Urbanisation and Children in the Pacific: Considering UNICEF’s Programmatic Response

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Scoping study sought to answer three questions:

1. How does urbanisation affect children in the Pacific and how will it affect them in the future?

2. Which stakeholders are already dealing with urbanisation issues across the Pacific region, and are there any that handle the impact on children in particular? (Kiribati, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu)

3. In what way should UNICEF Pacific engage in the field?
Introduction

Around 40% of Pacific Islanders live and work in towns, a figure, which according to the WB, will rise to over half by 2020.

The population of South Tarawa is growing at a rate three times faster than the national population growth.
Causes of urbanisation

- Search for work
  - Reliance on the cash economy
  - Access to markets

- Access to services
  - Educational opportunities
  - Health care

- Changing expectations as to what constitutes a ‘desirable lifestyle’
  - Recreational and social freedoms
  - Information revolution

- Natural population growth – high fertility rates, young populations
Climate change: a driver of urbanisation

Source: UNDP (2009)
Broad development impacts

• Settling on illegal and informal areas of land
• Poverty and worsening of living conditions
  - High population density
  - Inadequate provision of essential basic services
• Break-down of social safety-nets
• Environmental degradation
  - Management of solid waste
• Unemployment in the formal cash sector
• Social tensions, violence and conflict

⇒ Worsened human security
Differences between the countries

Vanuatu – access to resources
- 3 municipal areas: Port Vila, Luganville and Lenakel
- Population growth mainly from migration from smaller islands to peri-urban settlements
- Tourism draws people to urban areas
- New development initiatives have excluded traditional landowners and users from access to land for gardening, water and fishing

Solomon Islands – conflict, exploitation
- Honiara, Auki – main urban centres. Smaller centres in Kirakira, Gizo and Lata
- Residual tension remains within Honiara – kept in check by RAMSI
- Gangs in settlement areas – disaffected ‘ex-combatants’
- Some negative implications from RAMSI intervention
- ‘Islands’ of peri-urbanisation around logging camps

Kiribati – water and sanitation
- The most urbanised nation in the Pacific
- Environmental impact of the population density and subsequent impact of the environment on the people
- Potable water is a serious issue in South Tarawa
- Poor sanitation practices and facilities exacerbates the environmental situation – pandemic risk
Impacts of urbanisation on children and youth in the Pacific

Child Survival and Development

- Discrepancies between access to health services in rural and urban areas
- Cost of health care is still prohibitive to many urban/peri-urban dwellers
- Lack of access to clean water in urban areas
- Sanitation and hygiene issues: exposure to infections
- Overcrowded living conditions: exposure to range of diseases
- Poorer air quality
- Dependence on imported and often less-healthy food

⇒ Rising incidence of gastrointestinal disease and hepatitis
⇒ Increased incidence of respiratory diseases
⇒ High rates of child malnutrition
⇒ *Rallu (2007) draws a link between environmental impact of urbanisation and remaining high levels of infant and child morbidity in the Pacific*
Impacts of urbanisation on children and youth in the Pacific

**Child Protection**

- Absence of many traditional support systems
- Children often separated from families
- Children pushed out of households onto street
- Social disruption
- Both parents working
- Children in pockets of urban poverty: low self-esteem, feeling of alienation

⇒ Commercial sexual exploitation of children
⇒ Rise in domestic violence, children affected directly/indirectly by abuse
⇒ Child neglect, lack of supervision or care
Impacts of urbanisation on children and youth in the Pacific

Basic Education and Gender Equality

- Children in urban areas have better access to schooling (*quality* education) and more likely to complete secondary school education
- Most education expenditure is focused on urban/peri-urban centres
- Other factors affect school attendance in urban centres e.g. Malnutrition, educational costs

⇒ School drop-outs
  - More girls than boys
  - Disillusion and disenchantment amongst youth

⇒ Greater numbers of *under-employed* in urban centres
Impacts of urbanisation on children and youth in the Pacific

HIV and AIDS

- Heightened pre-conditions for epidemic
  - Poverty, illiteracy, sexual exploitation of children, prevalence of unsafe sex practices
  - Greater exposure to sex workers and to opportunities for sexual exchange (tourism)
  - Greater exposure to alcohol
  - Lack of parental supervision/guidance + greater exposure to peer pressure

⇒ Higher rates of infection from higher concentration of people in urban areas
Impacts of urbanisation on children and youth in the Pacific

**Participation**

- Urbanisation challenges traditional notions
- New cultural patterns of socialisation
- Little arena for urban youth to express themselves
- ‘Poverty of opportunity’ encourages high-risk and self-destructive behaviours

⇒ Children and youth feel disillusioned and disengaged
⇒ Unemployment affects 1 in 3 urban settlers.
⇒ Unemployment has escalated alcohol and drug abuse, family violence and criminal youth gangs
Impacts of urbanisation on children and youth in the Pacific

Emergency Preparedness and Response

- Urban children are largely unable to manage risk, and avoid impact of extreme weather events
- Less equipped to cope with illness, injury, death or loss of family income or assets caused by disasters
- Development challenges brought by urbanisation are dramatically aggravated by natural disasters and the consequences of climate change

⇒ Slow process of disaster recovery can lead to anger, frustration, violence and abuse
⇒ Children may need to work to help family recover faster
⇒ Children may drop out of school if costs become prohibitive
Key Findings

1. **Lack of coordination among stakeholders engaged in tackling the impacts of urbanisation on children and youth**
   - Few are supported by governments or international donors
   - Greater coordination noted in Sth. Tarawa where convergence work is

2. **Need for research, M&E to deal with urbanisation issues impacting on children and youth**
   - So much focus on programme sites, urban issues seem to have emerged unchecked
   - Recommends using strategic location of FOs to have role in monitoring urban situations

3. **Lack of awareness of urbanisation affecting children and youth (by urban communities)**
   - Urban settings have informal networks – *a new urban identity*: communication/awareness messages do not seem to be getting through
   - Eg. Urban populations still lack education and awareness of health in general and not always use facilities that are there.
Key Findings

4. **Need for capacity building to deal effectively with the impacts of urbanisation on children and youth**
   - Those working on the ground on urban issues do not have capacity/influence to engage at policy level, monitor work, collect data and conduct analysis

5. **Need to place urbanisation issues at the forefront of policy, advocacy and planning**
   - The extended family and communal nature of society in rural areas acts as a social buffer that urban areas do not have
   - Rural development may stem to some degree urban drift
   - Reality is that people will not return to rural areas and self-propagating growth in urban areas is still too rapid – the immediate needs of those adversely affected by urbanisation, living in urban areas are not adequate addressed.
In what way should UNICEF Pacific engage in the field?

1. **Coordination of stakeholders**
   - Work on ‘urban partnerships’ to foster greater efficiency and effectiveness

2. **Research, monitoring and evaluation**
   - Understand Pacific urban realities to better inform advocacy and planning

3. **Awareness raising**
   - Use ‘urban traditional’ networks to reach out to communities with communication strategies

4. **Capacity building**
   - Facilitate linkages between government agencies, including policy makers and implementers

5. **Policy, advocacy and planning**
   - Assist in bringing children’s issues to the forefront of urban policy development
Vanuatu

Health
- Rise in Malaria and other public health concerns (deteriorating living conditions)
- Food security (poor access to natural resources)

Child Protection
- Neglect (break-down of family support systems, and both parents working)
- Overcrowding – risks on street (e.g. substance abuse)

Basic Education and Gender Equity
- Low retention rate over first 6 years – as low as 15%
- Education costs are prohibitive for many
- Short of space in schools to accommodate large youth population
- Lack of vocational training to meet demands of employment market
- Wages and work conditions poor – deterrent to unemployed youth

HIV&AIDS
- Knowledge and access to family planning is limited
- Rising incidence of teenage pregnancies (only 38% of youth use contraceptive – YPP)
- Gender inequalities and marginalisation of youth

Participation
- Loss of language and knowledge of Kastom – new urban identities
- Lack of education and employment opportunities leads to disillusionment and disengagement – ‘kilemtaem’
Solomon Islands

Health
- 52 informal settlements around Honiara (APHEDA) with poor water supply, sanitation, medical services and transport
- Rise of malaria, TB and dengue

Child Protection
- Neglect (break-down of family support systems, and both parents working)
- Overcrowding – increasing nos. of children on street
- Rise in crime, physical and sexual violence, alcohol (kwaso) and substance abuse
- 37% women abused, are abused before 15 years, overall rates of abuse, higher in urban areas (SPC, 2009)
- CSEC – for money, food and shelter (fishing and logging)
- Maintenance of children born from short-term relationships with transient workers
- Presence of RAMSI sees more young people in conflict with the law in urban areas

Basic Education and Gender Equity
- Not enough schools to cater for all school-age children wishing to attend
- Schools often inaccessible for children in more distant peri-urban settlements
- Costs of education prohibitive for many
- Few ECE facilities in Honiara (due to lack of land availability)
- Unemployment and youth ‘hanging round’
Solomon Islands

HIV&AIDS
- High teenage pregnancy rate and rates of STIs
- Loosening of control in urban Honiara and breakdown of families – greater exposure to risk behaviour
- Demand for sexual services from transient workers

Participation
- National youth stakeholders not coordinated
- Low level of priority accorded by government to youth and their engagement as citizens
- Many adults dismissive of the modern urban teenager

Emergency preparedness and response
- Increasing lawlessness and gang culture (centred by young men and children involved in the ‘tensions’)
- When parents are absent at work, children in settlements are at risk in such volative environments
- Ex-combatants imprisoned about to be released have political connections
- Common fear of return of violence and riots
Health

- Rapid spread of infectious diseases in South Tarawa (living conditions are deteriorating rapidly)
- Acute respiratory infections in children
- Sanitation – most schools on South Tarawa have non-functional latrines
- Lagoon waters contaminated with high levels of fecal coliform
- Water supply – not safe even after boiling – in Betio and Bairiki
- Non-communicable diseases – shift from traditional food sources, rise in smoking, alcohol consumption
- Infant mortality 20% higher in Sth Tarawa than rest of Kiribati
- 70% of South Tarawa inhabitants do not own their land – few fresh food sources
- Teenage mothers giving birth outside formal health system to avoid cultural shame

Child Protection

- Neglect (break-down of family support systems, children hungry)
- Overcrowding – insecure environments for children
- Physical and sexual abuse – ‘common’
- CSEC – no enforcement of law, high need for income opp’ties

Basic Education and Gender Equity

- Generally, enrolments rates high, access good in urban Tarawa
- Sanitation aspect (mentioned above) is key issue
- 70% youth are unemployed/underemployed (UN, 2001) - bored
Kiribati

HIV&AIDS
- Rates of teenage pregnancy and STIs high
- Thriving sex trade with seamen
- Cultural expectation that men should gain sexual experience with sexually available women
- Urban setting factors = high risk environment
- Girls pregnant before marriage face shame and penalty from families and schools

Participation
- Decision-making authority rests solely with the *unimane*
- Urbanisation helping young people to become more vocal (through education and media)
- Youth policy has low priority in government and little budget allocation
- National youth council has little government support

Emergency preparedness and response
- Little effort at higher level to encourage environmental awareness at the community level
- Hard litter disposal – large problem
1. **Health**: Vanuatu - conduct baseline information on health status of children in urban Vanuatu, with particular focus on informal settlements; WASH initiatives in peri-urban settlements; Disaggregate recent base-line in Solomon Islands into rural and urban to understand urban dimensions.

2. **Education**: Vanuatu – support informal education providers for vocational options by building resources and capacities; Kiribati - advocate for inclusive education with MOE for children living with disabilities; Solomon Islands – partnerships with mobile ECE units to provide ECE to peri-urban settlements.

3. **HIV&AIDS**: Vanuatu - support stakeholders to promote sexual health awareness in urban areas; Kiribati - enforcement of penalties for ships allowing unauthorised personnel on board.

4. **Convergence**: ‘Societies not being homogenous enough’ cannot be an excuse to not work in urban areas – consider exploring convergence work in more urban centres, engaging stakeholders in implementation.

5. **Monitoring**: Be more strategic in the Field Office presence in urban areas: Local staff with local knowledge, monitoring work of CSOs and identifying where gaps in implementation on urbanisation and children issues.