at the community level rather than the national or international level.
- Create and sustain mechanisms at local and national levels for children and young people to be consulted and to have influence over public decisions and resource allocations, rather than focusing on high-level events that bring children and young people together with decision-makers but fail to take their opinions into account.
- Offer opportunities for children and young people to provide feedback on the quality, accessibility and appropriateness of public services.
- Take a long-term approach to gradually increasing children and young people’s control over decisions and to strengthen sustainable mechanisms for their involvement in decision making.

Health, education and social welfare agencies generally underspend in comparison with other sectors, and frequently show poor budget execution rates. Public Expenditure and Financial Accountability (PEFA) data show that in Viet Nam social sectors were unable to fully absorb the budget allocated to them. In Myanmar, the Philippines and Viet Nam, health and education sectors significantly lag behind the strong dynamics observed in general government expenditure.

There is clearly an intergovernmental transfer angle to the issue of low budget implementation in the social sectors. The wage bills of civil servants – doctors, nurses, teachers and social welfare administrators – tend to absorb a significant part of expenditure in the social sectors. Local governments typically have limited policy and fiscal space for increasing public sector wages and hiring more civil servants, compared with initiating infrastructure projects, for example. This bias against social spending underlines the need for better planning, timely implementation and increased quality in these sectors, which in turn requires strengthening local government data and reporting systems and capacity in public financial management.

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16 See https://www.unicef.org/eapro/Children_as_Active_Citizens_A4_book.pdf
While investment in relatively large infrastructure projects does not face the same negative bias as current expenditure for service provision, it still faces a significant financing gap. Despite the trend toward fiscal decentralization, cities in Asian countries, including Indonesia, still rely mostly on central government transfers, with their own revenue raising capacity remaining low by international standards (see Figure 7). This results in a large financing gap for large, multi-year investment in small and medium-sized cities, which often require resources well beyond local budgets, but do not have access to other financing avenues (for example, the public-private partnerships that help finance many viable large infrastructure projects such as toll roads, airports and ports, or the direct market borrowing available for other large and commercially viable projects in creditworthy, large cities). This financing gap tends to affect projects that are important for residents – especially low-income families with children - such as water and sanitation, waste management, affordable housing and urban transport.

**Figure 7: Subnational own revenue as share of total government revenue**

![Bar chart showing subnational own revenue as share of total government revenue](image)

Note: Data from 2013 for Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines. All other data from 2014.


4. Shaping urbanization for children

Shaping urbanization for children in the region requires strategies, planning, resources and vision. The process of urbanization and related migration creates enormous developmental opportunities across the region. However, urbanization can also lead to risks, compounded by the inevitable strain the sheer pace and complexity of change can place on social cohesion, infrastructure and public services. The information city administrations shared prior to as well as during the meeting inspired the following ‘Urban Risk Framework’ (see Box 1).
Box 1: The Urban Risk Framework

- The top row presents four risks that could derail children’s lives depriving them of developmental opportunities. Related services should typically be provided in a ‘package’ to enhance impact and reflect upon multidimensional deprivation.

- The second row compounds poor access to services; the instability and vulnerabilities often associated with migration and/or unclear status are frequent underlying causes of poor early child outcomes and/or health and learning issues during adolescence. Unsupportive social environments for participation can hurt children throughout the lifecycle.

- Addressing the last four types of risks are particularly important for the physical, mental and social development of children and adolescents in urban contexts. Designing infrastructure, streets and public transit that are child- and gender-responsive will translate into safer, smarter and healthier societies.

In order to carve out a comprehensive response to the 12 urban risks identified, city leaders participated in a visioning session, together with UNICEF country office representatives, technical staff and other meeting participants, to articulate immediate and high-level priorities and present a common vision for child-responsive urban development in the region.
The Surabaya Vision

**Services for all Children**
- Health and Nutrition
- Water and Sanitation
- Education
- Protection

**A Society for all Children**
- Early Childhood Development
- Poverty and Inequality
- Migration and Minorities
- Participation

**Infrastructure and Sustainable Environment for all Children**
- Space
- Transportation and Safety
- Digital Access and Safety
- Environment

The “Surabaya Vision”: The Surabaya Vision for East Asian cities, transforms risks into opportunities with equity: services for all children, a society for all children and infrastructure and sustainable environment for all children. This comprehensive and equity-oriented vision reflects upon the globally agreed road map and universal pledge to leave no one behind: the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs:

- **Services for all children**: Despite the availability of essential services in cities, children from disadvantaged urban households are often unable to gain access to critical services such as education, health, nutrition and water and sanitation. Rapid urbanization places immense pressure on existing facilities to deliver accessible, equitable and quality services.

- **A society for all children**: Comprehensive analysis of children living in urban contexts reveals multiple deprivations and inequities, and identifies unique vulnerabilities that children face during early childhood and adolescence. Migrants and minorities are often deprived of the rights of urban citizenship and are prevented from contributing to social and economic life. The voice and participation of families and children is often lacking in the decision-making process. Gaps in social protection and a lack of support to expecting parents and families with young children leads to unrealized potential in early childhood. Child sensitive social protection has a particularly important role in addressing these risks and nurturing children’s ‘cognitive capital’ so that every child develops to her or his full potential.

- **Infrastructure and sustainable environment for all children**: Urbanization compounded by migration exerts stress on infrastructure, which can intensify the vulnerabilities children face and threaten social cohesion. Infrastructure that is missing or dysfunctional creates dangers for children. Poor transportation infrastructure leads to safety concerns, including road crashes; the spatial and social structure of urban areas affects physical and mental health; digital access brings with it safety concerns; and inappropriate or insufficient infrastructure can fail to prevent and even exacerbate environmental issues including air pollution, flooding and other impacts of climate change.

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The Way Forward

Child-friendly cities depend on political will and leadership. The SDGs provide a framework for coordinated and integrated action, especially for local governments. Some 65 per cent of the SDGs, particularly Goal 11, can only be achieved if local and territorial governments are involved at all stages of the decision-making process. Localizing the SDGs allows for unique challenges, opportunities and capacities to be considered when establishing goals and targets for implementation, monitoring and reporting.

The Growing Up Urban meeting provided an opportunity for UNICEF to launch a dialogue with urban leaders on a range of topics that particularly matter for children in East Asia – such as access to child friendly urban services and spaces – and to investigate the prioritization, planning and budgeting processes that shape results for every child.

Participating cities in Surabaya expressed a desire to strengthen the partnership they have with UNICEF and other development actors, to:

- Improve data and knowledge sharing
- Explore, document and create better awareness on how urban planning, central and local resources and initiatives can be used in effective and efficient ways to enhance child nutrition, health, early development, education and protection for all children
- Involve young people and their families in the design of services and urban environments

The stimulating discussion confirmed the need for UNICEF to facilitate further exchanges on best practices regionally as well as globally, with a particular focus on the Child-Friendly Cities framework and to develop improved indicators for measuring urban commitments and the dynamics of child well-being.

UNICEF also committed to work with the regional cities’ alliance -- UCLG ASPA -- and its members to establish a committee on children and youth to promote the Surabaya Vision and focus on the following thematic areas:

- Data and Analysis: strengthening evidence on children and adolescents living in urban settings
- Participation and Rights: promoting meaningful participation of urban adolescents and youth
- Advocacy and Partnerships: forging new partnerships to promote Child Friendly Cities.
Contents of the Full Report:

available at: https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/growing-urban-east-asia

Growing Up Urban in East Asia: A conversation with Mayors on Making Cities Safe and Sustainable For Every Child

Foreword
Acknowledgments
Acronyms

I. Overview: Growing Up Urban

II. The Context
City profiles:
- Bangkok, Thailand
- Changsha, China
- Chiang Mai, Thailand
- Da Nang, Viet Nam
- Dumai, Indonesia
- Ho Chi Minh City, Viet Nam
- Jayapura, Indonesia
- Magelang, Indonesia
- Phnom Penh, Cambodia
- Shenzhen, China
- Surabaya, Indonesia
- Surakarta (Solo), Indonesia
- Yangon, Myanmar
- Zamboanga City, Philippines

III. The Themes of the Meeting
1. The urban paradox and investments in children
2. Confronting the urban paradox: improving equity and access to services
3. Unpacking urban governance, policy and fiscal space
4. Shaping urbanization for children
5. Conclusions and way forward
Acknowledgments

This document is based on the meeting report of *Growing Up Urban in East Asia: A conversation with mayors on making cities safe and sustainable for every child*. The meeting was held in Surabaya and brought together over 100 participants, including mayors, governors and senior officials and representatives of various urban departments (planning and development, women and children’s committees, child protection, and social welfare and education) from Bangkok, Changsha, Chiang Mai, Da Nang, Dumai, Ho Chi Minh City, Jayapura, Magelang, Phnom Penh, Shenzhen, Surabaya, Surakarta (Solo), Yangon and Zamboanga City. Participants were accompanied by UNICEF staff and a select group of experts.