On average, children in urban areas are more likely to survive infancy and early childhood, enjoy better health and have more educational opportunity than their counterparts in rural areas. This effect is often referred to as the ‘urban advantage’.

Nevertheless, the scale of inequality within urban areas is a matter of great concern. Gaps between rich and poor in towns and cities can sometimes equal or exceed those found in rural areas. When national averages are disaggregated, it becomes clear that many children living in urban poverty are clearly disadvantaged and excluded from higher education, health services and other benefits enjoyed by their affluent peers.

The figures below, called ‘equity trees’, illustrate that, while vast disparities exist in rural areas, poverty also can severely limit a child’s education in urban areas — in some cases, more so than in the countryside.

In Benin, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), the education gap between the richest 20 per cent and the poorest 20 per cent is greater in urban than in rural areas. The gap is widest in Venezuela, where pupils from the richest urban families have, on average, almost eight years more schooling than those from the poorest ones, compared with a gap of 5 years between the wealthy and poor in rural areas. In Benin, Tajikistan and Venezuela, children

**Figure 1.3. Educational attainment can be most unequal in urban areas**

Average years of schooling among population aged 17–22, by location, wealth and gender

Source: UNICEF analysis based on UNESCO Deprivation and Marginalization in Education database (2009) using household survey data: Benin (DHS, 2006); Pakistan (DHS, 2007), Tajikistan (MICS, 2005); Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) (MICS, 2000).
from the poorest urban households are likely to have fewer years of schooling not only than children from wealthier urban households but also than their rural counterparts.

Some disparities transcend location. Girls growing up in poor households are at a great disadvantage regardless of whether they live in urban or rural areas. In Benin, girls in urban and rural areas who come from the poorest 20 per cent of the population receive less than two years of schooling, compared with three to four years for their male counterparts and about nine years for the richest boys in urban and rural settings. In Pakistan, the difference in educational attainment between the poorest boys and girls is about three years in rural areas and about one year in urban areas.

The gender gap is more pronounced for poor girls in urban Tajikistan. On average, they receive less than six years of education, compared with almost nine years for poor girls in rural areas. But the gender gap is reversed in Venezuela, where the poorest boys in urban areas receive the least education – less than three years of schooling, compared to four and a half years for the poorest girls in urban settings and about six and a half years for the poorest boys and girls in rural areas.