Gathering accessible, accurate and disaggregated data is an essential step in the process of recognizing and improving the situation of children in urban areas. Innovative visual representations of information can help identify gaps, prompting action from local decision-makers.

The concept of mapping poverty originated in London over a century ago as a way to highlight differences in living standards according to social class. Today's computer technology makes it possible to compile simple interactive maps and correlations to show complex information traditionally displayed in columns and tables.

The Columbia University Center for International Earth Science Information Network used this method to highlight disparities in urban income in Malawi (see Figure 2.6). The map displays gradients of poverty, making possible a simple and intuitive urban-rural analysis as well as a comparison of the country’s two major cities: Lilongwe, the capital, and Blantyre, a city of comparable size. In this example, where darker shades denote greater poverty, Lilongwe appears to have lower levels of poverty than Blantyre. Yet patterns of deprivation differ. While Blantyre exhibits greater levels of poverty than adjacent areas, Lilongwe is a relatively well-off urban centre surrounded by poorer regions, but also showing pockets of poverty (isolated darker areas) within its limits. This case study demonstrates the variability of urban patterns.

Another example comes from the English Public Health Observatories. Practitioners, policymakers and the general public can use this interactive online tool to illustrate and analyse 32 health profile indicators at the district and local authority level. Examples of