Even where improved urban sanitation facilities exist, they are often shared by large numbers of people. Space, tenure and cost considerations limit the construction of individual latrines in slums. Public facilities are frequently overcrowded, poorly maintained and contaminated. Special provision for children is rare, so those waiting to use communal toilets are often pushed aside at peak times. Girls in particular may be exposed to the danger of sexual harassment or abuse, as well as a lack of adequate privacy, especially once they have begun menstruating.

**Education**

In Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States parties recognize children’s right to education and commit to “achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.”

Children in urban settings are generally considered to have an educational advantage. They are better off across a range of statistical indicators, more likely to benefit from early childhood programmes, and more likely to enrol in and complete primary and secondary school. As in other areas of social provision, however, the overall statistics can be misleading. In reality, urban inequities profoundly undermine children’s right to education. In urban areas blighted by poverty, early childhood programming is often notable for its absence. This is lamentable because the first few years have a profound and enduring effect on the rest of a person’s life and, by extension, the lives of so many others.

**Early childhood development**

Children start to learn long before they enter a classroom. Learning occurs from birth, as children interact with family and caregivers, and the foundation for all later learning is established in the early years. Poverty, ill health, poor nutrition and a lack of stimulation during this crucial period can undermine educational foundations, restricting what children are able to accomplish. By one estimate, more than 200 million children under 5 years of age in developing countries fail to reach their potential in cognitive development.

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**Figure 2.8. Urban income disparities also mean unequal access to water**

Use of improved drinking-water sources in urban areas in select countries in Africa (left end of the bar indicates access to improved water among the poorest quintile of urban households; right end indicates that for the wealthiest quintile)

Source: MICS and DHS in African countries, 2004–2006. Countries were selected based on availability of data.