



Uniting for children in an urban world

This edition of *The State of the World's Children* has sought to shed light on the experience of children and young people in urban areas, especially the poorest and most marginalized. It has covered issues as diverse as sanitation, gangs and governance. And it has taken in the broad sweep of global trends and focused in on individual, concrete examples of positive practices in specific urban neighbourhoods. Throughout, it has been concerned about disparity and the harm it does to the youngest members of the human family.

Hundreds of millions of children and young people live in the same cities as political, cultural and commercial elites – yet they struggle to subsist. Too many spend their days picking through rubbish for something to sell or making bricks for other people's homes. They spend their nights in makeshift dwellings under threat

of eviction or on the street, where they are at risk of violence and exploitation. Moreover, they are denied their right to take part in decisions affecting them. Instead, they are excluded from the process of finding the solutions that could improve their lives and those of countless others.

Mainstream approaches to development often view all children in urban areas as a homogeneous group and use statistical aggregates to determine resource allocation and programming actions. An equity-focused approach is needed to direct solutions precisely to those children who are hardest to reach. It is time to do things differently: to live up to the commitments of the Millennium agenda by ensuring that marginalized children in urban centres receive greater attention and investment.

This chapter explores five key areas in which action is required if the needs and rights of nearly half of the world's children – namely, those who reside in urban areas – are to be fulfilled. These are: understanding the scale and nature of urban poverty and exclusion; identifying and removing the barriers to inclusion; putting children first within a broader pursuit of equity in urban planning, infrastructure development, governance and service delivery; promoting partnerships between the urban poor and their governments; and ensuring that everyone works together to achieve results for children.

Understand urban poverty and exclusion

Reliable data and analysis highlighting the spectrum of urban realities is essential if those children with the greatest needs are to be reached. National and international surveys do not always include children and families on the urban margins, who may lack official status and have limited access to available services. Gathering accurate, disaggregated information should be the starting point for creating equitable, child-focused urban policies.

To begin with, a practical definition of what constitutes an urban area is needed if the particular problems faced by children in urban areas are to be identified correctly. Existing definitions vary greatly, complicating comparative analysis.

Next, the tools of data collection must be honed so they more precisely reflect disparities in children's needs and the realization of their rights based on wealth, gender, ethnicity, disability or neighbourhood. Determining which children and families are most at risk of exclusion may also require measures that highlight populations commonly omitted in surveys. One such technique is oversampling, or the deliberate inclusion of a higher proportion of individuals or families who would otherwise be undercounted or overlooked in standard random samples of the general population. Sample sizes need to be large enough for the various urban cohorts to be meaningfully compared; it may be necessary to oversample in slum areas, for example, to make such comparisons possible. In addition, mapping and spatial analysis – for instance, linking specific urban areas with particular health outcomes – can help target at-risk groups and identify priority areas for service and investment.

Expanding the collection of reliable and detailed urban data in international household surveys and national statistical processes will be vital to gaining deeper insights into the reality of urban life for children. Additionally, research on specific neighbourhoods and households should be conducted more frequently in order to capture the shifting and diverse nature of urban habitats.

Information is useful only if it is shared, so data must be disseminated widely and analysed in ways that expose causality and enable effective responses to inequality and exclusion. Such initiatives are under way, notably the analysis of National Family Health Survey (NFHS) findings in urban areas in India, and the World Bank's asset-based interrogation of Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS).¹ Nevertheless, more needs to be done to understand how poverty evolves and affects children in urban environments – and why it persists from generation to generation. This will require not only sound statistical work but also relevant research and evaluation of interventions intended to address these problems.



A boy stands on railroad tracks in Kibera, a slum area of Nairobi, Kenya, as fires smoulder in the background. Over a quarter of the city's population lives in Kibera. The train does not stop there.

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THE PAUCITY OF INTRA-URBAN DATA

Reliable statistics can help illuminate the plight of poor and marginalized children in urban settings – after all, it is difficult to argue with facts. However, this seemingly straightforward process is hampered by the limited availability of urban data that are meaningfully disaggregated – by wealth, residence, gender, ethnicity, city size or other relevant criteria.

Urban households – rich and poor – are often grouped together to provide a single average estimate of national urban poverty or malnutrition. This can be particularly misleading in countries characterized by high social and income inequality. Such averages mask the differences between cities and within urban communities whose residents have vastly divergent living standards.

Available population-based data sets may not lend themselves to further disaggregation at the urban level because sample sizes are often too small. In addition, although slum areas are generally included in census sample frames, they are seldom identified as slums.

Cost is a consideration. In order to obtain reliable estimates for slum areas, sample sizes would have to be increased significantly. Introducing additional categories of sampling (e.g., urban slums) to a survey increases its size and cost. But bigger surveys are not always better surveys. Keeping sample sizes down to manageable levels can yield data of higher quality as it enables survey managers to monitor progress and better train and supervise field staff who collect the data.

Where there is demand to incorporate urban slums into more surveys, designers can do so.

The difficulty of defining ‘urban’ and ‘slum’ poses another challenge. National criteria may not be fully transparent or may have changed over time. Definitions vary. Urban areas may be defined by administrative jurisdictions (e.g., municipalities), a threshold population size and/or density, or socio-economic conditions. The challenge of obtaining reasonable slum estimates is further complicated where slums are considered illegal settlements by national governments.

Urban-rural comparisons can also prove misleading. If assessed against a national wealth index, few urban residents are likely to fall in the poorer quintiles, or fifths, of the population, concealing the fact that while incomes may be higher in urban areas, so is the cost of living (rent, food, transport and basic services, for example). Many standard indicators, such as those relating to stunting or access to water and sanitation, are not readily comparable between rural and urban households. In a city, for instance, access to a reliable source of clean water may entail higher costs and longer queues.

While it is important to capture urban slum data, it should be emphasized that not all poor households are found in slums – and not all slum residents are poor. In fact, a 2005 study of 85 Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) found that 1 in 10 of a poor household’s neighbours was relatively affluent, as

measured by consumer durables and housing quality. This means that if efforts to reach the poor focus exclusively on slum areas, many poor households will be excluded.

Finally, some of the most vulnerable and marginalized – children living on the street or in institutions, or those engaged in child labour – are often excluded from the sample frame. Capturing the location and situation of these children remains a major challenge for international household surveys.

Experience indicates that showing the full spectrum of urban realities will require, at a minimum:

- Political will to establish urban data as a priority among competing interests
- Collaboration among agencies to collect, analyse and disseminate these data
- Clear definitions of ‘urban slums’ that reduce conceptual confusion and enable meaningful comparison
- Oversampling in slum areas to gather sufficient data for stratified analysis
- Making sure no slum has been overlooked, for example, by using such tools as Geographic Information Systems
- Going beyond national averages and rural-urban comparisons to analyse and document disparities within urban areas
- Devising new wealth indices that facilitate analysis and comparison of disparities within and between urban and rural areas.

Remove the barriers to inclusion

Improved understanding of exclusion must lead to the identification and dismantling of barriers that prevent impoverished children and their families from using services and enjoying such core elements of citizenship as legal protection and security of housing tenure. Service delivery will be a vital part of the response, but the essential problem remains that exclusion consistently undermines the capacity to secure children's rights.

A starting point is to determine the bottlenecks and barriers in each urban setting and to review the evidence on proven strategies to overcome them. Many factors, such as household income poverty, direct and indirect service costs, poor transportation and lack of official identification documents, serve to exclude the urban poor. Experience shows that service coverage for the poorest can be enhanced by abolishing user fees, setting up community partnerships, using mass communication and other strategies.

One reason such initiatives hold promise is that they balance greater supply of services with measures to enhance demand and utilization. Expanding the supply side (i.e., commodities, facilities, human resources), while necessary to extend health and nutrition services, is not enough to ensure effective coverage of such services among the poorest children and families. Effective supply-side measures must be complemented by demand enhancements that promote knowledge and take-up of services, continuity of use and assurance of quality.

Increased social protection also can have a marked impact in overcoming the financial barriers that exclude the urban poor. Conditional cash transfers to poor families, often in urban settings, have proved successful in a number of Latin American and African countries.² Mobile services are another creative possibility; in Washington, D.C., mobile health clinics assist children and adolescents who lack proper access to comprehensive paediatric health care in the city's underserved communities.³



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A 14-year-old girl stands on the balcony of a hostel in Benghazi, Libya. Following armed conflict that also displaced her family in 2011, the city's schools were closed and adolescent girls had few recreational opportunities.



Children in Moravia, a low-income neighbourhood in Medellín, Colombia.

Promoting knowledge and use of available services among target populations is also vital. Since 2002, for example, the Global Equity Gauge Alliance has challenged urban health inequities through outreach and community engagement in a number of countries. In Cape Town, South Africa, for example, residents and health workers are involved at every stage of the project, which entails reallocating health staff, running health promotion programmes in schools and providing dry toilets in informal settlements.⁴

The agenda must encompass not only services but also protection. Violence, in all its forms, is a common denominator in the poorest and most marginalized neighbourhoods. It is increasingly and accurately viewed by the international community as a major threat to the rights and well-being of all, especially children and women. Efforts are being made to tackle violence as an international issue, as evidenced by Safe and Friendly Cities for All, a joint initiative of UN-Habitat, UN-Women and UNICEF that aims to develop municipal prevention strategies with a strong focus on participation. Through such measures as legislation and policy, training, mass media campaigns, activism and budget review, it engages women, children

and their communities, the police, town planners and policymakers in fighting gender-based violence. Promising national initiatives are also under way, notably in Latin America. In Guatemala, for example, the CEIBA programme aims to provide young people with an alternative to drugs and a way out of violence by training them in job skills that are in local demand.

Safe public transport and well-regulated traffic are vital components of a city fit for children. Road accidents kill more of the world's young people than any other single cause. Successful initiatives in Colombia, Sweden and the Netherlands have combined car-free areas, dedicated bicycle and pedestrian routes, and public transport to reduce injuries and deaths.

Ensuring that all children are registered and documented must be a top priority because, however ardent the efforts to promote equity, it likely will elude children who lack official documents. About a third of all children in urban areas go unregistered at birth, and that proportion is closer to 50 percent in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.⁵



HOME-GROWN SOLUTIONS

by Celine d'Cruz and Sheela Patel,
Shack/Slum Dwellers International

One of the more promising developments in the effort to reduce urban poverty is the emergence of networks of grassroots groups in which women play a prominent role as agents of positive change in their communities and around the world.

We have had the privilege of working with one such network – Shack/Slum Dwellers International (SDI) – since its inception in 1996. There are similar networks of street vendors, home-based workers and waste pickers.

We believe that unless we band together, the challenges of urban poverty will not be addressed. By joining forces and pooling our knowledge, experience and creative solutions, we can achieve action on a meaningful scale. So it is that slum dwellers in such cities as Nairobi, Kenya, and Kampala, Uganda, are consulting counterparts in Mumbai, India, who persuaded government, railway authorities and international development lenders to relocate some 20,000 households as part of an effort to update the rail system. Ultimately, the Mumbai slum residents were able to design their own resettlement, moving from locations where many children had been killed by trains passing a mere 9 metres from homes.

SDI has hundreds of thousands of federated members in cities spread across 34 countries. They work for decent housing and infrastructure, usually seeking to collaborate with local government. This takes years of organizing, mobilizing and building relationships. It begins when

women form collectives to pool savings and make loans to one another so they can put food on the table, buy medicines, get transport to find jobs and pay for children's education. In time, they examine their environs and identify what they need.

At the top of the list of needs is security of tenure. Children need a decent place to live, places to play and neighbourhoods in which they feel safe. They need clean water and toilet solutions that do not force two-year-olds to stand in line or expose adolescent girls to harassment. Security of tenure makes it easier to fulfil these needs. It also frees children from the stress and lost opportunities that come with the ever-present threat of being forcibly evicted or having their homes demolished. Insecurity of tenure means that women and children must work near their dwellings so they are close at hand in case of eviction. Children serve as 'road runners', warning parents and neighbours when a demolition squad has been sighted; as their homes are destroyed, they scramble to protect whatever they can from being taken by the police. Living in constant fear of eviction erodes whatever resources a family has. But when secure tenure is negotiated, children start going to school, and parents feel more confident about investing in proper shelter.

Here, too, the experience of grassroots networks is instructive. An essential element of SDI's work is making what was invisible hard to ignore. Cities often have no data recording the presence of

people living 'illegally' on pavements, under bridges and on waste land. These residents are not counted in the census; they are excluded from voting lists; and their children's births are not recorded. But when their presence is documented through settlement profiles and family identification papers, it becomes clear that they are gainfully employed, contribute to the city's economy and are worthy of citizenship. Because such documentation also identifies the children in each household, it becomes possible to determine how many need immunization and schooling, how many work and what kind of work they do. In addition to being our basic organizing tool, this process of enumeration enables negotiation for tenure and service provision. The process yields another benefit for children – seeing parents, especially their mothers, negotiate collectively to improve lives and surroundings is a vital part of children's socialization.

Clearly, these networks cannot solve the problems of all children. But they are important allies in the endeavour to safeguard child rights, and they undertake critical foundational work to make children's homes and neighbourhoods safe and secure. They can bridge the gap between the formal urban development world and poor urban communities, promoting solutions that work for their members. We know from our work that poor communities are fed up with others setting development priorities for them. True alliances and partnerships mean making choices together.

Sheela Patel chairs the board of SDI. She works with the Indian non-governmental organizations Mahila Milan, the National Slum Dwellers Federation and the Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres (SPARC), which was established in 1984 to address issues faced by the pavement dwellers of Mumbai. Celine d'Cruz is the coordinator of SDI. A founder of SPARC, she began working for the rights of pavement and slum dwellers in India in the early 1980s, helping impoverished women in Mumbai bargain collectively to bring housing, education and health services to their families.



Girls attend a school in the Kucukbakkalkoy neighbourhood of Istanbul, Turkey, that offers remedial classes for Roma children who may have missed out on regular educational opportunities.

Put children first

Children's well-being is determined, in no small measure, by their environment. Their particular needs and priorities must be incorporated into efforts to improve housing, infrastructure, safety and governance. It follows that the work of local government and urban planning must be carried out with explicit recognition of the rights of children and young people, and with greater attention to age and gender.

This will entail a wider frame of reference for urban development that accommodates and reduces risks to children of all ages and needs, from infants and toddlers to adolescents, children with disabilities and those who do not attend school.

Ensuring that the urban poor have adequate housing and secure tenure must be a priority. Among its other social benefits, decent housing can protect children and families living in densely populated urban settings against many injuries, accidents and diseases.

Sound policies combine action to improve and expand housing for the urban poor with extension of services. Brazil's *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* (My Home, My Life) programme, for example, aims to build 3 million homes in five years while prioritizing social provision for the poor through education, conditional cash transfers and job creation.

Clearly, urban governance needs strengthening so that it is more capable of delivering policies and services that benefit and safeguard the rights of children. Too many city governments pander to vested interests and are too readily prepared to accept the status quo, which often involves vast, unplanned informal settlements that fail to meet people's needs. There is a manifest need to enhance accountability.

Moreover, city governments need to ground urban planning and programming in a commitment to equity and human rights. One hallmark of this commitment is the involvement of grassroots organizations in designing and monitoring implementation of urban policies and programmes. Participatory approaches can create sustainable solutions; communities' and children's perspectives are often invaluable in improving urban planning and design. Take the example of CLEAN-Delhi, a joint advocacy initiative of NGOs and schoolchildren in New Delhi, India. Launched in 1996 in the face of rising waste, emissions, traffic and pollution, CLEAN is credited with persuading policymakers to invest in composting and recycling units, permanent water and air monitoring systems and water filtration systems at schools and municipal water treatment plants. Following its initial success, the programme has been expanded to other Indian cities.

Similarly, recovery from natural disasters requires planning tailored to the needs of children in urban settlements. Two evaluations assessing the response to the 2010 earthquake in Haiti highlight the need to do better at matching humanitarian interventions with the specific needs of children in urban settlements. One study found that agencies had not been prepared well enough for the urban character of the disaster and as a result had failed to tailor their responses to the urban environment.⁶ A separate review found that water, sanitation and hygiene interventions would have been more cost-effective had they been based on a better understanding of the urban topography, its residential patterns and the needs and behaviours of the urban population – including children.⁷

Promote partnership with the urban poor

The challenges of poverty and inequity within most urban areas demand active partnership between the urban poor and government. Local authorities and communities will need to coordinate efforts so that limited resources are used most efficiently and equitably; so that the efforts and painfully accumulated assets of the poor are built on, not undermined; and so that people living in poverty – often the majority of the population – are included in broader urban development and governance.

The voice and involvement of children and adolescents can be an important aspect of this partnership but, all too frequently, child participation becomes a matter of tokenism. Examples from around the world show the many benefits, for both children and policymakers, of encouraging representation at the municipal level. In four South American cities, a multi-stage, long-term process of urban consultation with local governments has led to safer and more equitable cities. Positive outcomes include improvements to public infrastructure in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil; higher literacy rates in Cotacachi, Ecuador; and expanded birth registration in Ciudad Guyana, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

The international Child-Friendly Cities Initiative has succeeded in putting child rights on the urban agenda. To be awarded child-friendly status, a city must show that it fosters child participation and pursues child rights through its strategy, legislation, budgeting, impact assessments and public awareness programmes. The scheme has great potential for expansion, particularly in rapidly growing, rapidly urbanizing middle-income countries.

Children and adolescents should be encouraged to become involved in projects to improve their cities. Their participation gives them an empowering chance to air their views and engages them in understanding urban development and respecting their environment. Successful projects, such as Map Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya, have shown how adolescents can assist in generating an effective base of knowledge for development

programming. In Johannesburg, South Africa, 10- to 14-year-olds in low-income neighbourhoods succeeded in identifying risky areas of their city and proposing viable improvements.⁸

Such mapping exercises can help communities come up with ways to provide for play and leisure, which are children's rights and essential to their development. With modest material support from local government, for example, residents can create small play spaces between residences. Such settings allow parents and caregivers to be nearby.

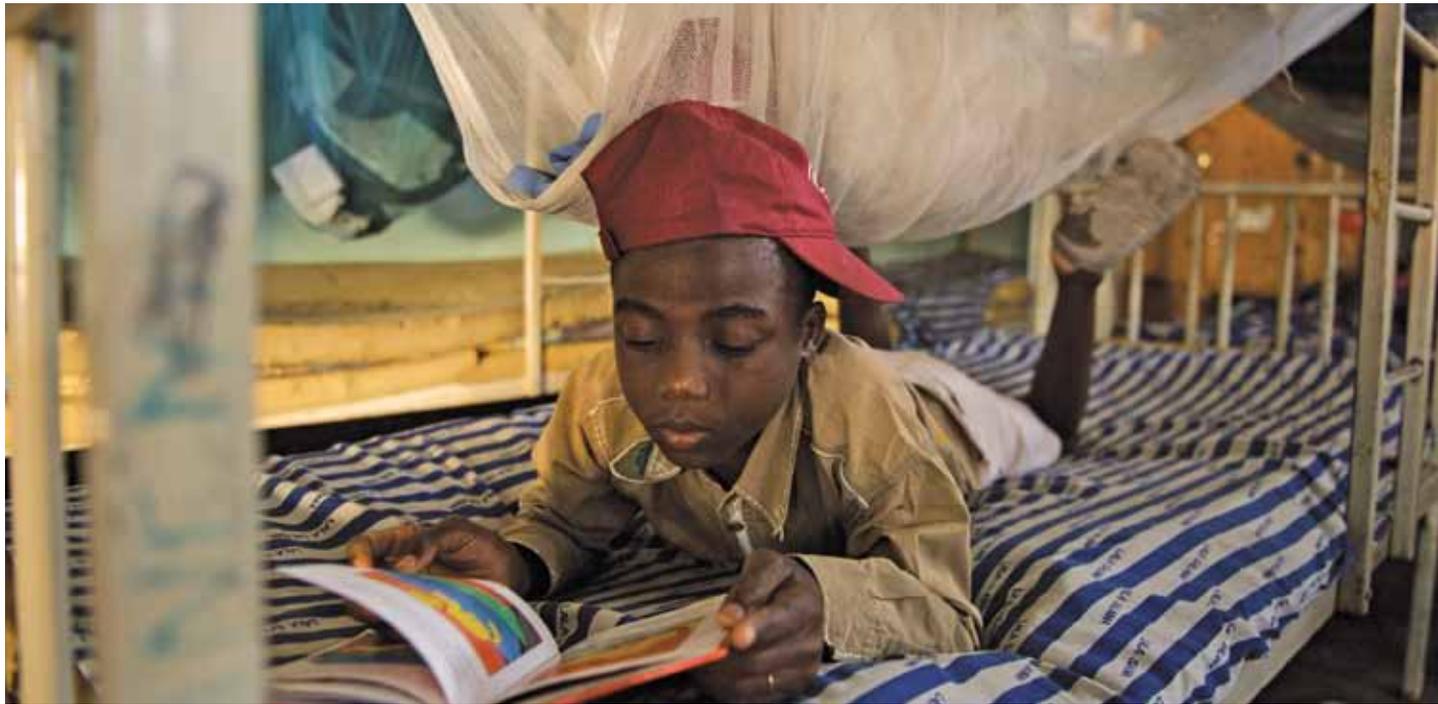
Where municipal authorities do not have sufficient capacity, community-based organizations and NGOs can also play a part. Examples include Kilikili, an organization in Bangalore, India, that creates green play spaces and involves children, including those with special needs, in the design process.

There is more at stake here than 'child's play'. Public play spaces can help mitigate overcrowding and lack of privacy in the home and enable children to mix with peers of different ages and backgrounds. This early experience of diversity can add to the foundations of a more equitable society.⁹ Moreover, a large body of evidence shows that exposure to trees, water and the natural landscape benefits children's physical, mental and social well-being.¹⁰

Work together to achieve results for children

The projects and programmes discussed in this report offer only a glimpse of what is being done to ensure equitable access to services and protection. Taken together, they provide a sense of what can happen when children's rights are placed at the centre of the urban agenda in active partnership with communities.

Under any circumstances, but especially in these straitened times, actors at all levels – from the local to the global – and from civil society as well as the public and private sectors need to pool their resources and energies to create urban environments conducive to children's rights.



A boy reads in his bed in Kuleana, a centre for boys who work on the streets, in the city of Mwanza, United Republic of Tanzania.

Non-governmental organizations and international agencies can play a crucial part in fostering the engagement of children in municipal governance and community decision-making. Local communities and authorities must engage each other if children's rights are to be realized. In addition, such cross-border issues as migration and trafficking demand urgent coordinated action.

International partnerships among civil society organizations can tap into the power of their constituent organizations to further children's interests and link communities around the world. Shack/Slum Dwellers International provides one example. This network brings together grassroots federations of the urban poor – many led and sustained by women – that address tenure, housing and basic infrastructure problems. These networks facilitate exchange among marginalized communities across the globe and serve as bridges between these communities, local and national authorities and international agencies.

Policies and actions that involve urban areas and different levels of government require greater coordination. Dealing with urban violence affecting children, for example, requires collaboration to address local

and national political and economic realities, influence cultural norms and attitudes, and re-establish trust among authorities, institutions and the general public.

Civil society organizations, and particularly community-based organizations, should be embraced in urban programming and governance, as they play a critical part in enabling local communities to influence policy.

Towards fairer cities

More than half the world's people already live in towns and cities and, increasingly, children are growing up against an urban backdrop. Their urban childhoods reflect the broad disparities that cities contain: rich beside poor, opportunity beside struggle for survival.

Equity must be the guiding principle in efforts for all children in urban areas. The children of slums – born into and raised under some of the most challenging conditions of poverty and disadvantage – will require particular attention. But this must not come at the expense of children elsewhere. The larger goal must remain in focus: fairer, more nurturing cities and societies for all people – starting with children.