

DISCUSSION PAPER

# URBAN CHILDREN: DISCUSSION OF UNICEF PROGRAMMING DIRECTIONS

SHERIDAN BARTLETT

POLICY AND PRACTICE  
FEBRUARY 2010

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Thanks also to many people within UNICEF for comments on an earlier draft of this discussion paper. The need to keep the document concise made it impossible to explore all of the additional avenues that were suggested or to explain in greater detail some of the findings reported here. The longer papers on which this one draws include more detail and can be obtained from the Urban Programming page, which can be found on the Policy Advocacy and Partnerships for Children's Rights intranet site: <http://intranet/dpp/PolicyAdvocacy.nsf>.



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# Executive Summary

## INTRODUCTION

1. Urbanization goes hand in hand with economic development. The concentrations of people, investment and ideas in urban areas, the levels of exchange, the economies of scale and proximity, can all contribute to growth and vitality, helping to pull a country out of poverty. But in the absence of effective equitable governance, urban poverty can be brutal and widespread. As the world becomes more urbanized (urban dwellers are more than half the world's population now, an estimated two thirds in another generation), cities contain a larger and larger share of the world's deprived people. The failure to achieve many of the MDG goals has been related to the failure to address the needs of this growing population.

2. Half of the world's urban poor are children and adolescents – approximately one out of every four children in the world. Their rights, their development, their capacity to escape from poverty, are key to the development and stability of the world. In the context of urban poverty this raises some particular challenges. UNICEF is the only multilateral agency? with the mandate and potential to ensure that urban poverty is tackled in ways that keep this in focus, and that address and acknowledge the multiple and interdependent needs and capacities of young people as members of their communities – but this necessitates approaches attuned to urban realities.

## URBAN TRENDS, URBAN POVERTY AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS

3. During the 20th century, the world's urban population increased more than ten-fold. Today over 3.2 billion people live in urban centers – half the world's population, compared to less than 15 per cent in 1900. This trend is underpinned by large economic, social and political changes – primarily the shift from agriculture to industry and services, and the movement of people to respond to this shift. Migration plays a key role in the adjustment of households and individuals to changing realities and a recognition of its positive potential is critical to a sound national development policy

4. One of the more significant challenges is identifying the extent of urban poverty and exclusion. Urban averages for most development indicators tend to be better than rural averages, and point to a distinct “urban advantage”. But these averages can be misleading. Concentrations of wealth in urban areas mask the depth of urban poverty and data often exclude the illegal urbanites who are the most deprived. Indicators of deprivation may also not reflect the different dimensions and manifestations of urban poverty and may not be comparable across settings. In most cities, for instance, people are tied to a cash economy, and the MDG poverty line of \$1 a day is blatantly unrealistic.

5. The urban poor are overwhelmingly young, a function of both a large unmet need for sexual and reproductive health services, and of the large numbers of children and adolescents, often unaccompanied, who migrate to urban areas. These young people, although highly vulnerable, are not primarily runaways or victims of trafficking, but purposeful migrants making strategic decisions and looking for opportunity in the context of limited choices. The rapidly growing urban youth population is overwhelmingly poor, marginalized and uneducated, but also in many

countries increasingly alienated and detached, as their energy and potential are overlooked by government, civil society and the development assistance world.

6. Between 30 and 60 percent of the urban poor live in informal settlements without the secure tenure that protects them from eviction. The lack of a legal address can also mean exclusion from voting registers, from schools and health clinics, a lack of police protection, and of the most basic provision for water, sanitation, drainage and waste removal. The implications for children are profound. No effort to address urban poverty or the rights of urban children can be truly effective without attention to the issue of tenure.

7. The concentration of human and household wastes in poor urban areas adds substantially to children's risk. Even when they are technically better served than those in rural areas, they may face higher odds of sickness and death. Data show a growing "urban penalty" related to growing numbers of the urban poor and deteriorating conditions. The infant survival advantage in big cities in Latin America disappeared by the early 1990s; the same thing is happening now in sub-Saharan Africa. High rates of malnutrition are also becoming more of an urban problem, related to higher food costs, the dependence on the cash economy, and unsanitary conditions that make it difficult to prevent contamination.

8. The urban poor can also be heavily exposed to toxics and pollutants and to the burgeoning problem of road traffic injuries, with child pedestrians facing the highest risk, in part because of the lack of space for play owing to cramped housing, piles of waste, open drainage, muddy lanes and the lack of open space.

9. Urban dwellers living in poor-quality overcrowded housing in slums and informal settlements without proper infrastructure are also among the groups most at risk from disaster and the direct and indirect impacts of climate change. The urban poor are least able to manage risk and avoid the impact of extreme weather events; least equipped to cope with the illness, injury, premature death or loss of income or assets caused by disaster. Without major changes in how governments and international agencies work in urban areas, climate change will mean that the urban poor in many regions are increasingly exposed to both extreme events and the more gradual changes that contribute to their continued poverty.

10. Services that are in theory more accessible in urban areas are often not available to the urban poor, or may be of very poor quality. For health care, the poor generally face difficult choices between expensive and often incompetent private practitioners and lethargic, apathetic and often overwhelmed public providers. As with health, there are often stark disparities within cities around education. In many poor urban areas, early childhood programming is almost non-existent and the failure to complete, or even to start, primary education can be as high or higher than it is in rural areas. The Education For All Global Monitoring Report for 2009 finds that children in urban slums are among the hardest to reach in many countries, and face a distinctive set of challenges.

11. A number of urban realities contribute to higher rates of HIV and AIDS, and associated illnesses; high concentrations of people and higher mobility; higher rates of partner change, greater personal autonomy, impunity for harassment, the greater presence of sex workers. A critical factor is the lower level of social protection for women and greater pressure to use

transactional sex for survival, especially for young migrants with limited options. HIV results from risky behaviours, but some have fewer choices available to them than others.

12. There are innumerable examples of a strong social fabric within poor urban communities, but also challenges in many settings that contribute to social fragmentation and lower levels of reciprocity. The insecurity in many poor urban settings – unreliable livelihoods, rising prices, the lack of safety nets, violence and crime and the absence of protection under the law, the threat and reality of eviction, the experience of exclusion – create a context of high risk and stress and can undermine the social cohesion necessary to tackle poverty effectively. When exposure to these stressors is chronic, it can affect children’s capacity to face normal developmental challenges, and has been related to anxiety, depression, defiance, aggression and problems with self control, as well as lower levels of achievement in school and higher dropout rates. Mental health problems, especially for women dealing with the many challenges of poverty, are increasingly identified as a major public health issue, and have serious implications for children.

13. Despite the range of development challenges within the context of urban poverty, this is also clearly an arena of considerable opportunity. The density that can be so problematic also contributes to the efficiency with which solutions can be implemented, and to the extent of the need within a concentrated area. The informality that can be so precarious stimulates creative solutions to survival that offer a great deal to build on. While the generally greater complexity of governance in urban areas can deter some development actors, this can also mean considerable scope for partnership and collaboration.

#### RESPONSES FROM THE DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

14. While there is growing recognition of the scale and significance of urbanization and urban poverty, the responses of governments and the development world to urban poverty do not bring great urgency to the task. Despite widely held assumptions about urban bias in the priorities of aid agencies and development banks, analyses of commitments find a low priority to urban development especially in areas most critical to children, such as housing and basic services. This extends to the priorities of national governments; although some Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) acknowledge the significance of urban poverty, most give it comparatively little attention.

15. Within existing attention to urban poverty, there has been relatively little effort to “mainstream” attention for children and adolescents, using age and gender sensitive planning or child impact assessments to consider the often disproportionate effects for this age group of housing, upgrading, basic service provision, livelihoods support etc. Some of the most interesting mainstreaming of attention to children is happening within the work of federations of grassroots organizations of the urban poor. While this is not an explicit part of their work, there is a nascent commitment to children that has led to some novel approaches and achievements.

16. There are many examples of more targeted attention to urban boys and girls, but nothing comprehensive or strategic in its approach to this large population. Child focused organizations, large and small, have been important partners in responding to children’s rights worldwide, but it is rare to find an explicit strategy on urban children and adolescents within larger international NGOs. Within more general development agencies, aside from sectoral work, most efforts

targeted at children are project-oriented and temporary, with attention most frequently focused on the “youth problem.”

## UNICEF’S PAST AND CURRENT URBAN WORK

17. UNICEF has been involved in supporting poor urban girls and boys from its earliest days despite a primarily rural focus, but has had an ambivalent relationship with this work, exploring and re-exploring engagement on the urban front, but never totally and unequivocally committing itself. The signal achievement on the urban front was the Urban Basic Services Programme, an area-based, multi-sectoral response, emphasizing self help and community involvement. The basic services response, both urban and rural, strong during the 1970s and 1980s, lost some support during the GOBI era as funds were reallocated to this large campaign, a response to the economic and political need for a high profile and measurable results around child survival. When children’s rights came into the picture, this catalyzed a different kind of interest in urban areas, with increasing attention to “children in especially difficult circumstances” and support to mayors and municipal leaders to develop rights based plans of action for children.

18. By 2002, the urban section had been eliminated, and the more visible urban focus had moved to the Child Friendly Cities Secretariat within IRC, which maintained the relationship with mayors and provided a clearing house for resources on children and cities, not only in programme countries, but in higher income countries, where the initiative is taken forward by a number of UNICEF National Committees. At the same time, despite the diminished formal support for urban work, in many country offices the urban work continued in a quiet way. UNICEF has in the meantime moved steadily in the direction of more upstream work, especially in the more middle income and heavily urbanized countries. This upstream work could still be highly influential in affecting the ways that government, including local government, and others respond to urban poverty.

19. There remains a surprising variety of urban work within 16 sample country offices, reflecting the range of realities and the degree of concern and independence of country offices. (Much of this work is not reflected in annual reports, in part because of the more sectoral reporting requirements.) This includes regular sectoral programming that just happens to take place in urban as well as rural areas, as well as projects (often pilot projects) and research that address challenges particular to urban areas – such as the situation of migrants, of children living and working on the street, of urban service provision, and of violence and road traffic injuries. . In some countries there is an effort, often in its early stages, to develop a specific urban policy in response to a targeted assessment of the needs (for instance, in India and the Philippines.) In some countries, efforts that have worked well within more rural districts are being purposefully translated to the context of large urban centres, for instance, Brazil and Vietnam. In the case of Mexico, the process moved in the other direction, taking experience from Mexico City and applying it within other areas of the country.

20. Despite this range of work, there are also many missed opportunities. In many offices this may be due to a lack of data allowing for valid situation analyses. Country offices often report large disparities between rural and urban areas, without referring to the disparities that generally exist within urban areas, or to the trends in many countries that are known to be narrowing the rural-urban gap. Even where good research exists on urban realities, this is often not reflected in

programme choices. There is also limited evidence of partnerships with municipal authorities, an essential ingredient for effective responses to urban poverty. While these partnerships exist in some offices, they do not appear to be a major focus. Conspicuously absent are any relationships with the many networks and federations of the urban poor, which increasingly offer strong potential for effective partnership.

## PROMISING PROGRAMME DIRECTIONS

21. A critical role for UNICEF in the context of the challenges of urban work is bridging the gap between local governments and the urban poor. Although central functions are also critical, in a growing number of urban settings, local government controls most of the realities that define local poverty. Creating the decent living environments, supportive social fabric and responsive services that underpin the rights of urban boys and girls certainly means a concern with policy and advocacy at the highest level. But it is essential that this be translated to realities at the local level.

22. Evidence points strongly to the effectiveness of local engagement, local partnerships and integrated, area-based, sustained community-driven responses to poverty. Vertical outcome-driven initiatives are tidier, easier to manage, more easily taken to scale, and are often seen as more cost effective. But this ignores the harder-to-measure impacts – the learning, ripple effects, synergies, sustainability, improved relations between the poor and local government bodies, the genuine “development” of the poor. Where children and adolescents are concerned, the benefits of stronger more supportive communities are indisputable.

23. There are a number of promising programming directions that help create the space for this kind of development, among them: responses to insecure tenure and eviction; the creation of local funds and foundations, and community-based versions of cash transfers; community-led data collection and monitoring, both as a way of filling gaps in data and knowledge, but also as an entry point for the empowerment of local communities; community-based child protection approaches; participatory slum upgrading; attention to the complementarities between pro-poor development and adaptation to the threats posed by climate change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

24. In order for UNICEF to be able to support these kinds of approaches, the following recommendations are offered:

- *Build on what is already happening within UNICEF:* uncover in more detail the wealth of current urban work through some specific questions for annual reports; share the learning; plan small regional consultations; undertake exchanges; do some detailed case studies where urban work is underway.
- *Address the gaps in data collection, research, monitoring;* add missing questions to MICS, influence national census taking; add urban components to sectoral surveys; build wherever possible on existing mechanisms to encourage intra-urban disaggregation of data, and collection of data not currently collected. Find ways to support community-led “enumerations” and monitoring to expand the information base while also expanding learning and organization and to increase accountability

- *Make more strategic use of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative* to promote stronger relationships with local governments and between local government and marginalized communities; CFC appeals to many and could be more effectively used as an urban entry point. The CFC research initiative currently underway offers tools that could be effective in strengthening the negotiating capacity of communities and the accountability of local government.
- *Respond to the risks of climate change* by drawing attention to the adaptation needs of the urban poor and their disproportionately vulnerable children, and to the synergies between adaptation, local development and the rights of children and adolescents.
- *Engage around urban realities with other agencies and organization:* UNICEF has the mandate to work with civil society as well as having a holistic, multi-dimensional focus. This makes it the ideal driver for coherent UN strategies that address the crisis of urban poverty in energetic, inclusive and collaborative ways. UNICEF also has much to contribute to other networks and alliances focused on the challenges of urban governance and urban poverty (for example, the Union of Arab Cities, the Cities Alliance and others).
- *Include grassroots networks and organizations of the urban poor:* not trying to drive the agenda of these groups but finding ways to provide the support necessary to help them do what they are best equipped to do, to expand their vision of what is possible, to provide the necessary support for them to more explicitly include girls' and boys' concerns and perspectives.
- *Engage more systematically with adolescents and youth:* Young people represent a significant and largely untapped resource in the efforts to address urban poverty. The particular contribution that this age group can make is well documented. They have a fund of knowledge about local realities and a particular and valuable perspective to bring to bear on the problems of urban poverty. There is considerable scope here for UNICEF's capacity to convene and coordinate; while an increasing number of agencies and organizations are focusing attention on the "youth problem" and while there is growing recognition that this may more productively be seen as a "youth dividend" there is little coordination in the multiplicity of efforts.
- *Explore the gap between organizational priorities and constraints, and the strategies that work best with the urban poor:* Most agencies need control over the agenda they are pursuing, with clearly established, pre-planned objectives and outcomes within set time frames. This can conflict with the fact that genuine lasting solutions move slowly, respond to opportunities and challenges as they come along, build on learning and relationships developed over years.
- *Explore new (or revisited) modalities* for stimulating child sensitive engagement and initiative at community level that are compatible both with UNICEF's organizational constraints and its need for some visibility, as well as with the proven strategies of the poor. An example would be support for city based "children's funds" building on the learning from such related initiatives as local funds, community-based cash transfers, participatory budgeting (and UNICEF's own block grants from UBSP days in Indonesia for example) and that permit scope for collaborative support among higher level partners.
- *Assign staff* with urban experience and commitment, probably at regional level, to encourage and support efforts in this direction, and to ensure that momentum is maintained.

# Introduction

It is no coincidence that all prosperous nations are predominantly urban. Urbanization goes hand in hand with economic development. Nations with the highest economic growth over the last few decades are also the nations that have urbanized most. No country has managed to move into middle income status without urbanizing and industrializing.<sup>1</sup> The recent World Development Report describes how development is inevitably accompanied by the greater concentration of people and activities.<sup>2</sup> The policies in many countries to control and restrict the flows of migrants into cities notwithstanding, this movement of people to where opportunity exists is fundamental to economic vigour.

The concentrations of people, wealth, investment and ideas in urban areas, the levels of exchange, the economies of scale and proximity, can all contribute to change, growth and vitality, helping to pull a country out of poverty. Where this happens, there is an ‘urban advantage’ in survival, health, education and opportunity, which can also then be reflected in rural improvements. But without effective, equitable governance, the advantages of cities pale beside the challenges for many urban dwellers. Concentrations of people can mean concentrations of faecal matter, garbage and pollution, not just ideas. High levels of exchange can mean the rapid transmission of disease, not just innovation. The generation of wealth can thrive on injustice and disparities, fueling violence, insecurity, exploitation. The pace of economic growth often outstrips the social and political reforms that are essential if the “urban advantage” is to deliver for everybody. In the absence of good governance, especially good local governance, urban poverty can be brutal and widespread. In most low and middle income countries, it is common for over a third of the urban population to live in serious deprivation. In many urban areas the impacts of climate change are likely to intensify this crisis.<sup>3</sup>

Yet urban poverty has been, and continues to be, a low priority in the agenda of most governments and development partners. – UNICEF is far from unique in its relative neglect of this critical challenge. But UNICEF has a unique role to play in this regard. Half of the world’s slum dwellers<sup>4</sup> are children and adolescents – approximately one out of every four girls and boys in the world.<sup>5</sup> Their rights, their development, their capacity to escape from poverty, are key to the development and stability of the world. UNICEF is the global body best equipped to ensure that urban poverty is tackled in ways that keep this fact in focus, and that address and

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<sup>1</sup> See Satterthwaite, David (2007). Many documents have suggested that sub-Saharan Africa is an exception as it is urbanizing without economic growth but an analysis of the most recent census data for this region does not find this – see Potts, Deborah (2009).

<sup>2</sup> World Bank (2008b).

<sup>3</sup> See for instance Bicknell, Jane et al (2009).

<sup>4</sup> The term “slums” and “informal settlements” are used somewhat interchangeably in this summary – but it should be acknowledged that they are not always equivalent. Slums, home to an estimated one out of every six people in the world, have been defined as areas with sub-standard housing, poor provision for infrastructure and high densities. Informal settlements generally share these attributes, but are defined also by the lack of formal government recognition. Not all of those who live in slums and informal settlements are poor, but the great majority of urban poor live in deprived slum areas that lack formal recognition.

<sup>5</sup> Approximately one person in six is estimated to live in a slum. Given the higher relative proportion of children and adolescents in these populations, one in four is a reasonable estimate.

acknowledge the multiple and interdependent needs and capacities of young people, as members of their communities.

Boys and girls in urban poverty are entitled, without discrimination, to the full range of civil, political, social and economic rights recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as other international rights instruments. In the context of urban poverty this raises some specific challenges. Many of these children and adolescents, to start with, are invisible. The illegal status of their households – or of themselves when they are unaccompanied, as is the case for so many young migrants – means they often fail to be represented in the routinely collected data that are the basis for policy. The lack of a legal address, of birth registration or other documentation can mean they are denied access to education, health services and other basic services. The obligations placed by the CRC on local governments can be more easily disregarded when, in official terms, dozens of settlements do not exist and their inhabitants are not considered citizens. The appalling living conditions of many poor urban children – an area not traditionally a focus for responses to children – are arguably the most pervasive global violation of children’s rights.<sup>6</sup> Complex as the issues are, UNICEF’s commitment to the rights of excluded, deprived children and adolescents, wherever they are, necessitates approaches that are attuned to urban realities.

Despite the range of development challenges presented by urban poverty, this is also clearly an arena of considerable opportunity. The density that can be so problematic contributes to the efficiency with which solutions can be implemented. The informality that can be so precarious stimulates creative solutions to survival that offer a great deal to build on. While the generally greater complexity of governance in urban areas can deter some development actors, it can also mean considerable scope for partnership and collaboration, and for drawing on the energies and resourcefulness of these concentrations of young people.

This discussion paper is a summary of the findings of a series of linked research components on urban trends and urban programming. The work that is drawn on here includes:

- a literature review on urban trends and their impacts on children and adolescents;
- an overview of work being done by a range of other institutional actors on urban poverty, especially as it affects children and adolescents;
- a review of the urban work being undertaken within a sample of UNICEF country offices;
- a description of some promising programming directions, along with some recommendations for UNICEF.

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<sup>6</sup> Nandy, S. and D Gordon (2009).



# 1. Urban Trends, Urban Poverty and the Implications for Children and Adolescents

This section summarizes some trends, challenges and opportunities that shape the experience of urban poverty in low and middle income countries, especially for children and adolescents, both male and female. Many of these realities also affect the capacity to respond to urban poverty, and have implications for the kinds of work that UNICEF can best undertake to support children's rights within this context.

## 1.1. Urbanization

Urbanization, often confused with urban population growth, means the increase in the proportion of a nation's population living in urban areas, and is caused by net rural to urban migration (although sometimes also by the reclassification of rural areas.) While urbanization invariably contributes to urban population growth, the opposite is not true – urban population growth can, and does, take place independent of an increase in the rate of urbanization – for instance in many sub-Saharan African nations.

During the 20th century, the world's urban population increased more than ten-fold, a function of both natural increase and urbanization. Today over 3.2 billion people live in urban centers – half the world's population, compared to less than 15 per cent in 1900.<sup>7</sup> The rate of urban growth is slowing down in many regions, but nonetheless it is estimated that by the middle of this century, 70 percent of the world's population will be in urban areas. Although most urbanites live in towns and smaller cities, well over a third live in cities of over 1 million. Over the last fifty years, dozens of major cities have grown more than ten-fold, and many far more than that. A large and increasing proportion of the world's continued population growth is taking place in urban areas in low- and middle-income nations (about 75 percent since 2000) and the great majority of the world's largest cities are now in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

These urban trends are underpinned by large economic, social, political and demographic changes – primarily the shift from agriculture to industry and services, and the movement of people to respond to this shift. As noted earlier, rural to urban migration is often viewed as a problem and many nations have policies to restrict the flow of migrants into cities. But the complex and ever shifting scale and direction of people's movements generally accords well with the location of economic opportunity – although these vast flows of people can also be in part a response to war, civil conflict or disaster. There has been considerable concern in some quarters about large numbers of environmental refugees flooding into cities and precipitating conflict over scarce resources.<sup>8</sup> Experience to date, however, suggests that while mobility is likely to become an increasingly important adaptation to the effects of climate change, this kind of movement is generally short term in the case of extreme events and natural disasters, and for short distances in the case of drought and land degradation.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Unless otherwise stated, the statistics for populations are drawn or derived from statistics in United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2008).

<sup>8</sup> Christian Aid (2007).

<sup>9</sup> Tacoli, Cecilia (2009); Black, R (2001).

Whatever the context, however, migration plays a key role in the adjustment of households and individuals to changing realities, economic or otherwise. UNDP's latest Human Development Report argues that recognition of the positive potential of migration is critical to a sound national development policy.<sup>10</sup> This recognition also needs to take better account of the youthfulness of the migrant population, as discussed in more detail below.

## 1.2. The underestimation of the scale and depth of urban poverty

As the world becomes more urbanized, cities and other urban centres also contain a larger and larger share of the world's deprived people. According to UNDP, "Urban slum growth is outpacing urban growth by a wide margin."<sup>11</sup> In many middle-income nations, the urban poor now outnumber the rural poor, and the balance is rapidly shifting in low income nations as well.

One of the more significant challenges, however, is identifying the extent and depth of urban poverty and exclusion. Whatever measures of poverty and deprivation are used urban averages in most nations are better than rural averages, and point to a distinct "urban advantage." Not only income, but life expectancies, provision for piped water, sanitation, schools and health care are generally well above national averages. But these averages can be misleading. Wealth tends to be concentrated in urban areas, and average figures can hide the significant proportion of urban dwellers living in very poor conditions. Figures also often exclude those who are the most deprived and excluded – the homeless, those living in informal settlements for which there are no data, the temporary dwellers working on construction sites and so on. Available data in most countries make it possible to point to regions and provinces where poverty is concentrated, or to disparities between urban and rural areas. But it is rare to find assessments of disparities within urban areas, which can be even larger. The guidelines for undertaking a UNICEF Study on Child Poverty and Disparities, for instance, extensive as they are, would not yield an adequate analysis of urban poverty in most countries.

Another problem is that indicators of deprivation can fail to take into account the multi-dimensional quality of poverty, and are often not comparable across settings. National income- or consumption-based poverty lines, for instance, do not generally reflect the fact that it costs more to live decently in most cities, where people are tied to a cash economy, and where the cost of non-food essentials can be especially high. In some nations, small upward adjustments are made to the poverty line in urban areas, but this is seldom based on an understanding of the extent of the costs that the urban poor face for non-food needs.<sup>12</sup> In the late 1990s, figures for the proportion of Kenya's urban population in poverty ranged from 1 to 49 percent, depending on which of four poverty lines was used.<sup>13</sup> Anyone who knows Nairobi, Mombasa or Kisumu, where more than half the population lives in unserved informal settlements, will know the latter figure is more accurate.

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<sup>10</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2009).

<sup>11</sup> United Nations Development Programme (2007).

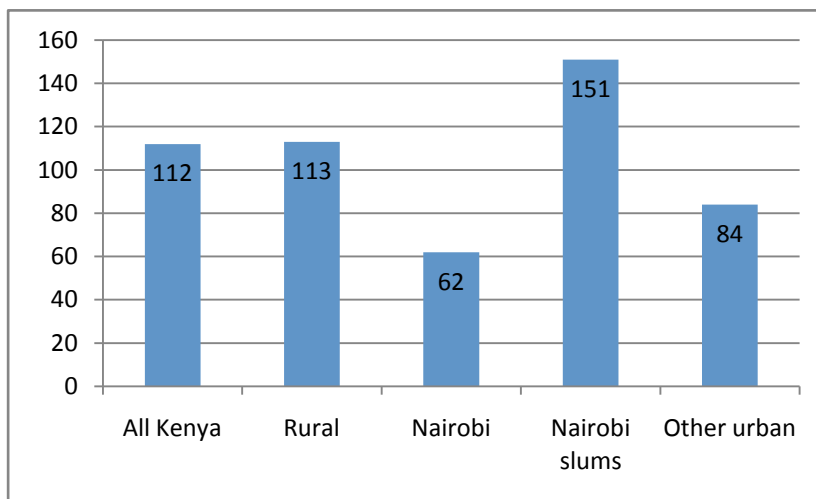
<sup>12</sup> Bapat, Meera (2009); Sabry, Sarah (2009).

<sup>13</sup> Sahn and Stifel 2003 suggest 1.2 percent for 1998; official statistics suggested three different figures in 1997: hardcore poverty 7.6 percent; food poverty 38.3 percent; absolute poverty 49 percent. Sahn, David E and David C Stifel (2003).

A good example of the misleading quality of urban averages can be found in estimates of coverage for water and sanitation, an important component of any multi-dimensional definition of poverty. In the great majority of nations, the average figures are substantially better in urban areas. But when the urban poor are considered separately from the urban non-poor, the picture becomes more complicated. DHS figures on flush toilets in southeast Asia, for example, show coverage of 89 percent for the urban non-poor and 62 percent for the urban poor; in sub-Saharan Africa, the corresponding figures are 27 percent and 13 percent; in Latin America, 64 percent and 34 percent. The same kinds of gaps exist for piped water. Coverage for the urban poor is usually closer to rural figures than to those for better off urban dwellers.<sup>14</sup> These figures, as noted above, also exclude the poorest in many cases. Another factor to take into account here is what it means to be without a toilet in a densely populated area, where concentrations of waste result in greater health hazards; what it means to be without adequate water provision when water purchased from vendors can cost many times what those with piped connections pay for the same amount. A number of indicators for poverty take on different meaning in different conditions. A common measure for inadequate housing, for instance, is the presence of a dirt floor – an inappropriate indicator for urban slums where people live in overcrowded, poorly ventilated multi-story tenements.

Child mortality figures may be a more reliable indication of actual levels of deprivation. In the rare cases where datasets allow for a comparative focus on urban slums, the evidence indicates, and has for some time, that child outcomes in slums are much worse than in other parts of cities, and generally as bad or worse than rural averages.<sup>15</sup> Figures from Nairobi are a case in point (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Child mortality rates, Kenya (Deaths per 1000 births)



Source: African population and Health Research Center, *Population and Health Dynamics in Nairobi's Informal Settlements: Report of the Nairobi Cross-Sectional Slums Survey* (Nairobi: African Population and Health Research Center, 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Panel on Urban Population Dynamics, (2003).

<sup>15</sup> Stephens, Caroline (1996); Sarah Fry, Bill Cousins, and Ken Olivola (2002).

This is by no means to downplay the severity of rural poverty or to suggest that disparities do not also exist within rural areas – but rather to emphasize that existing assessments of urban poverty can be quite distorted. These distortions become a particular concern in the context of the MDGs, the framework for so much programming. Their broad brush approach can seriously disadvantage urban children and families in poverty, as countries focus on rural areas in order to achieve their targets. A particular worry is the US\$1 per person per day poverty line used to monitor poverty levels for the MDGs. There are few cities in the world where this amount would not mean destitution. Fotso, focusing on sub-Saharan Africa, argues that while there has been significant progress on many of the MDGs, the failure of many nations to achieve health targets in particular may be due to the rapid growth in the numbers of the urban poor and the lack of attention to their basic needs.<sup>16</sup> Figures from Uganda, while extreme, highlight this problem: between 1999 and 2007, coverage for rural water provision increased from 21 percent to 63 percent; in urban areas over the same period, it declined from 60 percent to 56 percent.<sup>17</sup> There are certainly other countries where it is rural realities that are delaying the achievement of the MDGs. The point is that a human rights-based approach demands attention to poverty and exclusion wherever they occur – and that oversimplified analyses of both the location of poverty and its multi-dimensional and contextual nature can mean the neglect of a growing population of deprived people.

### 1.3. The demographics of urban poverty

The urban poor population is overwhelmingly young. No matter what measure is used, in most of the world you are more likely to be poor if you are a child. This is not unique to urban areas, but it is relevant to any attempt to understand poverty in an urban area, where the high dependency ratio complicates many other challenges, and especially where urban living means the absence of extended family support networks for the care of young children.<sup>18</sup> There is a large unmet need for sexual and reproductive health services in urban areas in all low-income countries (over 35 percent).<sup>19</sup> Delhi is a good example: in 2006, 29 percent of women in poverty were mothers before they were 18 compared to 5 percent of the city's non-poor; urban women in poverty had on average four children each, non-poor women less than two children each.<sup>20</sup>

The high birth rate among the urban poor is supplemented by the large numbers of young people who migrate to cities in many regions.<sup>21</sup> In China, for instance, 7.5 percent of the country's children are urban migrants.<sup>22</sup> Many of these young people are unaccompanied by family. This trend is most apparent in sub-Saharan Africa where adolescents now make up a much higher proportion of the population in urban than in rural areas.<sup>23</sup> In Ghana ten years ago almost half of a sample of rural households had children who had left for the city, many as young as 10.<sup>24</sup> In ten sample countries in SSA, more than a third of urban girls between 10 and 14 live without either

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<sup>16</sup> Fotso, Jean-Christophe, Ezeh, Alex Chika, Madise, Nyovani Janet, Ciera, James (2007).

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Uganda Country Office Annual Report 2008, from government figures.

<sup>18</sup> Population Reference Bureau (2008).

<sup>19</sup> Montgomery, Mark and Paul Hewett (2004).

<sup>20</sup> UHRC (2006).

<sup>21</sup> Yaqub, Shahin (2009).

<sup>22</sup> Government of China figure, cited in country office annual report.

<sup>23</sup> Bankole A, Singh S, Woog V, Wulf D (2004).

<sup>24</sup> Beauchemin, E. (1999).

parent.<sup>25</sup> Sommers describes this rapidly growing urban youth population as overwhelmingly poor, marginalized and uneducated, but also as increasingly alienated and detached, as their energy and potential assets are overlooked by government and civil society.<sup>26</sup>

Many girls and boys who fall into accepted categories of protection are rural children and adolescents whom conditions have pushed or pulled into urban areas. The underlying factors have deeper roots than most protection efforts can hope to respond to adequately. In many cases, young people's migration is part of a household strategy to strengthen or diversify their economic base. There is also the question of the perspective of the young people themselves. Yaqub argues that many migrating children and adolescents are not runaways or victims of trafficking, but purposeful migrants making strategic and rational decisions in response to the available opportunities.<sup>27</sup> While they can be extremely vulnerable within urban areas, there are opportunities for personal emancipation that may not exist back home.<sup>28</sup> As Sommers points out, most young Africans who do not already live in urban areas certainly want to.<sup>29</sup> Protection, even after the fact, has to consider these realities. Research points to the need for a more nuanced understanding of child and adolescent migration and for policies to support young migrants once they reach their destinations.<sup>30</sup> The sheer numbers of children and adolescents living independent of adults, the limited housing, livelihoods and service options they face at their destinations, and the choices they face in this context, all call for more concerted support, with attention to the different experiences of young boys and girls, and to the capacity of these young people to contribute to solutions.<sup>31</sup>

#### 1.4. Problems with secure tenure

It is common for between 30 and 60 percent of the population of cities to live in informal settlements. The insecure tenure here has multiple effects, causing stress and anxiety and limiting the investments that households are willing to make in their homes and communities. Living in a settlement with no legal address can mean exclusion from voting registers, no access to schools and health clinics, a lack of police protection, and of the most basic provision for water, sanitation, drainage and waste removal. The implications for children can be profound. Alternative juvenile justice responses, for instance, often require that a social worker accompany a child to court. This option is closed to children from settlements not reached by the social services system, who are dealt with instead through more punitive and controlling measures.

Insecure tenure also underlies the growing global epidemic of eviction that affects hundreds of millions every year, even in countries with democratic governments such as South Africa and India. Evictions, justified as being in the "public interest," take place because of urban regeneration, development or infrastructure projects, or are blamed on illegal occupation, environmental health problems or alleged criminal activity. There is often no warning, usually no

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<sup>25</sup> Cited by Mabala, Richard (2006).

<sup>26</sup> Sommers, Marc (2007).

<sup>27</sup> Yaqub, see note 21.

<sup>28</sup> Castle, S. and A. Diarra (2003); Hashim, IM (2003).

<sup>29</sup> Sommers, see note 26.

<sup>30</sup> Whitehead Ann and Jon Sward (2008).

<sup>31</sup> Yaqub, see note 21.

recourse and frequently no alternatives are provided.<sup>32</sup> If people are relocated, it is generally without consultation, and often to peripheral areas with no amenities or basic services and with difficult access to employment. Evictions cause major upheaval, destroying property and assets, leaving people homeless, breaking up social networks, compromising livelihoods, and often involving violence and even death. There is astonishingly little research on the implications for children, but what there is points to high anxiety levels, nightmares, withdrawal, apathy or aggression in response to the violence, confusion and loss, and higher rates of abuse.<sup>33</sup> The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) points out that violations of housing rights can plunge boys and girls into a precarious state that can result in numerous other rights violations.<sup>34</sup> No effort to address urban poverty or the rights of urban children can be truly effective without taking into account the issue of tenure, since it undermines in so many ways the capacity of households and communities to respond effectively to their own poverty.

## 1.5. Informal livelihoods

The informal economy, in many places the dominant source of urban employment, is vital to the livelihoods of the urban poor. In Karachi, Pakistan, 75 percent of workers are in the informal sector;<sup>35</sup> in Accra, Ghana, 87 percent.<sup>36</sup> The informal economy can act as a crucial safety net for the poor, but it is far from secure, and the inherent lack of protection can undermine the rights of informal workers. Work can be irregular, and both female and male casual labourers and those operating informal enterprises are vulnerable to harassment by police, local authorities or their employers. Enterprises within informal settlements also often suffer from the lack of space and provision for water, sanitation and electricity. Researchers in Dhaka point to the “cycle of repeated illness, poor nutritional status and low work productivity resulting in the continuous degradation of their human and material capital.”<sup>37</sup> Another disadvantage of informal sector work is that it can limit access to benefits available to formal sector workers – such as family allowance or child benefit schemes. In the context of the global recession, informal workers in urban areas have been especially hard hit. Respondents in a recent study, including vendors, waste pickers and home based workers from 10 countries, are working longer hours, earning less, and making serious cuts in spending for food and healthcare,<sup>38</sup> often with disproportionate effects for young children, who may not get the care they need. In times of crisis, evidence generally shows the urban poor to be especially vulnerable.<sup>39</sup>

In many cities, the informal economy depends to a considerable degree on the work of children and adolescents, male and female, doing household chores and childcare so adults can work, helping in family enterprises, or working in paid (or bonded) work themselves. The extent of their labour remains largely unmeasured. But the scope for exploitation and abuse is considerable, especially given the large numbers of young people coming to cities for work. Surveys in a number of nations show that around two thirds of urban working children are

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<sup>32</sup> Du Plessis, Jean (2005).

<sup>33</sup> Dizon AM and S Quijano, (1997).

<sup>34</sup> The Centre on Housing Rights and Evictions (COHRE) (2006).

<sup>35</sup> Urban Resource Centre (Karachi) (2001).

<sup>36</sup> Maxwell, Daniel, Carol Levin, Margaret Armar-Klemesu, Marie Ruel, Saul Morris and Clement Ahiadeke (2000).

<sup>37</sup> Kabir, Md Azmal, Aatur Rahman, Sarah Salway and Jane Pryer (2000).

<sup>38</sup> Horn, Zoe (2009).

<sup>39</sup> Baker, Judy (2008).

migrants.<sup>40</sup> Pryor's 2003 study of livelihoods in Dhaka slums found that almost half the children between 10 and 14 were working for pay, and their earnings made up between a third and a half of the income of their households.<sup>41</sup> To a large degree it is the very informality of the labour market that contributes to the vulnerability of young male and female workers and permits their exploitation – including exploitation by 'formal' enterprises through sub-contracting work to informal enterprises or using out-workers.

But a critical aspect is also young people's right to move into an adult role and to find suitable decent employment. Unemployment rates have risen steadily for young people over recent years, and they are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults.<sup>42</sup> The number of 15 to 24 year olds is expected to double by 2050, and a large proportion will be poor and looking for work in urban areas. Creative solutions are needed to ensure that their energies can be channeled into constructive employment.

## 1.6. The physical environment of urban poverty

Many of the issues faced by the urban poor households are directly related to the environments they occupy. Not all of the urban poor live in slums and informal settlements; nor do all slum dwellers qualify as poor in income terms. But there is very large overlap between income poverty and the material and service deprivations that are often spatially concentrated – in some cases in the highly congested slums of large cities, in other cases in ill-served peri-urban settlements that have more in common with rural poverty.

### Sanitation and infection diseases

The leading causes of death in slums and informal settlements are still the easily preventable infectious diseases that so disproportionately affect young children. The density and concentration of human and household wastes within poor urban areas adds substantially to children's risk. Even when they are technically better served than those in rural areas, they may face higher odds of sickness and death. Where data can be disaggregated to reveal intra-urban differences, they show a growing "urban penalty" related to growing numbers of the urban poor and to deteriorating urban conditions.<sup>43</sup> Official UN statistics show the great majority of urban dwellers in low and middle income countries to have "improved" provision for water and sanitation, but within the context of dense urban settings, "improved" does not mean adequate for health.<sup>44</sup> Under-five mortality rates are generally more highly correlated to access to water and sewerage connections than to poverty lines or the availability of health services.<sup>45</sup> The infant survival advantage in big cities in Latin America and the Caribbean disappeared by the early 1990s.<sup>46</sup> The same thing is happening now in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Yaqub, see note 21.

<sup>41</sup> Pryer, Jane (2003).

<sup>42</sup> International Labour Organization (ILO) (2006).

<sup>43</sup> Harpham; Awasthi S, Agarwal S (2003).

<sup>44</sup> Bartlett, S (2003).

<sup>45</sup> Shi, A (2000).

<sup>46</sup> Brockerhoff, M and E Brennan (1998).

<sup>47</sup> Fotso, Jean-Christophe (2007).

## Toxics and pollutants

Poor urban communities are most heavily exposed to toxics and pollutants, in part because of the constraints in finding land – the poor are more likely to have to settle for sites that pose environmental health risks – but also because industries are also more likely to be able to dump their wastes with impunity in poor communities. The burning of household waste, in the absence of provision for solid waste removal, is also a significant problem. The livelihoods of the poor are a factor too; rummaging in dumps, recycling batteries, tanning and rendering, and various other occupations undertaken by the poor, usually within their communities and often in their homes with children close by and even involved in the work, can have significant health effects.

## Road traffic

The burgeoning problem of road traffic injuries is especially severe in urban areas because of growing numbers of vehicles, often mixed with other forms of traffic, and little investment in safety.<sup>48</sup> Poorer populations bear the greatest burden – pedestrians are at highest risk, followed by passengers in buses and trucks and cyclists.<sup>49</sup> Children between 5 and 10 are the most vulnerable group – although rates are extremely high among younger children and adolescents as well.<sup>50</sup> The lack of safe play space is a critical risk factor. Boys are about twice as likely as girls to be victims, a reflection of the greater likelihood that they will be allowed out to play in the street.<sup>51</sup> Neither research nor policy have adequately addressed these issues. What attention there is focuses heavily on measures that have been successful in high income countries (like seat belt use) that do not address the vulnerabilities most relevant in poor urban neighbourhoods.<sup>52</sup> Patterns of injury can be very local, and need to be locally identified.

## Overcrowding and lack of supportive common space

Local environments affect learning and social development as well as health. Children need the chance to play, explore, observe, interact, and engage in purposeful activities within supportive settings. Many poor urban settlements are rich and varied environments for learning and interaction. But opportunities can also be seriously thwarted by cramped unsafe household space, piles of waste, open drainage ditches, muddy lanes, busy streets and the lack of open space, as well as by social fears.<sup>53</sup> The right to play and to associate with others is fundamental to children's confidence and competence, but is seldom a consideration in attempts to upgrade the communities of the poor.<sup>54</sup> These concerns are exacerbated by the dearth of early childhood programmes in poor communities (see below).

## Protection issues

Harsh, abusive treatment for children is not unique to urban areas, but can be intensified by the challenging conditions of urban poverty, which amplify social stressors and contribute to

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<sup>48</sup> WHO (2009).

<sup>49</sup> Nantulya VM, Reich MR (2003).

<sup>50</sup> Toroyan T, Peden M (Eds), (2007).

<sup>51</sup> WHO (2009).

<sup>52</sup> Toroyan T, Peden M (Eds) (2007).

<sup>53</sup> See for instance Aguirre, ADM. (2005).

<sup>54</sup> Hardoy, Jorgelina, Andrea Tammarazio and Guadalupe Sierra (2009).



frustration, and exhaustion.<sup>55</sup> Confined household space means children are underfoot and can result in higher levels of irritation and more punitive responses. Overcrowding has been significantly associated with maltreatment in various urban settings.<sup>56</sup> The absence of basic amenities and service provision can also have significant implications for security, increasing children's exposure to harassment and result in reduced opportunities for social interaction and even withdrawal from school. In Johannesburg, boys and girls from four low income neighborhoods pointed to the absence of street lights, inadequate public transport that forced them to rely on predatory taxi drivers, broken traffic lights that meant long waits to cross busy streets and increased the chance of harassment, waste filled open spaces taken over for drug dealing.<sup>57</sup> Using community toilets can also be an occasion for abuse and harassment, especially for girls.<sup>58</sup>

### Children on the street

Life on the street is one of the few aspects of urban childhood that has been extensively documented and debated, especially in the 1980s and 90s,<sup>59</sup> with some arguing even that street children had "hijacked" the urban child agenda, obscuring the equal or sometimes worse condition of children in poor urban households.<sup>60</sup> The resourcefulness and ingenuity of many children on the street has been frequently documented,<sup>61</sup> but this does not alter the hardships they deal with, the hazards to physical and mental health, the vulnerability to harm and exploitation or the absence of long term opportunities. Their situation may often be the result of a choice, but it is a choice made generally under the most extreme pressures, as they free themselves from abuse and violence, or simply lack other alternatives.<sup>62</sup>

## 1.7. Urban food security and children's nutrition

High rates of child malnutrition in the world's poor countries and communities<sup>63</sup> are increasingly an urban problem in both relative and absolute terms.<sup>64</sup> Although rural children remain on average less well nourished, when income is factored in the rural-urban gap disappears in many countries.<sup>65</sup> Specific conditions within urban areas contribute to the likelihood of food insecurity and undernutrition for young children. Food costs are higher, with many of the urban poor spending 60 percent of their income on food.<sup>66</sup> The rapid food price increases in 2007/2008 had

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<sup>55</sup> Aidoo, Magna and Trudy Harpham (2001); Evans, G and S Saegert (2000).

<sup>56</sup> Vega-Lopez, MG GJ Gonzalez-Perez, MPH Ana Valle, ME Flores, S Romero-Valle and IPP Quintero (2008); Afifi, Z. E. M., El-Lawindi, M. I., Ahmed, S. A., Basily, W. W.(2003); Wachs, T and F Corapci (2003).

<sup>57</sup> Kruger, Jill Swart and Louise Chawla. (2005).

<sup>58</sup> Burra, Sundar, Sheela Patel and Thomas Kerr (2003).

<sup>59</sup> Much of this literature was contributed by UNICEF and IRC; see for instance Black, Maggie (1991).

<sup>60</sup> Rajani R (1997).

<sup>61</sup> See for example, Davies, Matthew (2008).

<sup>62</sup> Conticini, Alessandro and David Hulme (2006).

<sup>63</sup> In the least developed countries, 34% of all under fives are underweight and 40% are stunted. *State of the World's Children* 2009. According to the WHO, 60% of all deaths among children under 5 can be attributed to malnutrition.

<sup>64</sup> Van den Poel, E, O O'Donnell, E van Doorslaer (2007); Fotso, see note 38.

<sup>65</sup> Faruque AS, Ahmed AM, Ahmed T, Islam MM, Hossain MI, Roy SK, Alam N, Kabir I, Sack DA (2008); Kennedy G, Nantel G, Brouwer ID, Kok FJ (2006).

<sup>66</sup> FAO/IES (2004).

especially significant effects for poor urban households.<sup>67</sup> In some cities expenditure on non-food essentials is so high that households need to cut corners on food expenditures.<sup>68</sup> The dependence on cash and informal employment can also mean fluctuations in income and children can be especially vulnerable to this insecurity. A study of the allocation of calories within households in Bangladesh finds that the poorer a household, the more likely that adults will be given priority. (The research found that girls received only slightly less calories than boys, but not as much as expected; differences between men and women were not reported.)<sup>69</sup>

Unsanitary conditions make it especially difficult for poor urban caregivers to prevent contamination of food and water, and gastrointestinal illnesses can contribute significantly to children's undernutrition. The participation of women in the urban work force, higher in some regions than others, may also more often be at the expense of their children. While urban mothers initiate breastfeeding in high numbers, they tend to end it sooner – median duration is 4 to 6 months less in urban areas. A particular danger in underserved slum areas is the greater likelihood of contamination and illness when infants are bottle fed, or during the transition to solid food.<sup>70</sup> The shift in diet in urban areas, where traditional foods maybe more expensive than processed foods, can also have nutritional impacts for children. There is some evidence, too, that early malnutrition can increase the predisposition to obesity and chronic disease, and there is a particular need in poor urban areas for nutrition policies that meet this dual challenge.<sup>71</sup>

## 1.8. Urban health systems

Numerous studies point to the failure of urban health services to respond adequately to the needs of poor urban children.<sup>72</sup> The health care that is in theory more readily available to those in urban areas is seldom accessible to the urban poor or of adequate quality when they can access it. Public health services, in the cash economy of urban areas, are less often free than in rural areas. The process of decentralization has also resulted in many urban areas in the fragmentation and deterioration of services.<sup>73</sup> The large growth in poor urban populations has strained urban health services in many cities.<sup>74</sup> In Asia, immunization rates are lower for children in slums than in rural areas, as is the chance that they will receive oral rehydration therapy when they have diarrhoea.<sup>75</sup> The urban poor often face difficult choices between unqualified, incompetent, expensive private practitioners and lethargic, apathetic public services.<sup>76</sup> In many cases, caregivers delay finding treatment for sick children because of the expense, the challenges in dealing with the system, and the sense that they are unlikely to receive quality care.

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<sup>67</sup> Cohen, Marc and James Garrett (2010).

<sup>68</sup> Bapat note 12.

<sup>69</sup> Cockburn J, Dauphin Anyk, Razzaque Mohammed A (2009).

<sup>70</sup> Ruel MT, Garrett JL, Haddad L (2008).

<sup>71</sup> FAO/IES (2004).

<sup>72</sup> Bhandari N, Bahl R, Taneja S, Martinez J, Bhan MK (2002); Kemble, Sarah K, Jennifer C Davis, Talemwa Nalugwa, Denise Njama-Meya, Heidi Hopkins, Grant Dorsey and Sarah G Staedke (2006).

<sup>73</sup> Montgomery, Mark (2009).

<sup>74</sup> Awasthi S, Agarwal S (2003).

<sup>75</sup> Fryet al note 11.

<sup>76</sup> Harpham, T (2009).

An important focus of many health care systems and initiatives is awareness raising – for instance, campaigns to promote hygienic behaviour. These can be invaluable, and as UNICEF and WHO point out, simple measures such as handwashing can play a significant role in reducing disease. Yet the multiple burdens faced by caregivers in underserved urban settlements can conspire to make health messages hard to observe even when they are well understood. Preventing faecal-oral contamination for a busy two year old in filthy surroundings can be extremely difficult. In the absence of supportive infrastructure and the living conditions that make it feasible to protect children’s health, it is unrealistic to expect that health services and public health messages will suffice.

## 1.9. HIV and AIDS in urban areas

This is one of the few areas where no claims are made for an “urban advantage” in health status. Available figures point to higher urban rates of HIV and AIDS.<sup>77</sup> A number of urban realities can contribute to this. High concentrations of people and higher mobility lead to higher rates of transmission;<sup>78</sup> the spread of HIV has also been related to the breakdown in traditional social norms in urban areas, higher rates of partner change, greater personal autonomy, impunity for harassment, the greater presence of sex workers. (These same factors, seen from an alternative perspective, might be interpreted as lower levels of social protection for women and greater pressure to use transactional sex for survival, especially for young migrant women and others who have few choices and limited opportunity.<sup>79</sup>)

There is disagreement around the relationship of poverty and HIV, with some arguing for a strong association, and others seeing HIV as an issue that transcends socio-economic status. Statistics are readily available to support both perspectives. Risky behaviours underlie the transmission of most HIV infection, but some people have considerably more choice about these behaviours than others. While poverty may or may not be the primary factor in determining who is exposed to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases, it is clearly the poor who struggle most with the downstream impacts.<sup>80</sup>

Certain realities stand out in the urban areas of many low and middle income countries:

- *Young girls face the highest risk* (in sub-Saharan Africa girls on average are three times as likely to be infected),<sup>81</sup>
- *Migrant youth and children are especially vulnerable,*<sup>82</sup>
- *Forced sex and sexual violence by men are linked to higher rates of HIV:* (physical force can cause tearing and abrasions and increase the risk of infection) for women especially.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Van Donk, M. (2006); Dyson, T. (2003).

<sup>78</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>79</sup> Mabala R and Cooksey B (2008).

<sup>80</sup> Gillespie, Stuart (2008).

<sup>81</sup> UNAIDS. 2007.

<sup>82</sup> Bankole A, Singh S, Woog V, Wulf D (2004).

<sup>83</sup> Dunkle, K, R K. Jewkes, H C. Brown et al. (2004).

- *Separation from family or social isolation can contribute to higher rates of disease:* (social isolated girls in South Africa were six times more likely to have been forced to have sex);<sup>84</sup>
- *Quality of local provision contributes to vulnerability:*<sup>85</sup> (lack of street lights; public toilets; insecure transport to school are risks especially for girls and young women);
- *The lack of opportunity and control in life can play a big role:* (prevention messages were found to have little meaning for adolescent girls who see few opportunities for themselves other than transactional sex.<sup>86</sup>)

These risk factors are most relevant to sub-Saharan Africa (where the research is disproportionately focused), and to sexually transmitted HIV, especially for girls, who are more vulnerable in many ways than their often more affluent male sex partners. It is important, however, not to overlook regional and even local differences in transmission. In Central Europe and the countries of the ex-Soviet Union, transmission is far more highly associated with injecting drug use, more commonly among men, but spreading also to their sexual partners<sup>87</sup> High rates of drug-related transmission, most commonly in urban areas, are also found a number of Asian countries (for instance China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam and Myanmar<sup>88</sup>) and in parts of Latin America.<sup>89</sup>

Interventions (regardless of the type of transmission) often fail to target those who are most vulnerable, or even those most affected, and hence have limited protective value.<sup>90</sup> In Delhi, for instance, 93 percent of non-poor young women had heard of AIDS but only 59 percent of the urban poor, who were 4 to 5 times more likely to be married (and more vulnerable) by age 18.<sup>91</sup> In two large West African cities, while about 80 percent of infections were among sex workers, (many of them girls under 18) less than 1 percent of the country's HIV investment was in sex work interventions.<sup>92</sup>

## 1.10. Education and the urban poor

Globally, children in urban areas are more likely to attend early childhood programmes and have better access to school. They are more likely to enroll, to progress successfully through primary school and to enter and complete secondary school; and less likely to start school late, and to have to balance the demands of work and school.<sup>93</sup> However, as with health, these average realities do not reflect the often stark disparities within cities. In many poor urban areas, early childhood programming is almost non-existent and the failure to complete, or even to start, primary education is often as high or higher than it is in rural areas. The Education For All

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<sup>84</sup> Cited by Mabala 2006 note 25.

<sup>85</sup> Mabala, Cooksey, note 79.

<sup>86</sup> Hawkins K, Price N, Mussa F (2009).

<sup>87</sup> UNICEF (2008b).

<sup>88</sup> Chen, Peter (2008).

<sup>89</sup> For example, see Hacker M, Leite I, Friedman S, Carrijo R, Bastos F, (2009).

<sup>90</sup> Barnett, T and A Whiteside (2002).

<sup>91</sup> UHRC note 20.

<sup>92</sup> World Bank (2005).

<sup>93</sup> UNESCO (2008).

Global Monitoring Report for 2009 finds that children in urban slums are among the hardest to reach in many countries, and face a distinctive set of challenges.<sup>94</sup>

Governments may feel little responsibility to establish schools in illegal settlements, and children may be denied access in other neighbourhoods because of their lack of a formal address.<sup>95</sup> Where government does establish schools in informal settlements, they may not come close to meeting the needs.<sup>96</sup> Many communities are pushed to rely on alternative solutions, some of them creative and effective, but many underequipped, overcrowded and too expensive for those in poverty.<sup>97</sup> As the EFA report points out, the high presence of private and alternative schools in many slum areas is not an indication of choice and access, but rather of the lack of choice where the poor are concerned. Where figures are available, they show significantly lower enrollment in slum areas than in rural areas, and higher rates of drop out. Urban areas as a whole are falling behind in some places, most likely as a result of the growing numbers of unreached children in poor urban settlements.<sup>98</sup> In Nairobi, contributing factors to higher rates of drop out were the poor quality of schools in slums, limited access to secondary school for children living in these areas, the greater vulnerability of these girls and boys to sexual coercion within school, and higher levels of child labour.<sup>99</sup> Frequent moves and eviction can also contribute to higher dropout rates for urban children. Rural children have been found in general to be more likely to work, but also more likely to juggle work with school; urban children more frequently to do one or the other, pointing to the need for more routine access to non-formal part time programming.<sup>100</sup>

The issue of safety in school is a growing concern especially within poor urban areas. There is increasing documentation, especially from Africa, of violence, sexual harassment and coercion within schools – a factor that may be keeping many girls in particular out of school within urban areas, and placing those who attend at high risk.<sup>101</sup>

### 1.11. The social aspects of urban poverty

Many observers have pointed to the crucial role of human and social capital in the survival strategies of the poor. There are innumerable examples of a strong social fabric within poor urban communities, and high levels of vitality, creativity, productivity can enhance the dynamics of urban life and society. Aside from participating in the economic life of the city, the poor contribute in many other ways to the diversity, culture and energy that are part of the city's assets and identity.

But there are also challenges in many settings that can contribute to social fragmentation and lower levels of reciprocity. The insecurity that characterizes many poor urban environments – unreliable livelihoods and rising prices, the lack of safety nets, violence and crime and the absence of protection under the law, the threat and reality of eviction, the experience of

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<sup>94</sup> UNESCO *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> Aggarwal YP and Chugh S (2003).

<sup>96</sup> Lakshmanan, V (2007); Mugisha, Frederick (2006); UN-HABITAT (2006).

<sup>97</sup> Mudege, Netsayi N, Eliya M. Zulu, Chimaraoke Izugbara (2008).

<sup>98</sup> Undie Chi-Chi, Mugisha Frederick, Epari Charles, Ezech Alex (2008); Begum, Sharifa and Binayak Sen (2005).

<sup>99</sup> Mugisha, note 96.

<sup>100</sup> Hunt F (2008).

<sup>101</sup> Mabala and Cooksey note 79.

exclusion from the life of the city, discrimination against ethnic groups can all conspire to create a context of high risk and stress and to undermine the kind of social cohesion necessary to help tackle poverty effectively. Low levels of social capital may be a particular concern for new migrants,<sup>102</sup> although some suggest that it may be the level of poverty rather than migrant status per se that has a greater influence.<sup>103</sup> The very high levels of disparity and relative exclusion within urban areas are undeniably a basic feature of the experience of urban poverty. Many social problems have been shown to be worse where disparities are large (poor health and mental illness, obesity, unwanted pregnancy, crime levels, poor educational achievement), leading to a conclusion that disparity in itself may be central to many of the deep seated problems associated with poverty.<sup>104</sup> Children and adolescents tend to be especially aware of this, pointing to the sense of stigma and humiliation they experience as the most challenging aspect of their poverty.<sup>105</sup> However, while a sense of exclusion can undermine children's aspirations and development, there is also plenty of evidence that with support and a sense of involvement, their situations can be a stimulus for self-reliance, competence and resourcefulness.<sup>106</sup>

Violence and crime are particularly problematic in many urban areas, where what Taussig calls "terror as usual"<sup>107</sup> can exhibit itself through street crime a growing gang culture, the proliferation of arms and drug trafficking, political and police violence and a pervasive sense of insecurity.<sup>108</sup> An estimated 60 percent of urban residents were victims of violence between 2001 and 2006.<sup>109</sup> In many nations, urban space is increasingly being reorganized in response to crime and violence as the rich retreat to fortified enclaves or use transport networks and privatized security systems to isolate themselves from the poor, who are seen as the perpetrators of violence. Yet the evidence indicates that the poor are less likely to be the perpetrators of violence<sup>110</sup> and that violence is most often experienced by the poor themselves.<sup>111</sup> This kind of spatial segregation denies the poor their right to the city and can play a role in perpetuating violence.<sup>112</sup> In Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, for instance, over half the homicides were a result of community mob violence, most often a response to thieves in the absence of formal policing and security.<sup>113</sup>

Reliable figures related to violence as it affects and involves children and adolescents can be hard to come by, and are usually complicated by the conflation of those under 18 with young adults up to 29 years of age. While the common wisdom has it that "young people", primarily males, are both the chief perpetrators and the main victims, these claims are generally accompanied by figures related to victims rather than perpetrators,<sup>114</sup> and even the figures on

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<sup>102</sup> See for instance Aikins Ad-G, Ofori-Atta AL (2007).

<sup>103</sup> Harpham, note 76.

<sup>104</sup> Wilkinson RG, Pickett KE (2007).

<sup>105</sup> Boyden, Jo, Carola Eyber, Thomas Feeney, Caitlin Scott (2003); Chawla, L., Ed. (2001).

<sup>106</sup> Izutsu, T, Tsusumi A, Islam AM, Kato S, Wakai S, Kurita H (2006); Cucchiario G and P Dalgalarondo (2007); Boyden, Jo (2009).

<sup>107</sup> Cited in her description of daily life in El Salvador by Hume, Mo (2004).

<sup>108</sup> Moser, Caroline ON (2004).

<sup>109</sup> Cited in UN Habitat (2007).

<sup>110</sup> UN Habitat (2007).

<sup>111</sup> Santos SM, Barcellos C, Sa Carvalho M (2006).

<sup>112</sup> Rogers, Dennis (2004).

<sup>113</sup> Outwater AH, Campbell JC, Mgaya E, Abraham AG, Kinabo L, Kazaura M, Kub J (2008).

<sup>114</sup> See for instance Krug, E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi A, Lozano R (2002).

victims are only higher for this age group when absolute numbers are considered rather than rates.<sup>115</sup> There is little evidence separating out the involvement of those at the younger end of the 15-29 group. What does seem clear is that boys are more often both perpetrators and victims of community level violence than girls, and that those under 14 are minimally involved.

Attempts to understand the causes of violence look at the structural factors expressed in disparities and exclusion that fuel anger and frustration, as well as focusing on more immediate personal, social and environmental characteristics, including the experience of family and community violence and abuse, parental, peer and personal drug use, low levels of social support and high density housing. By far the strongest predictor is having been exposed to violence, whether as a victim or an observer.<sup>116</sup>

Safe, secure, supportive neighbourhoods with a range of opportunities for learning, social interaction and relaxation are a critical protective factor for children and adolescents. Yet almost inevitably, especially in poorly governed cities, the poorer the settlement, the less likely it is that there will be the kinds of amenities that provide these opportunities and that protect children from harassment and insecurity – be they street lights, safe sidewalks and common space, or toilets that provide privacy and protect children from abuse. These concerns are especially marked for girls. In Allahabad, India, for instance, both boys and girls agreed that there were no places within their neighbourhoods where unmarried girls could safely congregate for any purpose.<sup>117</sup> In many regions, there is a sense that girls are behaving inappropriately just by being seen in public space, a fact that then increases their risk by making them “fair game”. Around the world, girls report greater restriction on their movement. One outcome of this, however, is the greater likelihood that boys and men will be victims of violence outside the home.<sup>118</sup>

High rates of violence in the private realm are often found in the context of high levels of community violence and can be sidelined in attempts to address community security, dismissed as a domestic issue that is not the concern of others.<sup>119</sup> Yet violence at home is clearly a critical issue, especially affecting women and girls, but with far reaching implications for all family members. Among adolescents in Sao Paulo, violence within the family was found to be three times more likely to result in mental health problems than more general levels of community violence.<sup>120</sup> Harsh and abusive physical treatment for children, as well as violence against girls and women, are by no means unique to urban areas. But aspects of urban poverty can contribute to the likelihood of violence and abuse. The way caregivers deal with their children, for instance, is at least in part related to their living conditions, which can amplify other social stressors and contribute to frustration, exhaustion and anxiety.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> WHO Global Burden of Disease figures, cited in Krug et al *ibid*.

<sup>116</sup> Krug, E, Dahlberg LL, Mercy JA, Zwi A, Lozano R (2002); Dalal K, Rahman F, Jansson B (2008); Reid RJ, Garcia-Reid p, Klein E, McDougall A(2008); Brook David W, Brook Judith S, Rosen Zohn, De la Rosa Mario, Montoya Ivan, Whiteman Martin (2003).

<sup>117</sup> Sebastian, Mary P., Monica Grant and Barbara Mensch (2005).

<sup>118</sup> Krug et al note 116.

<sup>119</sup> Hume, Mo (2004).

<sup>120</sup> Paula CS, Vedovato MS, Bordin IA, Barros MG, D'Antino ME, Mercadante MT (2008).

<sup>121</sup> Aidoo, Magna and Trudy Harpham (2001); Evans, G and S Saegert (2000).

Violence both at home and in the community can have profound effects for children and adolescents, undermining faith in adults and the social order and seriously restricting opportunities. When exposure is chronic, it can affect the capacity to face normal developmental challenges, and has been related to anxiety, depression, defiance, aggression and problems with self control, as well as lower levels of achievement in school and higher dropout rates.<sup>122</sup> There is mixed evidence on the relative effects for boys and girls. High levels of stress, whether associated with violence or with other factors associated with urban poverty, can be seriously debilitating for all age groups, and the effects for adults have implications for children as well. Increasing evidence globally points to the high burden of common mental health problems in low-income countries, with women generally at double the risk of men, and with highest rates among the poor.<sup>123</sup> WHO's Atlas project, assessing the prevalence of child and adolescent mental disorders, finds high rates of disabling mental illness for this age group – as high as 20 percent in some places. Urban poverty, unemployment, family and community violence and insecurity have been noted as serious risk factors.<sup>124</sup> There is a large unmet need for mental health services for children, as for adults – in Mexico City for instance, less than one in seven adolescents with psychiatric disorders reported having used any mental health services in the past year.<sup>125</sup> Although stress can be high in poor urban areas, it is a mistake to assume that mental illness will be a default response. Boyden and others note that in the face of adversity, the opportunity to take an active role, to solve problems, to contribute to household and community, can play a positive and protective role for children.<sup>126</sup>

There has been growing interest in recent years in how poverty-related stress erodes the cognitive capacity of children through the secretion of hormones potentially damaging to the development of the immature brain.<sup>127</sup> While urban slums have not been a specific target of research on this front, there is research showing that “environmental chaos”, including overcrowding, high levels of noise and a lot of people coming and going, have adverse effects for children's learning, motivation and development.<sup>128</sup> The effects of stress for children are also evident through the impact on caregivers and other family members. There is growing attention to the links between maternal mental health and the developmental outcomes for children on various fronts; and children of depressed mothers had been noted, among other things, to have poorer adaptive skills and more emotional and behavioural problems.<sup>129</sup>

## 1.12. The vulnerability of the urban poor to disasters and climate change

Over recent decades, extreme weather events have killed hundreds of thousands of urban dwellers and contributed to injury and illness, impoverishment, hunger and displacement for

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<sup>122</sup> Krug, et al note 116; Baker-Henningham H, Meeks-Gardner J, Chang S, Walker S (2009); Mudege, Netsayi N, Eliya M. Zulu, Chimaraoke Izugbara (2008).

<sup>123</sup> Harpham, note 76.

<sup>124</sup> Patel V, Flisher AJ, Nikapota A, Malhotra S (2008).

<sup>125</sup> Borges G, Benjet C, Medina-Mora M, Orozco R Wang P (2008).

<sup>126</sup> Boyden, Jo and Gillian Mann (2005); Boyden, Jo (2009).

<sup>127</sup> Evans, Gary and Michelle Schamberg (2009); Farah, Martha, Kimberley Noble and Hallam Hurt (2005).

<sup>128</sup> Evans G Gonnella C, Marcynyszyn LA, Gentile L, Salpekar N (2005); Wachs, T and F Corapci (2003).

<sup>129</sup> Riley AW, Coiro MJ, Broitman M, Colantuoni E, Hurley KM, Bandeen-Roche K, Miranda J (2009).



hundreds of millions.<sup>130</sup> Those living in poor-quality overcrowded housing in slums or informal settlements without infrastructure are among the groups most at risk from the direct and indirect impacts of climate change. However, to focus only on the current and likely impact of climate change is to miss the very large preventable disaster burden that has long occurred in urban areas and that continues to occur, independent of climate change.

Urban populations in high-income nations take for granted a web of institutions, infrastructure, services and regulations that protect them from disasters. Only a small proportion of urban centres in low- and middle-income nations are comparably served. Rapid urbanization adds to the burdens, as growing numbers live in relatively high-risk areas – on hills prone to landslides, in deep ravines, on land prone to flooding or tidal inundation.<sup>131</sup> The urban poor are least equipped to manage risk and avoid the impact of extreme weather events; also least able to cope with the illness, injury, premature death or loss of income, livelihood or assets caused by disaster. Without major changes in the ways that governments and international agencies work in urban areas, climate change will mean that poor urban dwellers in many regions are increasingly exposed to both extreme events and more gradual changes that contribute to their continued poverty.<sup>132</sup>

The challenges that already disproportionately affect poor urban boys and girls are intensified by disaster.<sup>133</sup> Droughts, heavy or prolonged rains, flooding and the kinds of conditions that prevail after disasters all increase the risk of sanitation-related disease, which is already so high in poor urban areas. Malnutrition, resulting from food shortages, but also closely tied to unsanitary conditions and to children’s general state of health, increases with extreme events; when children are already undernourished, they are less likely to cope well with the additional strain. Warmer average temperatures in most nations mean an increased risk of heat stress, especially in poor urban areas because of the “urban heat-island” effect resulting from high levels of congestion and little open space and vegetation. This disproportionately affects young children and the elderly. Higher average temperatures are also increasing the range of many tropical diseases, and children again are generally at highest risk.

The shocks surrounding stressful and extreme events can have high costs for children. Most of the research in this regard has been on the trauma associated with the event. But many observers have questioned this emphasis, and affected families and children themselves make the point that the day-to-day hardships, uncertainties, frustrations and humiliations surrounding recovery are the more critical problems. Even less extreme weather events can create havoc in families’ lives, deepening the level of poverty. When times are hard, children can become an asset that is drawn on to maintain the stability of the household. They may be pulled from school to work or, in the case of girls especially, to take care of younger siblings. Some children may be considered more “expendable” than others. Many of Bombay’s young female sex workers are from poor rural villages in Nepal, where inadequate crop yields lead families to send off one child so others may survive.

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<sup>130</sup> Satterthwaite, David, Saleemul Huq, Mark Pelling, Hannah Reid and Patricia Lankao-Romero (2007); IDSR (2009).

<sup>131</sup> Hardoy, J, D Mitlin et al (2001).

<sup>132</sup> Satterthwaite et al note 130.

<sup>133</sup> The following three paragraphs draw on research presented in detail in Bartlett, S (2008).

Sometimes extreme weather events mean separation and displacement for shorter or longer periods. The loss of family members can be a more extreme outcome for children, but even with family intact, life in emergency or transitional housing can mean long months, sometimes even years, in physically challenging and socially dysfunctional environments. Severe overcrowding, chaotic conditions, lack of privacy and the collapse of regular routines can contribute to anger, frustration, violence and the erosion of social norms. Adolescent girls especially report sexual harassment and abuse. The cumulative effects of these stressors can affect children's development on all fronts. Increased levels of irritability, withdrawal and family conflict are not unusual after disasters, and high stress for adults can have serious implications for children, contributing to higher levels of neglect and abuse. Increased rates of child abuse, often reported after disasters, have long been associated with such factors as parental depression, increased poverty, loss of property or a breakdown in social support. Similar challenges are faced by children and families uprooted by conflict.

## 2. Responses from the Development Community

Numerous development actors are involved in work that has an impact for urban children and adolescents in poverty. There are problems in adequately assessing constructive action in this area however. Many of the interventions most effective in addressing the quality of life for urban children and adolescents are not directly targeted at this age group, and determining the impacts for children of such initiatives is difficult – child impact assessments are still rarely undertaken within more general development efforts. Slum upgrading, for instance, may provide safer space for recreation, but it may also allow cars to move more quickly through a settlement, and result in the loss of play space. In most cases the impact remains undocumented. It is also a problem that a lot of targeted programming for children and adolescents takes place without reference to location. Interventions in urban areas may not be documented as urban, and often are not designed to respond specifically to urban realities. Recognizing these inevitable shortcomings, the attempt here is to give a brief overview of more general development assistance efforts in the area of urban poverty reduction, as well as efforts that specifically target urban children and adolescents. More detailed attention is given to the work of specific agencies in a longer paper.

### 2.1. More general attention to urban poverty

#### National and local government

One relatively straightforward way to determine the level of attention being given to urban poverty by national governments in low-income nations is to look at their Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers. Although some PRSPs acknowledge the significance of urban poverty, most give it comparatively little attention<sup>134</sup> and many do not even mention 'slums' or informal settlements (although there are some signs of change in the most recent PRSPs.<sup>135</sup>)

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<sup>134</sup> Mitlin, Diana (2004).

<sup>135</sup> Personal correspondence with David Satterthwaite and Diana Mitlin who are currently reviewing all the recent PRSPs to see what attention they give to urban issues.

One of the responses to poverty that is growing in favour in recent years has been the use of cash transfers, which have proven benefits for children. In general these have been more focused on rural than on urban areas, however. A 2008 World Bank seminar on transfers in urban areas identified some particular challenges, noting that targeting was more challenging, that take-up was lower, and that cash transfer amounts needed to be increased to take account of higher costs in urban areas. The findings indicated a need to adjust design to reflect urban realities – for instance making payments through banks rather than in cash to provide better control over impulse purchases.<sup>136</sup>

In an era of decentralization, the situation of the urban poor is often more heavily dependent on the effectiveness and accountability of local than of national government. Many cities have managed to provide a high standard of living for their inhabitants. But most such examples are in a few middle income nations; much of the preceding section has pointed to the widespread failures in this regard, noting the tendency of so many local authorities not only to withhold support to the urban poor and their settlements, but also to obstruct their efforts to get a foothold in the city. In some cases this can be related to the failure of national governments to accompany decentralization with the resources needed to accompany the responsibilities. But there are many ways, even in the absence of adequate resources, that local authorities can respond more actively and equitably than they do to those in poverty. Given the key role of local governments on the urban poverty front, there is surprisingly little attention to “local governance” within most discussions of how to meet global targets.<sup>137</sup>

### The private sector

In every country there is a role for both private and public sectors in addressing urban poverty, but too much variability to allow for very meaningful generalization. Cities depend on private investment and enterprises for their economic base, but the private sector covers a wide range, from the smallest local vending enterprises to the largest multinational companies. In most low and middle-income countries, the urban poor depend heavily on the private sector for their livelihoods, housing and a range of basic services, especially where local government does not fill this role. There has been considerable debate over the engagement of the private sector in urban areas, especially in regard to more effectively meeting that backlog of need for public services. The World Bank and other agencies have argued that privately run utilities would be a cost-conscious and demand-responsive alternative to frequently inefficient, corrupt, and politically manipulated public services. Actual experience with private sector participation have been far from the ideal promoted, however, and the major private companies themselves are no longer convinced, if they ever were, that the poor are able to pay the full costs of provision.<sup>138</sup>

### Civil Society

Urban slum areas are often seen as hotbeds of local NGO action, and this can be viewed as making up for the absence of attention to poverty on the part of local government (and the larger aid world). But INTRAC’s research indicates that this perception is based on the performance of comparatively few effective organizations, and that in many urban centres there are few or no

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<sup>136</sup> Ribe, Helena, Polly Jones, Andrea Vermehen (2008).

<sup>137</sup> For more discussion on this point, see Satterthwaite, David (2005).

<sup>138</sup> Hall, David and Emanuele Lobina (2006); Budds, J and G McGranahan (2003).

local NGOs that can serve as effective partners for the urban poor or for local government. Most urban NGOs, they add, “*report that both their official agency and northern NGO donors are impervious to learning from or really listening to them. They see northern donors with no explicit urban agenda, no knowledge of NGO developmental approaches appropriate to the urban context and no learning systems to summarise their urban counterparts experiences.*”<sup>139</sup> And while NGOs can develop useful and innovative solutions, they almost never have the funding or capacity to create the systems to underpin these solutions (such as installing water mains, trunk sewers and drains.)<sup>140</sup>

### Grassroots organizations and federations of the urban poor

Increasingly there are national and international networks of grassroots urban organizations – waste pickers, home-based workers, vendors, slum dwellers, those facing disaster risks – that are finding innovative responses to the problems of urban poverty. Sewa is a good example – a network of over 20,000 poor self-employed women workers registered as a trade union in seven states in India. They work at organizing women, building new skills, encouraging the formation of capital, increasing their social security, advocating for their needs. The international network of federations of the urban poor, Slum Dwellers International, is another much larger example, with an urban presence in 16 countries, and hundreds of thousands of members. These federations are developing real alternatives to addressing their members’ needs for tenure, housing and basic infrastructure. Where they are supported by governments and international agencies, the scale and scope of what these federations can achieve increases greatly. In most countries where they work, local governments now work in partnership with the federations, supporting substantial house-building or upgrading programmes, and achieving a scale of action far beyond what civil society organizations usually engage in or what government agencies would usually support.<sup>141</sup> This kind of “co-production”<sup>142</sup> extends participatory democracy by giving urban poor groups a chance to influence decisions about priorities and the allocation of resources but also to design, implement and manage responses, bridging the gap between what works for the poor and the formal rules and regulations governing land use and building and infrastructure.<sup>143</sup>

### International agencies

For more than 30 years, there has been a widely held assumption that there is an urban bias in the policies and priorities of aid agencies and development banks.<sup>144</sup> But analyses of commitments from 1970 to the late 1990s found a low priority to urban development especially in the areas

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<sup>139</sup> INTRAC [www.intrac.org/docs/Rural%20Roots.doc](http://www.intrac.org/docs/Rural%20Roots.doc), downloaded Oct 12 2009. See also Patel, S and Bartlett, S (2009).

<sup>140</sup> In fact, there is a concern that creative solutions like “peepoo” bags, or even enormously effective public health responses like handwashing may have the effect of distracting attention from the role of local government as a provider of proper sanitation solutions.

<sup>141</sup> Some examples are South Africa, Namibia, Tanzania, Malawi and Kenya, India, Thailand, Philippines and Cambodia.

<sup>142</sup> Mitlin, Diana (2008b).

<sup>143</sup> For examples, see Manda, Mtafu A Zeleza (2007); Mitlin, Diana and Anna Muller (2004).

<sup>144</sup> Lipton, Michael (1977); Corbridge, Stuart and Gareth A. Jones (no date).

most critical to children, such as housing and basic services.<sup>145</sup> Since the late 1990s it has become more difficult to ascertain the level of assistance to urban poverty because aid is increasingly given to basket funding or sectoral or budgetary support, and its allocation then depends on national priorities.

In general there still appears to be limited institutional recognition of the growing scale and depth of urban poverty or of the important role of urbanization and urban development within stronger, more successful economies. While the World Bank's new urban policy comes out strongly on the importance of an urban agenda for economic success, its coverage of urban poverty reduction is disappointing. The urban poor are only seen in terms of their vulnerability, not the knowledge, resources and capacities that they bring or could bring to urban development. Some agencies that have had an explicit and successful urban focus in the past are pulling back from this. Sida, for example, is dismantling its urban section, GTZ's website now announces that poverty has a rural face despite its long engagement in urban areas, and DFID, while pointing to poverty as an increasingly urban phenomenon, no longer has an urban policy. The World Bank and the IMF acknowledge that most countries are not on track to meet most of the MDGs, with the most serious shortfalls in the areas of nutrition, health, education and sanitation.<sup>146</sup> There is growing evidence that these shortfalls are related in many countries to the lagging progress within poor urban areas.<sup>147</sup>

## 2.2. Mainstreaming attention to children into urban initiatives and poverty reduction efforts

Within the context of the urban development and poverty reduction efforts that do exist, efforts to undertake any kind of age sensitive planning or analysis are few and far between, and there has been relatively little effort to mainstream attention for children and adolescents within more general urban development efforts. Of the many local authorities, for instance, that like to consider themselves "child-friendly," few actually consider the political implications of age, or make the interests of children or adolescents a priority, or even a consideration, in all their decisions and activities. Housing policies, public works, transportation services, land use regulations, preparations for disaster and adaptation to climate change, for instance, seldom take children's needs into account.<sup>148</sup>

Things are not any better within the development assistance world. As a GTZ urban governance advisor in Bangladesh points out, "too little is done to reach the different generations of the urban poor, who for example in the project's design we have to work with here, figure as an anonymous ageless mass." It is instructive in this context to consider the declining attention given to gender equity within development assistance, as reported by the Reality of Aid.<sup>149</sup> If impact in this area, specifically mandated by the Paris Declaration, is scant, it is not surprising that attention to age is even less likely to be considered.

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<sup>145</sup> Milbert, Isabelle (1992); Milbert, Isabelle and Vanessa Peat (1999); Satterthwaite, David (1997); Satterthwaite, David (2001).

<sup>146</sup> The World Bank (2008a).

<sup>147</sup> See for instance Fotso et al, note 8; Gyorkos, TW, SA Joseph, M Casapia (2009).

<sup>148</sup> Bartlett, S (2005).

<sup>149</sup> The Reality of Aid (2008).

A few agencies stand as exceptions. UNHCR, for example has a policy of mainstreaming age (along with gender) into all its activities. Clearly articulated child-focused priorities are built into its policies and procedures. (There is also a clear distinction in analysis and programming between the conditions faced by refugees in urban situations, camps and rural areas, and the agency is giving increasing attention to the large numbers that head direct to urban areas) An independent evaluation commends the agency for clear policies and guidelines regarding age, and effective, community based, rights based approaches. It also notes that the range and complexity of concerns around refugee children, especially separated children, cannot easily be solved by a single organization, and points to the particular challenges of responding to the large numbers of refugees located in urban slum areas.<sup>150</sup> Partnership, especially with UNICEF, is critical on these fronts.

The World Bank's support for slum upgrading is also encouraging, since some of the some of the initiatives it helps to fund include attention to the age specific needs and social aspects of local development (including family support programmes, day care services, community-driven violence prevention, sports programmes, after school homework programmes and summer camps.) These initiatives in Central and Latin America have taken place as action learning projects in collaboration with communities and local government, and have been successful in reaching out to police and engaging the enthusiasm of mayors (one of whom noted that he had learned the most important things were recovering public space and promoting leadership within these communities.)<sup>151</sup>

This kind of integrated attention is not always easy. IIED America Latina, a Buenos Aires-based research centre, has since the late 1980s worked directly with poor communities, believing this was essential to understanding the changes needed in public policy. Their primary focus has been support for community initiatives around housing, basic services and the development of community organization, collaborating with local authorities and the social actors that contribute to policy. But they have always tried to respond to any opportunities to address the needs of girls and boys – following up in a rush, for instance, to chances for funding, attempting to coordinate with municipal programmes. But they have never been able to sustain any attention to this age group over the long term. Too often, their efforts for young people ended up being voluntary sidelines that become neglected before they put down roots. They relate this to the pressure of their other priorities, their lack of expertise in this area, and to problems with sustained funding, however small. Critiquing their own work, IIED America Latina's staff speak of the need for a more coherent strategy, sustained, if minimal, sources of funding that make it possible to build more flexibly on what they have started, and better communication with young people, who often have had little chance to influence the shape of projects undertaken in reaction to initiatives from above.<sup>152</sup>

Some of the most interesting “mainstreaming” of attention to children is happening within the work of federations of grassroots organizations of the urban poor. While attention to boys and girls has not been an explicit part of their work, the tendency to consider the full range of community needs has led to some novel approaches and achievements. Community toilets built

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<sup>150</sup> Rothkegel S et al (2008).

<sup>151</sup> Conversations with Judy Baker, lead economist for urban and Ellen Hamilton; also see Baker, Judy (2006).

<sup>152</sup> Hardoy, note 54.

by women's savings groups, for instance, often include separate open air toilets with small squat plates and handle bars which are less daunting for small children, and ensure that their feces do not end up in community walkways and drains. Federation women in South Africa during their regular savings group meetings have developed informal community surveillance systems to support children in difficulties. Participatory meetings with children in Bangalore slums around their local space, as part of an upgrading project, is hoping to generate broader local discussions that go beyond the planning of housing to consider how shared space affects the quality of life for all. Given the horizontal networks and shared learning of these federations, these kinds of practices have the potential to spread and evolve in a way that gradually takes them to scale.<sup>153</sup>

### 2.3. Targeted attention to children in urban poverty

Child focused organizations, large and small, have been important partners in responding to children's rights worldwide, but urban children have seldom been a systematic focus of their interest. Numerous smaller local NGOs conduct activities within urban areas, focusing on such issues as street children, out of school children, bonded labour and youth training. However, it is rare to find an explicit focus or strategy on urban children and adolescents within larger international NGOs. These larger organizations often have projects that extend to urban areas, or ad hoc responses to emergencies in urban areas, but this does not translate into a specific analysis of, or strategy around, urban issues. When searching for information from various organizations, it is not uncommon to be told that, while there are projects for children within some urban areas, there is no material available on this and no one within the organization with an overview of this work or where it is happening.<sup>154</sup> It is also not uncommon to be referred back repeatedly to the same few efforts – in particular to the Child Friendly Cities Initiative, in which UNICEF has a leading role.

One child rights organization, Save the Children Sweden, has made unusual and sustained attempts to establish a focus on urban children and urban issues since the Second UN Conference on Human Settlements in 1996. This is a case where a few dedicated individuals within an organization have attempted to draw attention to this critical issue without in the end being able to shift their institution's thinking. Concrete outcomes were a series of documents on children's rights and the physical environment, research (funded by Sida) to explore examples of effective attention to children in the work of local governments, a presence at various international fora, and support to field offices to collaborate with municipalities to work with deprived children within their jurisdictions. The integrated child friendly district project within one poor district of Ho Chi Minh City, for instance, lasted for several years, but finally folded as a result of being too top down in its objectives, according to an evaluator.<sup>155</sup> Within headquarters, the focus on urban issues, good governance and child friendly environments, sustained with difficulty over 12 years, was recently lost within an internal sectoral reorganization.

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<sup>153</sup> Conversations with numerous people involved with these federations.

<sup>154</sup> For instance, various attempts to identify a Plan International staff member with whom to discuss urban programming went nowhere. The organization's communication officer first suggested I look on their website for a map that would indicate roughly where programming took place. Further discussion of the nature of my exploration resulted in the conclusion that PI could be of no help on this front, since no one at HQ appeared, on investigation, to have a perspective on this issue.

<sup>155</sup> Conversation with Tim Bond.

Within more general development agencies, with the exception of investment in the more traditional sectoral investments in education and health, targeted attention to urban children and adolescents has tended for the most part to be project-oriented and temporary. Many of these efforts appear to be more rhetorical than practical in nature, an effort to indicate the awareness of the agency regarding this large proportion of the population, but with little documented impact on policy or practice. An example is the Healthy Environments for Children Alliance established by WHO – described as “A worldwide alliance to reduce environmental risks to children ... by providing knowledge, increasing political will, mobilizing resources, and catalysing intense and urgent action.”<sup>156</sup> Such a network has clear relevance for poor urban children, but the detailed 2003 Framework for Action appears to have resulted in only a handful of activities, the most recent of which date back to 2005. There was no response from their secretariat to emails. Without doubt, WHO’s more general activities have greater relevance for children than this targeted child effort. The rhetorical nature of this “intense and urgent action” is unfortunately not unusual.

Many multilateral and bilateral agencies tend to give more explicit attention to youth than to children – in part a reflection of the assumption that UNICEF has children covered; in part a concern about the destabilizing potential of a large, undereducated, underemployed youth population. There has been a recent plethora of international youth forums, and many multilaterals and bilaterals are investing more in youth programming, especially around HIV, employment and post conflict scenarios. A survey undertaken by Thomas Munyuzangabo of UNICEF WCARO, however, finds little long term funding commitment despite the declarations around the importance of this age group. Many promising initiatives are meagerly funded, an indication of their relative importance within the scheme of things. UN Habitat’s new Youth Opportunity Fund, designed to support youth led initiatives, is a case in point. The objective is to catalyze attention to the need for a focus on youth within development policies and strategies, and to build the capacity of youth organizations to advocate for a role in local development planning. This initiative has received a lot of attention, despite funding of just a few million dollars. Ideally the pilot phase will be successful enough to mobilize interest and take it to scale. The reality is that such an initiative, if it involves only short term funding for scattered projects, is unlikely to develop the rich substrate of local experiences, networks and learning that would be necessary within any given city to give it the chance to have a serious impact.

So, while there is growing recognition of the scale and significance of urbanization and urban poverty, it is fair to say that the development world’s responses to urban poverty do not bring great urgency to the task, and that attention to the impacts for girls and boys remains limited. While there are examples of innovative and effective projects for urban children and adolescents in poverty, there is nothing that could be considered comprehensive or strategic in its approach to this large and growing population. No agency or organization has seized the reins in terms of systematically assessing the situation of urban children or developing approaches to working with urban governments to address this critical situation. There is a huge potential for effective partnership of this front, but UNICEF remains the only agency with the mandate and capacity to develop, advocate and coordinate the comprehensive, integrated responses that are needed to respond effectively to the multiple and often distinctive challenges faced by poor urban children.

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<sup>156</sup> <http://www.who.int/heca/en/>.



### 3. UNICEF's Past and Current Urban Work

#### 3.1. The urban history

UNICEF has been involved in supporting poor urban children from its earliest days despite its primarily rural focus, but has tended to have an ambivalent relationship with this work, exploring and re-exploring engagement on the urban front, but never totally and unequivocally committing itself. This ambivalence seems to have been one expression of a deeper divide within the organization – a tension between the sectoral and the integrated; the large national campaigns and the community-based initiatives. While large campaigns, especially in the area of child survival, have tended to be more rural in focus, work within the urban arena has been more oriented on the whole to integrated community based initiatives – a difference in emphasis that may have had less to do with the situational appropriateness of these approaches than with personalities involved in the urban work.

The most visible expression of this approach was the Urban Basic Services Programme, initiated as a response to the recognition that poverty was a growing concern in urban areas as well. UBSP was a flexible, area-based, multi-sectoral response, emphasizing low cost solutions, self help and community involvement, and linking social development with the provision of physical infrastructure.<sup>157</sup> These were among the earliest and the most innovative external-agency funded initiatives addressing urban poverty. UNICEF supported publications were also among the first to highlight the very high infant and child mortality rates in urban slums.<sup>158</sup> UBSP was in a sense the precursor of the kinds of integrated slum upgrading projects that became more common from the 1980s onwards, including those now being explored by the World Bank. The basic services strategy, according to Maggie Black, dominated UNICEF policy during the second half of the 1970s.<sup>159</sup> It was approved by the Executive Board in 1976 as the most effective means to addressing essential needs in both rural and urban areas.<sup>160</sup> By 1982, the board, noting good progress in 43 countries, made a commitment to expanding and strengthening support to UBSP, and as part of this commitment, established the posts of Regional Urban Advisors in three offices.<sup>161</sup>

However, after the strong growth during the 1970s and 1980s, the basic services approach lost some prominence when James Grant became executive director, and GOBI<sup>162</sup> took centre stage with its highly targeted, inexpensive medical interventions to reduce infant and child mortality, implemented through recipient governments. A budget analysis indicates a rapid increase in the priority given to GOBI between 1982 and 1990 and a corresponding decline in the basic services support.<sup>163</sup> This was not surprising given the economic and political climate of the times, with its

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<sup>157</sup> Cousins, W (1992); Black, M (1996).

<sup>158</sup> See Basta, Samir S. (1977).

<sup>159</sup> Black, Maggie Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Report of the Executive Board May 1976 (EflcEF/644, PWS- 24); General Assembly resolution 31/167, 21 December 1976, both cited by William Cousins.

<sup>161</sup> Cousins note 157.

<sup>162</sup> GOBI is an acronym standing for growth monitoring, oral rehydration, breastfeeding and immunization.

<sup>163</sup> Satterthwaite, David (1998).

emphasis on neoliberal policies and distrust of social welfare approaches. UNICEF needed a reputation for visible, cost effective, measurable results.

At the same time, this was seen as a period of consolidation for UBPS with attempts to institutionalize the approach, to build on lessons learned and to incorporate GOBI into community efforts. Many urban programmes continued and were strengthened. Throughout the 1980s, however, there were disagreements within UNICEF as to the relative priority that should be accorded to these two approaches. The support given by senior management (especially Grant) to GOBI during the 1980s was opposed by many UNICEF staff who felt more resources should be devoted to participatory community based basic services and support, and that sectoral priorities should be determined by country offices, not by senior management in New York.

When children's rights came into the picture, this catalyzed a different kind of interest in urban areas. There was increasingly a focus on "children in especially difficult circumstances", (developed prior to the passage of the CRC) and, in response to both decentralization and child rights, the urban section became involved in supporting mayors and municipal leaders to develop municipal plans of action for children. In 1993 the urban section produced a policy document, UNICEF Programmes for the Urban Poor, arguing for a revitalized and expanded UBS approach. But the urban section was on its way out at this point. The regional advisor posts had been eliminated and there were questions about the apparent redundancy of an urban section when there was no corresponding rural section. The urban section was folded into a catchall division that included gender and participation, then it was eliminated. By 2000, UNICEF's more visible urban focus had moved to the Child Friendly Cities Secretariat within IRC, which maintained the relationship with mayors and provided a clearing house for resources on children and cities. In 2001, a consultation at IRC brought together interested staff from 17 country and regional offices with IRC staff to discuss how the urban work could best be taken forward. They concluded that, while the new MTSP's five organizational priorities along with existing procedures and tools were appropriate to urban realities, concerted effort would be needed to ensure that excluded urban children were in fact included in overall work plans. Particular attention was called to the need for improved situation analysis in the urban context, and for partnership with both local governments and urban networks. At the same time, despite the diminished formal support for urban work, in many country offices the urban work continued in a quiet way.

While there has apparently never been a formal policy decision to move away from urban programming, the perception of many in the organization is that urban work is frowned upon, and some offices see their work in this area as ending in response to head office directives. It is not clear in these cases (for instance the discontinuation of Nigeria's and India's UBS programmes) whether this was perhaps more a concern about the service delivery modality than about the urban setting per se.

People within the organization offer a range of explanations for diminished attention to urban poverty:

- We were tired of the political game, that's why we stayed away from urban areas.
- It didn't go away; it just got called something else. People feel embarrassed to acknowledge urban work.

- It's so much easier to get results in rural areas.
- If it can't be linked to a silo, it won't go anywhere. Cross cutting areas end up getting ignored because no one has real ownership.

The last urban advisor feels that where there has been an informed awareness of the depth of urban poverty, attention has continued, but that in the face of a lack of disaggregated data and other pressing priorities, urban poverty has been easy to ignore. She also stresses the importance of resource constraints, both material and human, noting that work within urban areas can require different expertise and additional resources. UNICEF has in the meantime moved steadily in the direction of more upstream work, especially in the more middle income and heavily urbanized countries, calling for different approaches in both the rural and urban arenas, and broadening the opportunities to affect how both national and local governments respond to poverty wherever it is.

### 3.2. Current work at country level

An overview of work within country offices involved the purposeful selection of countries within each region, with a strong focus on Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Countries included Mexico, Brazil and Columbia within TACR; Senegal and Nigeria in WCAR; Kenya and South Africa in ESAR; Pakistan, India and Bangladesh in ROSA; Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and China in EAPR; Russia in CEE/CIS and Iran in MENA. These countries together contain 30 of the world's 50 largest cities. Information comes from annual reports and other documents, and from discussions with staff within country offices – in some cases recently retired or relocated staff when it was difficult to get current staff to respond. It has been a challenge in many cases to get responses, and there is still work to be done on this front.

#### The range of work

There is a surprising variety of urban work within the sample country offices, reflecting the range of realities and the degree of concern and independence of country offices. The work includes regular sectoral programming that just happens to take place in urban as well as rural areas, as well as projects (often pilot projects) and research that address challenges particular to urban areas – such as the situation of migrants, of children living and working on the street, of urban service provision, and of violence and road traffic injuries (which may be seen as primarily urban problems). Some middle income countries – including Russia, Brazil, Iran, and Mexico – are so heavily urbanized that it would be difficult to avoid urban work. Some work, by default, even in less urbanized countries, has a primarily urban focus: HIV and much of the organization's protection work falls into this category. Although WASH is primarily rural in its orientation, a recent survey found extensive urban work in this area in a number of country offices, much of it a continuation of earlier UBS programmes. The WASH work in Indonesia has been especially focused on responding in community-based ways to the realities of urban slum conditions. A number of country offices, including Colombia and China, are focused on the situation of rural to urban migrants, working upstream to influence their position. The Bangladesh office, together with government and 20 NGOs, supports the huge BEHTRUWC programme targeted at providing education for hard to reach urban working children. In some countries there is an effort, often in its early stages, to develop a specific urban policy and

approach in response to a targeted assessment of the needs (for instance, in India and the Philippines.) In some countries, efforts that worked well within more rural districts are being purposefully translated to the context of large urban centres, for instance, Brazil and Vietnam. In the case of Mexico, the process moved in the other direction, taking experience from Mexico City, the world's second largest city, and applying it within other areas of the country. More details are available on these and many other efforts within a longer paper.

### Annual reports do not reflect the extent of the work

The extent of urban programming is often not reflected within annual reports. A lot more is actually happening on the ground in many cases. Bangladesh, for instance, makes virtually no mention of urban programming in its annual report, yet it is clear from other sources that it is heavily involved in responding to urban children in poverty, and in ways that are very specific to their particular realities. The tendency not to point specifically to urban challenges and responses is to some degree a function of reporting requirements, which focus on sectors rather than settings. But, as explained by some within the organization, including in some country offices, it is also sometimes a reluctance to highlight this work, since their understanding is that HQ prefers a focus on rural areas. Some referred to a sense of discomfort at being involved in work that deviates from this perceived larger mission. .

In some cases, these guidelines may be taken perhaps too rigidly. In Nigeria, for instance, country staff describe a programme in the late 1990s that combined attention to urban basic services, livelihoods and children in especially difficult circumstances within many urban slum communities in Lagos and other cities. They felt the programme was valuable and should be continued, but in 2001 were told that UNICEF did not want to be involved in urban service delivery, and the programme ended. Since then work has focused more on the national and state level, supporting government personnel and building capacity, but there is a sense of frustration about unmet needs and the importance of more focused work with local authorities. Nigeria is urbanizing faster than any of the other sample countries, and it lags behind the other countries in terms of many indicators, but there appears to be a sense of uncertainty on how to get traction in this critical area. Possibly this is a place where what was perceived as successful programming on the ground could more strategically have been used as an entry point for capacity building within government, rather than being abandoned.

### Problems with identifying exclusion and deprivation

Common to a number of countries is an assertion that UNICEF does not distinguish between rural and urban, but “seeks to promote the well being of the most excluded and vulnerable children wherever they are”. Given the spectrum of realities that are encompassed by the terms rural and urban, and the frequently arbitrary nature of these categories, this position is very sensible. However, it presupposes a capacity to identify exclusion, vulnerability and deprivation wherever they are. Especially where urban areas are concerned, this is not always easy, as has been discussed, and COs often lack the data that would permit them to identify the extent and location of deprivation within urban areas. Country offices often report large disparities between rural and urban areas, but without any reference to the sometimes even larger disparities that exist within urban areas, or to the trends in many countries that are known to be resulting in a narrowing of the rural-urban gap. The Bangladesh Study on Child Poverty and Disparities is a telling case, revealing the lack of nuance in the guidelines for these studies. Across almost every

indicator, rural children are shown to be worse off than urban children – except when the percentage of those in absolute poverty, based on caloric intake, is considered. Here the urban figures are higher – 43.2 percent compared to 39.5 percent. It is important to note that for this indicator, averages are not the benchmark, and this should tell us something, calling into question the utility of the other figures. Yet the consistent gap between urban and rural average indicators on other fronts is uncritically presented, in keeping with the study guidelines. Fortunately, with or without these statistics the Bangladesh office is aware of the scale of urban poverty – but in many country offices these misleading comparisons of rural and urban realities could be a reassuring validation of an inclination to avoid the complex urban scene. This again is not an attempt to set up rural and urban in competition with one another, but rather to suggest how easily the depth of urban poverty can be overlooked.

In some country offices, for example in South Africa, the identification of need is undertaken by the government, which, as country office staff point out, use income as a basis rather than more multi-dimensional indicators of child well being or deprivation. But in urban areas in particular, a universally applied income poverty line can be, as noted, a misleading basis for determining need, given the greater dependence of the poor on a cash economy and the higher cost of living.

Where good disaggregated urban data exist, some country offices have made good use of them. The Kenya country office, for instance, has undertaken baseline studies on the situation of children in Nairobi's huge slums, as well as drawing on existing data sets that disaggregate urban slum data, and has implemented child survival and nutrition work designed to respond to these urban challenges. Mexico based its education attention to Mexico City's excluded children on household level data collected by the municipality in the poorest districts of the city. "It takes the same skills as any good UNICEF work," says one programme officer, "use the data to find out who is most excluded, then bring people to the table." This is practical advice for capitalizing on UNICEFs strengths. But it DOES involve having and using that data.

### Research, not always drawn on

In some cases, even where there are not good disaggregated datasets, there may still be strong urban research or analyses of specific aspects of urban poverty. This may then fuel urban responses – India is a good example of a country building an evidence base to develop an urban approach. However, good research does not necessarily result in a link with programming. A 1996 evaluation report from the Uganda office provided a thorough assessment the situation of the urban poor in the country, noting that the needs were extensive, and in many ways unique, and that the country lacked any policy or institutional framework for addressing the problems. The report concluded that it was incumbent on UNICEF to respond, and several strong recommendations were made, building on the strengths of the office. In later annual reports, the word urban does not appear at all. In West Africa too, there have been numerous in-house studies pointing to the significant challenges faced by the urban poor, as detailed by Sarah Martelli in a recent review of UNICEF's West African urban research. She points to a number of disturbing realities: the much lower access to basic services within poor urban areas than are suggested by aggregate figures; the increasing malnutrition and mortality rates in informal settlements, the poor access to schools and health services.<sup>164</sup> Yet programming in this region

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<sup>164</sup> Martelli, Sarah (2009).

with many rapidly urbanizing nations remains overwhelmingly rural. The most recent annual report from the Senegal office, for instance, indicates that the better average status of urban dwellers resulted in their decision to focus their efforts on rural poverty.

Iran is an example of a country office that has very little in the way of hard information. The government has extensive data, but does not share it. But the CO has moved ahead on the basis of anecdotal evidence, which points to ever more extreme disparities within Tehran, with Afghan refugees in especially difficult situations.

### Integrated frameworks for country efforts

Despite the sectoral emphasis within UNICEF, many country offices have developed more integrated frameworks for responding to poverty and exclusion, perhaps a hold over from the UBSP days. Brazil, for instance, has three “platforms” for integrated programming, one of them the new urban platform which is adapting the very successful “Municipal Seal of Approval” initiative from the semi-arid region to the realities of large favelas in Rio and Sao Paulo. In Mexico, education has served as an integrated entry point for all other programming focused on children in the most excluded communities and households. Mexico City has been the petri dish for this, the sense being that if UNICEF could broker productive relationships within this politically complex arena, the learning could easily be translated to other settings. In both India and Vietnam, integrated mechanisms for programming have been pursued in more rural areas through provincial and lower levels of government – and there are plans now to explore the same approach in urban areas. This is further along in Vietnam than in India, and the Ho Chi Minh City variant of the Provincial Child Friendly Programme is in development.

### National variants

There are interesting national variants in the way these kinds of urban efforts are conceptualized and implemented. A comparison of Brazil and Vietnam provides a good example. These country offices are taking different routes to adapting rural or smaller town initiatives to the realities of large cities. In the case of Brazil, the Municipal Seal of Approval initiative, involving a competition for smaller municipalities around progress on a number of child rights indicators, was driven by mayors in a desire for visibility. Results of this mobilization included, among other things, major declines in infant mortality and child malnutrition rates, and improved school attendance and health care. In translating this initiative to 126 poor urban communities in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, the overall strategy has changed. The process, which is synchronized with the four year political cycle, still focuses on the broad mobilisation of local administration and civil society, but there is a greater emphasis on a community-based response which is to some degree community driven. UNICEF partners with NGOs which already have a relationship with the communities in question, and impacts are evaluated not only in terms of the quantitative indicators, but also on a community assessment of coverage and quality of services, as well as the level of participation of local adolescents in their communities.

In Vietnam, the modification has been in the other direction. The Provincial Child Friendly Programme works directly with authorities at provincial, district and commune levels to ensure they address children’s needs in a holistic way in their local development plans. In Ho Chi Minh City, the basic thrust will still be evidence-based advocacy on children’s issues, but not so much on supporting multi-sectoral/convergent services on the ground as on knowledge generation on

urban issues for children. Its more upstream strategies will include partnership with private sector to increase social responsibility and mobilize resources to address child's rights issues; generating and using data to influence policy, and promoting positive behaviour and social change.

## Partnerships

Despite these urban examples, partnerships within the sample countries are largely with national government ministries, other multilateral agencies, the private sector and the larger NGOs. There is relatively little emphasis these days on relationships with local authorities, and little evidence of UNICEF using resources for leverage at the municipal level – although some country offices do mention engagement at the municipal level. Colombia, for instance, is involved with a number of mayors' offices; Kenya deals with the Nairobi City Council; the Philippines has many local government partners both in rural and urban areas. But this is not a major aspect of the focus on partnerships, despite the degree of decentralization in many countries. Examples of municipal engagement appear to be most common in Latin America, and the most visible engagement with local government is through the Child Friendly Cities Initiative and Mayors, Defenders of Children, which will be discussed below. One interesting exception is Iran, where strong efforts are being made to partner with the Tehran municipality, which has been courting UNICEF for some time. A large proportion of Iran's population lives in Tehran, but the political realities of engaging with this level of government (which is not even considered to be "government" per se) are especially complex.

Relationships with civil society, part of UNICEF's mandate, have been rich and varied, but there has been some question about the degree to which they qualify as real partnerships. Sheila Barry, in following the history of UNICEF's engagement on this front, points out that these relationships have often had more to do with the strategic pursuit of UNICEF's own priorities than with shared visions or goals. She discusses the organization's own critique of its performance in this regard, and its recognition of the need for a more proactive approach, ongoing dialogue, mutual accountability and relationships based on respect for mutual strengths and autonomy.<sup>165</sup>

Conspicuously absent on the civil society front are partnerships with grassroots organizations. There are numerous instances where these organizations have become federated at state or even national level, representing sometimes hundreds of thousands of low-income people. These networks offer strong potential for effective cooperation, as will be discussed more below. One exception, within the sample countries, to UNICEF's lack of engagement on this front is the recent meetings on the development of an urban focus in the Philippines, where the Urban Poor Alliance, one of the country's networks of urban poor organizations, was a party to the consultation. These kinds of relationships could be a critical component of an effective response to urban poverty, but they would require changing some rather common perceptions of UNICEF as a partner. A few comments from activists and practitioners are illustrative:

- “Hardly any activists on the ground believe that UNICEF wants to do anything to strengthen what they do; instead UNICEF always has to decide who they want to involve.

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<sup>165</sup> Barry, Sheila (2005).

So people like us never consider exploring anything with UNICEF.” (Grassroots organization)

- “If UNICEF could act as a kind of cement to bring together community organizations and local government, that would be a good role. But it would have to be without UNICEF pushing any particular agenda other than children. If “child participation” or “child rights programming” are thrust down people's throats, then nothing will be achieved. (Evaluator of community programming)
- “Working at higher levels can be done in a wide variety of ways. It cannot just be about hiding behind national governments. UNICEF needs to be clear about its own position and communicate it more clearly to others.” (Local NGO)
- There’s no continuity or flexibility. We can work on a training program with youth but later there will be no access to employment; you work on diagnosing community problems with children and youth, but then nothing is implemented, there is no programme or funds for that. Agencies work like that. It’s very difficult for groups like us because you generate expectations, and then you can’t bring about changes because it’s all based on voluntary work.” (Local NGO )

UNICEF itself acknowledges the administrative burdens for partners of collaboration and the fact that often CSOs are treated more like contractors than partners; it recognizes the need for a better understanding on its own part of appropriate modalities for engagement.<sup>166</sup>

At the other end of the partnership spectrum is UNDG and the One UN. UN coherence presents logistical challenges, as well as concerns for some within UNICEF regarding visibility and independence. As Barry points out, UNICEF will have to review its role and its relationships with partners to maintain its relevance and identity.<sup>167</sup> However, this is also an excellent opportunity to take a lead on some critical fronts. As pointed out in UNICEF’s May 2009 stocktaking report regarding UN coherence, if UNICEF is in the driver’s seat, things are more likely to move forward. To date, there has apparently been little time to discuss programming issues, but there is a commitment to “dynamic flexible programming”, building on the good practices of other agencies and disseminating lessons from the pilots that can be applied to all. UNICEF is also interested in pushing for briefer more strategic UNDAFs.<sup>168</sup> The implications for urban areas will be discussed further in later sections. One implication is certainly a more purposeful collaboration with UN Habitat on this front.

### Child Friendly City Initiative

The Child Friendly City work continues to be active within UNICEF, both by Country Offices and National Committees. The initial pledge by Italian mayors in 1990 in response to the CRC was followed by activity in a number of countries and the establishment of informal networks of mayors and child friendly municipalities, and the more formal establishment of Mayors Defenders of Children's Rights in 1992. In 2000, UNICEF and UN Habitat, jointly with the Italian government, set up the Child Friendly Cities Secretariat in Florence to support this

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<sup>166</sup> UNICEF (2009b).

<sup>167</sup> Barry mote 145.

<sup>168</sup> UNICEF (2009a).



growing network. Although the CFCI was visible and active, focusing on connections between rights, governance and participation, some within UNICEF have regarded it as a rather thin alternative to an investment in urban programming, or to a fuller organizational involvement at the local government level. This is in fact a valid comment: CFC is not in principle a programmatic initiative. It was initially positioned as an advocacy and capacity-building effort, meant to stimulate action, policy dialogue and networking of a more upstream nature regarding children in urban settings. Being based at IRC, the initiative was not aimed to provide direct technical support, even if this has happened in some cases e.g. for urban situation analysis, or operational support to the field in urban programming. Its key focus has been on capacity development and knowledge exchange regarding urban children, in developed as well as developing countries. . However, the connection from advocacy and mobilization to strengthened programming for children has worked significantly in many instances. The 'building blocks' from the CFC Framework of Action provide guidance for programming and have been contextualized and applied in different contexts and settings. Nevertheless, the strategic potentials has been limited by the lack of a mandate, human resources and budget to effectively support programme strategies for urban settings. Conflicting views and opinions persist within UNICEF regarding the initiative's role and potential for advocacy and programme strengthening within the agency's work

Despite fluctuations in staff and budget, there has been an interest in both in the concept and the establishment of child friendly cities, reflecting a need that doesn't go away. The principle of 'child friendliness' is readily accessible to a wide range of audiences and it holds appeal as a perspective to promote meeting children's needs and promoting their rights. This appeal is particularly recognized by National Committees, who utilize the initiative as a platform for local level child rights advocacy and civic engagement of children and young people. The preliminary stages of an evaluation indicate some form of involvement along these lines in about 40 country offices, some of them in the development stage – including Morocco, Syria, Costa Rica, South Africa, Kazakhstan, El Salvador, as well as some 15 National Committees, most prominently France, Italy, Spain and Switzerland. In 2008, for instance, Russia launched the initiative with a workshop that introduced over 100 representatives from interested Russian cities and regional authorities to key concepts. The initiative has begun in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Krasnodar and Ishvask, and first time partnerships being established with private companies should expand the funding base for the office significantly. In 2009, the UK NatCom launched a child-friendly communities programme as one of the pillars of their domestic advocacy work, and both the US Fund for UNICEF and the Canadian NatCom have begun piloting of a CFC initiative.

Iran's use of the CFC model in Bam to respond to the earthquake was especially impressive, as an example of how the model can be used as a platform for rethinking a city. UNICEF was invited by the Ministry of Housing's steering committee for the rebuilding process to collaborate in design guidelines for the new Bam, with the objective of making a whole town – housing, schools and public space – work well for children, and with the intent of using the guidelines and learning eventually for the whole of Iran. The process was highly participatory, involving children and adults. It also entailed a study tour to Curitiba in Brazil, coordinated by UNICEF staff from Iran and Brazil, for some of the key people involved in Bam, including representatives of ministries and local government. Yet the feeling currently within the country office is that not enough happened on the community development side, and that with the recovery effort over, coffers are empty, and not much is happening to sustain the focus for children. There is a

beautiful community centre, for instance, but no community organization to manage it, and it may end up becoming space for officials.

In early 2008, UNICEF Geneva, with ADAP and IRC, convened a consultation on CFC, concluding that a systematic effort was needed to increase the capacity for cities to assess and monitor their performance with regard to children. An operational research initiative is now underway to develop a package of participatory tools that can be used to assess a set of child rights indicators at community and local government levels. The use of these tools is expected to raise awareness on children's rights among communities and municipal stakeholders, and to mobilize communities in engaging in dialogue with local authorities. They are being designed to be adaptable to local conditions, and are currently being piloted in eleven countries.<sup>169</sup> Tools of this kind are, of course, only as strong as the process within which they are implemented, and it is to be hoped that ways are found to ensure that they can become flexibly used not only as barometers of local realities, but as drivers of local processes. The initiative may play a role that complements and facilitates systematic policy and programmatic action by strengthening local governance. This research is complemented by a comprehensive desk review on child friendly initiatives in Country Offices and National Committees, carried out jointly by UNICEF Geneva, ADAP and IRC.

### The lack of formal urban champions

While the point is well taken that an “urban section” should not be necessary in an organization that has no comparable “rural section”, the fact remains that in the absence of someone to push and support the more complex urban agenda, UNICEF has allowed this focus to slip. If there was an assumption, upon dismantling the urban section, that urban work would simply find its way within the organization's larger agenda, this has proven for the most part not to be true. India is a good example. A few years ago, an exploration was undertaken with the goal of establishing a reinvigorated urban programme in coordination with government; the resulting report made recommendations and laid out a clear plan of action, with the active interest of a national ministry. These plans did not go forward, however, and the current social policy officer, now re-exploring this engagement, said things collapsed when the in-house champions for this engagement left the office. If urban programming must rely on the chance presence of urban enthusiasts within a given office, it is not likely to be explored in a sustained way. There needs to be some presence within UNICEF of people versed in urban realities who can be counted on to coordinate, encourage and maintain momentum for these developments.

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<sup>169</sup> Information from Roger Hart, CERG, lead designer of these tools, Dora Giusti, IRC.

## UNICEF and urban water supply and sanitation

The WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Program, mandated to monitor progress towards the water and sanitation targets of the MDGs, reports that urban water supply coverage was 96 percent in 2006. However, this global figure masks the fact that a considerable number of poor urban residents lack improved water supply. JMP estimates show that the urban population relying on unimproved sources doubled from 29 million in 1990 to 57 million in 2006. In addition, many of the urban dwellers who are “covered” by improved water supply may actually be receiving very low levels of service, and this is especially true in slums, where water may be time consuming to collect and sources highly unreliable. A 2006 UN Habitat study in poor urban settlements in Kenya found that coverage dropped dramatically when quantity, cost and time taken to fetch water were taken into consideration.

Conditions are even worse where urban sanitation is concerned. Increases in urban sanitation coverage are not keeping pace with inflation; the number of urban dwellers using improved sanitation has risen by 779 million since 1990, but in the same period the urban population grew by 956 million. More than 158 million urban dwellers practise open defecation – and create, in densely populated urban settlements, an environmental and health crisis.

Many urban water and sanitation utilities are ailing, and struggle to serve their existing customers, much less extend service to the unconnected poor. However, there is considerable activity in this sector, with a multitude of actors, including the large development banks, offering assistance to utilities ready to reform and improve water supply systems. The urban sanitation sector, in contrast, is largely neglected. Not only is investment lacking, but technological solutions to the thorny problems of human waste management in dense settlements are scarce.

In this challenging context, a recent informal survey of UNICEF WASH programs found that about half of country programs have some urban WASH activities in their portfolios. Out of the 53 country programs responding (there are WASH activities in 101 countries in total), 45 have some sort of urban WASH activities. These are largely based on UNICEF’s traditional areas of expertise in emergency response, WASH in Schools, and behavior change (such as hygiene promotion). There is clearly interest in urban WASH programming, reflecting the growing awareness that in an urbanizing world, poor water and sanitation conditions in and around cities put children at risk.

### Results of informal survey of urban WASH activities in UNICEF country programs

<u>Subject</u>	<u>Number of Country Programs</u>
Service Provision	33 out of 45
Enabling Environment	41 out of 45
Behavior Change	45 out of 45
WASH in Schools	35 out of 45
Emergencies	33 out of 45
Plans for Future Urban WASH programming	36 out of 45

At a workshop on urban WASH programming held in October 2009, regional WASH advisors and the headquarters team discussed the areas in which UNICEF might have comparative advantage.

Resource people at the workshop provided evidence of the challenging nature of the urban water and sanitation sector, with a multiplicity of actors and often complex supply mechanisms (large piped

schemes, centralized treatment), high costs and complicated tariff structures which are often designed to assist the poor but achieve exactly the opposite. Recent moves in the sector are towards greater in technology and management, decentralized schemes, increased accountability, a range of options and overall a user perspective and improved understanding of the consumer, including the poor consumer. Innovations include the establishment of utility-supported commercial water kiosks to serve areas beyond the piped network; small, locally managed piped sub-systems, and privately managed pay-as-you go sanitation blocks.

Based on these presentations and the discussions around them, participants determined that UNICEF had a strong base for certain types of urban interventions, and as the survey had already shown, was in fact already significantly engaged in urban WASH.

UNICEF’s comparative advantages were determined to be:

**Hygiene and sanitation promotion:** strong capacity and experience from rural areas can be adapted to urban work and could be expanded to include issues such as water conservation; experience with community-based processes such as Community Approaches to Total Sanitation; UNICEF has recognized expertise in this area

**WASH in Schools:** ongoing schools programming provides a good entry point; caution is needed as many slums do not have formal schools so there is a risk of slum dwellers “missing out”

**Small towns and secondary cities:** UNICEF already has experience in small piped water systems in larger rural conglomerations, and small towns are a logical extension.

**Emergency response and disaster risk reduction:** UNICEF’s role as Cluster Lead and experience in emergencies provides opportunities, and these will become more significant as disaster vulnerability will increasingly be centred around urban areas; cholera outbreaks in urban areas provide urgency to promote sanitation

**Advocacy:** UNICEF has an important role to play advocating for improved WASH for children in urban areas, including a focus on the poor and vulnerable; we can also identify gaps and provide data and analysis

**Coordination:** UNICEF has a unique ability to bring stakeholders together and should use its strong reputation to bring about inter-sectoral collaboration; UNICEF can focus on learning opportunities and help bring information in

It was felt that UNICEF must continue to work from its comparative advantage, rather than trying to branch out into entirely new areas of work, and that it was important to be pragmatic in terms of what the agency can and cannot take on in this challenging sector.

#### UNICEF Areas of Comparative Advantage

Utility reform	Little, except for informed advocacy
Expansion of piped networks in large cities	Little
Expansion of piped sewerage networks	None
Establishment of new small piped systems	Some in small towns
On site sanitation: public, private	Significant
Hygiene promotion in urban areas	Significant
WASH in urban schools	Significant

## 4. Some Promising Programme and Policy Directions

### 4.1. Children's rights and local development

A critical role for UNICEF in the context of the particular challenges of urban work is bridging the gap between local governments and the urban poor. In most urban settings, local government controls many of the realities that define local poverty, that constrain the capacity of the poor to address their own condition, and that contribute to the violation of children's rights. This is not to call into question the importance of many centrally controlled interventions; the diversity of institutional arrangements within different countries suggests that there is no universal blueprint for making a difference for children and their families. Mexico's flagship *Oportunidades* cash transfer programme, for instance, has efficiently and transparently reached 5 million poor households through its centralized management operation.

However, government responsibilities in most countries are increasingly decentralized, and much of what the poor require – schools, healthcare, water and sanitation, land (or land tenure), social safety nets, the rule of law, getting onto voter registers – must be obtained from local departments and agencies. Meeting most of the MDGs depends on more effective, accountable local structures. Many barriers to poverty reduction are local – local power structures, land owning patterns and anti-poor politicians, bureaucracies and regulations. The outer rings of the ecology of urban poverty are also critical. Creating the decent living and working environments and supportive social fabric that underpin the rights of urban children and adolescents means a concern with policy and advocacy at the highest level. But it is essential that this be translated to realities at the local level.

The CRC recognizes the ecology of children's rights. It requires states to provide the institutions, services, support and facilities that allow families to care adequately for their children,<sup>170</sup> acknowledging thereby that children's rights will be most sustainably addressed if they are taken up with commitment and capacity by the adults in their families and communities. UNICEF's Mid-Term Strategic Plan clearly supports this recognition, stressing the importance of “empowering and building capacities among the poorest families and communities” (17b), “promoting intersectoral approaches that address the situation of children in a coherent and protective manner; and facilitating national and local alliances in both the public and private sectors to achieve results for children.” (24).<sup>171</sup> The significant synergies between children's rights and successful community development need to be taken into account no matter what the arena of organizational activity.

Many development practitioners, including many UNICEF staff, are strong believers in the power of local engagement, local partnerships and integrated area-based responses to poverty. For all of the messiness and complexity of this kind of development work, the literature and experience on the ground tend to support these approaches to urban poverty and to the challenges facing children in urban poverty. Vertical outcome-driven initiatives are tidier, easier to manage, can more easily be taken to scale, and many people see them as more cost effective. They

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<sup>170</sup> The obligations for states are considered to extend to all levels of government.

<sup>171</sup> UNICEF (2005).

undoubtedly *are* more cost effective in terms of measurable outcomes. But if the harder-to-measure impacts are considered – the learning, the ripple effects, the synergies, the sustainability, the improved relations between the poor and local government bodies, the capacity of local communities to monitor governance, the genuine “development” of the poor – then they are probably not the most effective use of resources.

These approaches are not incompatible however. Sectoral expertise and support are essential in a sectorally organized world, and can also create the platform for more integrated responses. Creating the links between a vertical, results-oriented framework and a model that enlarges the scope for self-determination among the urban poor means doing what UNICEF does best – brokering relationships, leveraging resources, promoting enabling policies, finding ways to translate sectoral knowledge and funding into integrated responses at the community and district level, strengthening the capacity of actors at different levels, amassing relevant information, helping effective experiences go to scale. UNICEF’s multidimensional nature gives it a unique advantage, within the larger UNDAF context, in terms of convening support for integrated responses – a playing card that it has perhaps not been using to full advantage.

The arguments in favor of sustained support to locally-driven, locally-based, integrated development are familiar:

*Integrated* – because both poverty and children’s development are multidimensional phenomena, and these dimensions are so interdependent. Objectives cannot as reasonably be achieved in isolation, since change in one area affects change in others. Also many of the issues of poverty that most profoundly affect boys and girls are not considered to be children’s issues, but need to be addressed in ways that take children’s needs into account – housing, tenure, livelihoods, basic service provision among them. Sectoral responses, even to “children’s issues” may be most efficient for those delivering them, but they fail to address the full range of children’s rights, and the contextual quality of poverty. *Sectoral responses need somehow to be embedded within an integrated framework – as they were for instance within UBSP*, however modest this framework might have been.

*Area-based* – because the ecology of children’s poverty must be considered; because local areas are the scale at which sectoral and integrated responses can best be articulated; because both problems and strengths vary locally, and because the most effective solutions take account of this variation. Although the level of need may not be consistent within a community, the identification of deprivation and of the most practical responses can happen most effectively at the local level, along with the implementation of these responses. *Some of the most effective large-scale urban poverty reduction programmes have achieved scale by developing a funding framework that supports dozens or hundreds of ‘area based’ initiatives.*

*Community-driven* – because local people, with appropriate support and tools, are best able to identify the issues that affect them and the solutions that are likely to work (or not to work); because community ownership is the best guarantee of long term success; because failing to take advantage of local knowledge, skills and energy is a waste of a critical resource; because far from being an obstacle to going to scale, the involvement of communities in their own development and in their children’s development, is the only way, in the absence of ample resources, to ensure that solutions CAN go to scale. The urban poor have been addressing their

own problems for a long time in the absence of support from government. It makes logical sense to build on what they are doing. Ownership by communities can also help to address the incoherence that frequently results when responsibility is divided between different government agencies that do not coordinate their efforts. Lessons have been learned but forgotten on this front. In the words of one experienced urban practitioner: *“nothing will work if new concepts, structures and methodologies are introduced at the local or municipal level from outside without the momentum and ideas coming from the local community/local government and without the absolute commitment on the part of local and central government to maintain and fund them in the future.”*

*Sustained* – because genuine and lasting change seldom happens within the confines of a project cycle. There are any number of interesting, innovative programmes and projects for urban children or for addressing urban poverty, but most of them do not put down roots. Racelis and Aguirre make this observation: *“Limited programs with top-down approaches all too often rest on their laurels once they have some results.”*<sup>172</sup> Flawed initiatives are often scrapped rather than fixed ... there is little genuine effort to build on learning from mistakes. The lack of staying power is frequently related to the funding cycles of donors or agencies. *Communities need sustained support and small amounts of funding – not short term large scale projects.*<sup>173</sup>

*In partnership with local government* – because efforts by NGOs, agencies, the poor themselves, have the greatest chance of successfully going to scale when they are rooted in strong partnerships with local government; because local government is the responsible body for most of the interventions required by the urban poor and because it is impractical and shortsighted to create parallel systems where it is possible to strengthen formal systems. *There are many examples of locally-driven actions by urban poor organizations and federations that increase in scale and effectiveness as governments begin to see them as part of the solution rather than the problem.*

Support for these kinds of approaches, whether upstream or through pilots on the ground, may not be considered practical everywhere. The experiences and history within country offices, the presence of strong partners, the local culture of participation, make it a more do-able proposition in some places than in others. The level of organization, staying power and flexibility necessary for genuinely community driven initiatives can be daunting. There is certainly as much evidence about the difficulties of this kind of work as of its value. Political realities within many urban slums, for instance, including clientelism, vote buying and intimidation, can obstruct and undermine efforts towards control by the poor over their own lives. Violence and insecurity can also discourage people from involving themselves in the public domain. Practically speaking, however, these *should* be reasons for encouraging community building, not for avoiding it, since organized communities are essential to resisting coercion and countering violence. Community organization is also fundamental to effective poverty reduction, local development, the sustained realization of children’s rights, and in the end, the capacity to go to scale. But even when this level of partnership appears unworkable, there are elements that can be incorporated.

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<sup>172</sup> Racelis, Mary and Angela Desiree M. Aguirre. (2005).

<sup>173</sup> Burra, Sundar and Sheela Patel (2002); Boonyabanha, Somsook (2009).

## 4.2. Making space for the urban poor

There is copious evidence within the literature, and numerous examples within UNICEF programming and beyond that point to the effectiveness of responses that incorporate some of these features. Here I will list some promising approaches that can help create the *space* for these kinds of responses and that could productively be built on by UNICEF, or supported in ways that highlight the implications for children and adolescents, or enhance the capacity to deliver for this age group. Many of these approaches have obvious project-level implications, but should not be viewed simply from this perspective, any more than UNICEF's pilot projects should be viewed in isolation from the policies they are intended to influence and inform. Slum upgrading, for instance, or efforts to address eviction, if they are to be undertaken at a larger scale, require significant upstream support, whether through influencing policy and resource allocations, strengthening policy implementation, or facilitating the kinds of partnerships and joint efforts that are most relevant.

### Supporting pro-poor age-sensitive local government

Appropriate support for local government must be defined by local realities – including the size of the urban area, the extent of decentralization and local government responsibility, the relationship between national and local government, and the existing degree of commitment to addressing poverty. There is a considerable difference, for instance, in the complexity of dealing with a city of 15 million and one of 150,000; or between attempting to move a local authority towards a recognition of the urban poor as citizens with rights and collaborating with an already committed government in its efforts to undertake child impact assessments or more pro-poor regulatory systems.

A number of initiatives on the part of donors and multilaterals have undertaken to strengthen local government and its capacity and willingness to deliver for the poor and for their children. Within UNICEF itself for instance, the Municipal Seal of Approval in Brazil (and now in other Latin American countries) managed through incentives and at little cost to stimulate more extensive and effective municipal attention to a range of concerns. The Latin American/Caribbean joint initiative between UNICEF and UNDP, *Gobernabilidad Local y Derechos de la Niñez*, is working to “*produce systematic knowledge and management tools that contribute to sustaining recommendations for governmental counterparts and the civil society on how to formulate and implement local policies in favour of the child and the adolescent.*”<sup>174</sup> Through the Cities Alliance, a number of development partners are collaborating with a network of local governments to help them link economic growth to poverty reduction and slum upgrading. Whether by convening partnerships with other layers of government, other multilaterals, or grassroots federations; by helping to develop local plans of action and budgets that take children's rights into account; by developing effective strategies for more adequate information systems or by advocating for rights-based responses to such issues as land development, support to local government structures and processes can have a considerable impact on the urban poor.

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<sup>174</sup> <http://www.infanciaygovernabilidad.org/red/>.



A persistent challenge is that in many situations municipal governments still have only a limited role in some key sectors or have designated roles that are far beyond their capacities. This affects the ability to design and implement a cross-sectoral, integrated approach without bringing in the central government line ministries. In the MENA region for example this is a common reality. This and other challenges faced in local governance, including the lack of control over budget allocations from the central level, must be acknowledged. UNICEF's work in Mexico City is encouraging in this regard. Despite the size and complexity of the city and the range of government players with different political loyalties, UNICEF was able to support productive collaboration in ensuring access to education for the most excluded

Another challenge where children are concerned is to persuade even the most positive municipal authorities (or other partners) that what is called for is a system-wide change in perspective rather than a separate project.<sup>175</sup> Especially in the realm of children's and adolescents' involvement in local governance, it is easy for "children's councils", for instance, to become more a showcase project than a genuine and practical conduit for the particular perspectives of young people. In Nepal the UNICEF country office notes, regarding a child friendly local governance effort in the city of Biratnagar, "*They see the CFLG like an additional program and not as an approach that involves mainstreaming this in the governance process policies systems and processes.*"<sup>176</sup> This problem calls for the promotion of networks of cities engaged in similar processes, allowing for the kind of exchange, mutual support and developing awareness that can spur progress. CFCI is a natural platform for this. It also requires perhaps a different initial mind set – not how can we promote children's councils, as much as what is the most effective means within a particular setting to ensure that the perspective of children and young people is taken into account. There are such a wide range of possible approaches.<sup>177</sup>

### Local funds and related mechanisms

Local funds and other mechanisms like participatory budgeting and community-based cash transfers are some of the effective ways that have been and are being explored for delivering resources directly to communities for local and often small scale pro-poor projects. Household level cash transfers are turning out to be an effective means for addressing poverty, with significant benefits for children.<sup>178</sup> Many of the deprivations of urban poverty, however, cannot be addressed by individual households – waste collection, street lights, drainage and water quality are just a few examples. Community-based transfers and local social funds can give communities the space to identify and debate their shared needs, appropriate solutions, and effective use of available resources, allowing greater flexibility and continuity than most projects provide, and building organizational capacity on the ground.<sup>179</sup> One good example is the funds available to slum communities for upgrading in Thailand through a government initiative. Support is provided to community organizations for thousands of community-driven local

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<sup>175</sup> See for instance Bartlett, note 148.

<sup>176</sup> UNICEF Nepal (2009).

<sup>177</sup> See the papers within the special 2005 issue of Children, Youth and Environments on local governance, [http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/15\\_2/index.htm](http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye/15_2/index.htm).

<sup>178</sup> A few examples from this burgeoning literature are Köhler, Gabriele, Marta Cali and Mariana Stirbu (2009); Soares, F V, R P Ribas and RG Osório (2007); Bariantos, A and J DeJong (2004). It is also worth noting the research on the particular challenges facing cash transfers in urban areas.

<sup>179</sup> See for instance Poverty Action Lab (2009); also SEWA (2009).

projects, but also to their networks, to allow them to work with city authorities and other local actors and national agencies on city-wide upgrading programmes.<sup>180</sup> Another is the Urban Poor Funds set up by federations of slum dwellers in many nations which manage some of their savings and through which external funders can support their work.<sup>181</sup>

Local foundations are a similar mechanism, with the emphasis on the structure rather than funds. Graca Machel makes the case: “*African solutions cannot emerge without organizations that are not dependent on programme funding and deadlines... Because of its closeness to local communities and understanding of the local context, a local foundation can respond to the needs and priorities of communities more effectively. Foundations in Africa are not just grantmakers but also capacity builders, advocates, conveners – convening other donors to look for solutions to pressing issues. The agenda will be set at home and the response will be found at home. So I see foundations, particularly endowed foundations, as strategic instruments that will enable Africans to make their own choices about how Africa meets the challenges of African development.*”<sup>182</sup>

### Responses to the precariousness of informality

A fundamental feature of life for so many in urban poverty is the reliance on, and the precariousness of, informal solutions to most aspects of life. Initiatives that respond to the survival strategies of the poor, while protecting them from some of the negative impacts, are integral to poverty reduction and the realization of children’s rights. Attempts to address and respond to forced eviction, or the threat of forced eviction, at both national and local levels, whether by international rights bodies and networks or by more local groups, have often resulted in reprieves for the poor, or at least in planned relocation that involves far less upheaval. In Mumbai, for instance, extensive negotiations resulted in 60,000 railroad dwellers avoiding bulldozing, and managing their own relocation with government support.<sup>183</sup> The more allies the poor have in pushing for equitable solutions, for bringing child friendly standards to the fore, the more successful they are likely to be. What serves low-income communities best are local governments that make clear their commitment to avoiding evictions and to supporting upgrading.

There are also many solutions to insecure tenure that build on what is locally practical. Overly simplistic responses to the tenure issue have received broad acclaim, in particular. De Soto’s argument for individual legal titles have also been shown to backfire – for instance, legally titled land can be subject to market pressures, titles can fail to produce the promised benefits with regard to access to credit, and they disadvantage the poorest squatters and tenants.<sup>184</sup> Systems of collective or community land tenure can offer greater protection to the poorest and prevent market-driven displacements. There are numerous examples of the success of such approaches,<sup>185</sup> and they could well be explored, advocated and supported at the highest levels,

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<sup>180</sup> Boonyabancha, Somsook (2009).

<sup>181</sup> Mitlin, Diana (2008a).

<sup>182</sup> Interview with Graca Machel, Alliance Magazine, September 2003, <http://www.alliancemagazine.org/en/content/interview-graca-machel>.

<sup>183</sup> Patel, and Bartlett, note 139.

<sup>184</sup> Payne, Geoffrey, Alain Durand-Lasserve and Carole (2009).

<sup>185</sup> Boonyabancha, Somsook (2009); Nkurunziza, E (2007).

with an emphasis on the fundamental relationship between the issue of tenure and the realization of wide range of children's rights.

Informality with regard to livelihoods is a double edged sword for many urban dwellers – vulnerable young female and male migrants and refugees among them. Regulatory changes could make informal workers, including children and adolescents, less vulnerable to harassment, exploitation and insecurity.<sup>186</sup> Better access can also be provided to formal supports, such as savings accounts, assured protected space for vending or informal markets, sanitary facilities on the street, supportive policing. This again could involve project level work, but more important is the kind of influence at policy and regulatory levels that could promote these kinds of changes.

### Community-led data collection and monitoring

Community-based data collection is one effective way to supplement the shortcomings of routine data sets. Enumerations by poor urban communities, for instance, have provided detailed demographic data and maps that can build the information base necessary for upgrading as well as providing communities with the information to advocate for their needs with local government.<sup>187</sup> There are many examples of such enumerations, especially within the urban poor federations of Slum Dwellers International, which over time have evolved simple robust shared approaches to collecting and managing data, clarifying, for instance, who lives within a community, how long they have been there, what work they do in the city, and mapping and numbering shacks and facilities. Communities undertaking enumerations are assisted by experienced federation members from other places – sometimes even from other countries when new groups are being established. All groups joining the federation routinely undertake a survey like this, a concrete way to identify and understand their shared needs, and to build a joint presence.<sup>188</sup> Although methods are simple, the realities faced may be quite complex. Karanja, for instance, describes some of the considerable challenges that can be faced by enumeration efforts in volatile situations where there are conflicting interests, and some of the strategies for addressing them.<sup>189</sup> The information collected through participatory approaches like this, as well as through more qualitative surveys, can be organized and combined with more traditional datasets through data management systems such as Urban Info or other adaptations of Dev Info, as is currently being done with Child Friendly City action research.

Important to recognize here is the contribution that new, but now reliable and low cost technology and techniques, could bring to better documenting, understanding and planning services for urban areas. These technologies are especially relevant for those living in unmapped informal settlements. Mapping using handheld GPS units, for instance, can rapidly improve how both planners and urban populations understand the actual situation in terms of demographics, location of people and services and specific risks and resources. An example is the mapping effort recently undertaken by OpenStreetMap with local young people in Kibera, the huge slum in Nairobi.<sup>190</sup> This technology makes it possible for volunteers worldwide to create public digital

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<sup>186</sup> For instance, Sankaran, Kamala (no date).

<sup>187</sup> Glöckner, Heike and Meki Mkanga (2004); Patel, and Bartlett, note 139.

<sup>188</sup> There are numerous other examples in the journal *Environment and Urbanization*; a few are Muller, Anna and Diana Mitlin (2007); Weru, Jane (2004).

<sup>189</sup> Karanja, Irene (2010).

<sup>190</sup> <http://www.mapkibera.org/blog/>.

maps of their communities. Most recently some of these volunteers have been undertaking to use their experience to map Port au Prince slums in the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake.<sup>191</sup> Care must be taken, however, that initiatives of this kind do not encourage a tendency by government or development partners to contract out such efforts to consultants, removing ownership from local people. One of the strengths of enumeration by organized community groups is what it contributes to the local capacity to negotiate with government and international agencies. There are equally strong examples of community-led monitoring on a number of fronts – whether on the status and well being of children,<sup>192</sup> or the effects of various kinds of service delivery or community development programming.<sup>193</sup> When monitoring is a community process, it encourages reflection and ownership, promotes accountability, allows for a better understanding of what works, and can significantly improve outcomes.<sup>194</sup> Even approaches not driven by communities can be useful when they allow for local opinion: an interesting mechanism is the concept of a citizen score-card for urban governance, like that developed in China with support from the World Bank, with input from UNICEF.<sup>195</sup>

### Participatory slum upgrading

There can be numerous benefits to upgrading initiatives – over and above the obvious improvements to health, comfort and dignity. Upgrading homes with provision for piped water, sanitation, solid waste collection and electricity improves the efficiency and scope of household enterprises. Better infrastructure, especially drainage, can reduce the risks from flooding and storms, and be a critical part of adaptation to changing climate conditions.<sup>196</sup> Involving local residents can build the strength of local organization. In addition to the many other advantages of involving local communities in this process, there is relevance for many child protection issues. There is a natural synergy between the focus on local physical conditions and other challenges that face children and their families. Discussions of housing, schoolyards, roadways, community toilets, local space can provide concrete entry points into discussion of many other concerns, some of them quite sensitive. Conversations with groups of women about crowding and privacy, for instance, can become frank discussions of the roots of abuse in the home. Discussion of streetlights relate to concerns about safety in the community. Children often find discussion of their physical surroundings to be an unthreatening window into other worries – the embarrassment of using school latrines that are exposed to public view, the desire of older girls to have some quiet place outdoors where they can hang out with friends, the fact that punishing schedules do not permit time for play.

### The complementarities between good local governance, pro-poor development and adaptation to climate change

Good development is the core of climate change adaptation – in part because in the near future, climate change risks are mostly increases in risks that are already present. Many of the vulnerabilities to disaster in urban areas, and to changes that climate change is likely to bring,

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<sup>191</sup> <http://www.openstreetmap.org/>.

<sup>192</sup> Racelis, Mary and Angela Desiree M. Aguirre. (2005).

<sup>193</sup> Storti, Charlotte (2004).

<sup>194</sup> For example, Bjorkman, Martina and Svensson, Jakob (2007).

<sup>195</sup> Brix, Hana (2009).

<sup>196</sup> Satterthwaite et al note 130.

especially for the urban poor, are underpinned by failures of development and the incapacity of local governments to ensure provision for infrastructure and disaster-risk reduction. There are a number of places where innovative urban policies and practices are showing how effective adaptation to climate change can be built into local development plans, which involve, among other things, a recognition of the disproportionate vulnerability of the unserved urban poor, and of the links between longer term adaptation and equitable service provision and infrastructure.<sup>197</sup> Capitalizing on the developmental implications of adaptation means another avenue and rationale for building local government capacity and promoting constructive relationships between local government and the urban poor.

### Child impact assessments

As mentioned a number of times, many of the policies, services and interventions that critically affect children are not designed with a view to these particular impacts. From macro-economic policies to local road works, impacts for boys and girls of different ages can be profound. Child impact assessments are too rarely undertaken, but can be a valuable corrective, and one of the few routine ways to ensure that this particular lens is brought to bear. Recent work within UNICEF, for instance, describes the use of child impact assessment in evaluating the potential implications of electricity tariff increases, and points to the importance of getting children's perspectives, and ensuring that opinions come from diverse group of children and youth – including the most marginalized.<sup>198</sup> These authors explain that, while the Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended the use of child impact studies to respond the principle of best interests, little has been done to translate this recommendation into practically effective tools.

## 5. Recommendations

Inevitably, recommendations of this sort are generic in nature. The wide range of situations within which UNICEF works and the corresponding diversity of responses make it difficult to provide specific guidance. These specifics will ideally be explored and worked out at regional and country levels. One of the more fundamental concerns is the way in which increased attention to urban can best fit into UNICEF's larger agenda. It appears to be generally accepted that a separate programme area for urban is not desirable or useful in a world that is half urban, but that ways be found to integrate these efforts into the more general priority to address exclusion and deprivation. The way this integration plays out in different regions and country offices, however, will have to reflect a range of concerns that cannot realistically be addressed here.

### 5.1. Starting with what's happening

It makes a lot of sense to start with what UNICEF is already doing – uncovering the wealth of urban examples, sharing the learning and enhancing support for successful efforts. This includes attention to the copious urban research, evaluations and explorations that the organization has

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<sup>197</sup> See for instance Ayers, Jessica (2009); Roberts, Debra (2008).

<sup>198</sup> Krieger, Yulia Privalova and Erna Ribar (2009).

undertaken in a number of countries, pulling it together as Sarah Martelli did recently for West Africa.<sup>199</sup> A good initial approach might be to include in the annual report requirements a request that country offices reveal and describe any specific urban work, approaches, challenges, advocacy etc. in the interests of supporting a re-exploration and invigoration of urban responses. Small regional consultations could review programme experience and documentation. More detailed comparative case studies could also indicate how country offices have responded to similar challenges in different settings – a comparison, as noted, of Brazil’s adaptation of the Municipal Seal of Approval in Rio and Sao Paulo, with the Ho Chi Minh city’s adaptation of the Provincial Child Friendly Programme could be very informative – as could a detailed study of the Indian and Filipino country offices, both with a strong UBSP background, both having undertaken an evaluation of current urban realities, and both committed to moving forward on this front. Another useful approach to consider could be more of the kind of exchange that occurred when country offices facilitated a study visit from Bam to Curitiba.

## 5.2. Data, knowledge, situation analysis, monitoring

It’s important to address the need for better disaggregated and location specific urban data to allow for improved urban situation analyses and well targeted interventions. It is too easy right now to take refuge in the averages that disguise the depth of urban exclusion. MICS, for instance, could be modified to include questions that are currently missing (for instance “how long have you lived here?”), and the current practice of selecting some cities for a closer look could be expanded. Some country offices have the opportunity, also, to influence national census taking, or to introduce disaggregated urban dimensions into sectoral surveys. The guidelines for the Global Study on Child Poverty and Disparities could provide better support for the use of disaggregated intra-urban data wherever this does exist – and for an acknowledgement of the shortcomings of average results where it does not, or perhaps for an annex synthesizing what information is available on the poorest urban communities, to provide some sense of the depth of poverty.

Building on processes that already exist makes good sense. An explicit urban dimension, for example, could be included in the SitAN Guidelines. The detailed survey of informal settlements in Nairobi undertaken by the African Population and Health Research Centre, which yielded the information in figure 1, for instance, was all the more powerful and informative for policy because it was designed to fit within the framework of the national Demographic and Health Survey. Part of the developing urban platform in Brazil, which involves community mapping, including interactive websites, also links as far as possible with public databases and monitoring systems.<sup>200</sup> Wherever possible, new technologies and the innovative use of these technologies should be capitalized on.

Other avenues that could be explored include the community-led enumerations and comprehensive city wide surveys mentioned above,<sup>201</sup> which have been used not only to fill the huge gaps in routine data collection, but at the same time to empower the poor and strengthen their capacity to negotiate with local authorities. These enumerations could be drawn from for

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<sup>199</sup> Martelli, Sarah note 164.

<sup>200</sup> Conversation with Victoria Rialp.

<sup>201</sup> Weru, note 163; Patel, Sheela, Jockin Arputham, Sundar Burra and Katia Savchuk (2009).

more complete situation analyses in specific cities; they could also be supported and built on to include more child specific information, or serve as an entry point for partnership with these important networks. The Child Friendly City research initiative could provide additional tools for this purpose. Besides offering an approach to discussing and assessing priorities for children by empowering children and communities, if applied on a larger scale – for instance, within all schools in a city - it would allow for quantification of data which may not be otherwise available at that level.

Another valuable contribution would be finding ways to enhance the potential utility of vast amounts of information routinely collected by different local institutions. For example, health units may keep records based on where children are treated, but not where they live, making it impossible to relate provision of water, sanitation or other local environmental conditions to the incidence of certain illnesses. The Brazil country office currently has an agreement with government to strengthen a national public health database that would include this kind of information. Finding ways to support and encourage community led monitoring as a routine component of service delivery would also be a productive way to acquire relevant information while helping local communities to build their own capacity and the accountability of local government and other service providers.

Integral to an improved analysis of the urban scene is an understanding of municipal responsibilities and capacity to respond within given cities, and in particular their stance and responses with regard to poorer sections and informal settlements. This understanding is critical to the potential for UNICEF's country offices to engage in dialogue and advocacy around pro-child and pro-poor urban policies, planning, budget allocations and implementation. The toll being designed by CFC to develop for assessing local governance could be very helpful on this front.

### 5.3. Make more strategic and productive use of the Child Friendly Cities Initiative

CFC can be an excellent portal for engagement with local authorities and other local partners. The mid-term review suggests strengthening partnerships with municipalities to promote “Child Friendly Cities”.<sup>202</sup> It might equally suggest strengthening CFC to promote stronger partnerships with municipalities. Too often CFC can be regarded as a sideline to UNICEF's “real” work, and as less serious. This is an approach with proven appeal, it is highly visible, and it can be an entry point both conceptually and politically and an effective approach to leveraging limited resources. It's an excellent platform for linking advocacy and programme agendas, and for encouraging a positive relationship between marginalized communities and local authorities. Negotiating around eviction is an important example – no child friendly city can countenance forced eviction, and networks of child friendly cities could be critical allies on this front. Child impact assessments in such areas as budgets, public works, transport, disaster preparedness, utilities, could also take place under this umbrella. The CFC “building blocks” together with the participatory community and governance assessment tools that are currently being developed and piloted provide a framework within which communities can negotiate with local authorities,

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<sup>202</sup> UNICEF (2008a).

ideally backed by the credibility of UNICEF. They offer a fine opportunity for linking a research agenda with advocacy, local empowerment and support for integrated programming, all with a focus on children and their rights. The same is true for such related initiatives as the Municipal Seal.

#### 5.4. Responding to the risks related to climate change for the urban poor

For the hundreds of millions who contribute little or nothing to climate change, but who will suffer most from its consequences, adaptation is the critical focus. In cities with large proportions of the population in congested and underserved urban areas this poses particular challenges. Adequate housing, infrastructure, health, education and livelihoods are critical determinants of adaptive capacity. Reducing climate change risks is as much about changing relationships between the underserved poor and local government as it is about any strategy to fund protective infrastructure. It is critical that the new institutional and funding arrangements for climate change adaptation recognize this; there is huge pressure to become far more effective at ensuring good development for urban poor. A vital role for UNICEF, aside from humanitarian relief, is helping to draw attention to the adaptation needs of the urban poor and their disproportionately vulnerable children, and to the synergies between adaptation, successful local development and the rights of children and adolescents. Children do not currently figure much in the emerging adaptation agenda. Important aspects, for instance, are the very high dependency ratio in many of the most vulnerable settlements, and the value of stressing preparedness – which can mean ensuring that girls and boys are healthy and well fed enough to withstand shocks, and that the coping strategies of their families and communities are able to take children’s immediate and longer term needs into account. There are other synergies that could be explored too – are there ways for instance to tap the resource represented by unemployed young people in urban adaptation efforts? <sup>203</sup> Government is most likely to respond proactively to longer term adaptation needs if this also addresses other currently pressing development problems.

#### 5.5. Purposeful engagement around urban realities with other agencies and organizations

While UNICEF is engaged in numerous productive partnerships with other international agencies and organizations, collaboration on issues pertaining to urban children and youth could be more resolute and proactive. For instance, the well known housing rights agency, COHRE, has in the past had a UNICEF staff person on its advisory board, but only to consider the appropriateness of language on children in its publications, not to collaborate on more substantive issues, such as eviction policies at national and sub national levels. UNICEF could well push for more systematic and focused attention in a number of areas – for instance, considering with WHO how standards for “improved” provision of water and sanitation might be adapted to reflect the realities of high density in poor urban settlements; supporting the World Bank’s integrated work within urban slums; working with UNESCO and other partners to address the crisis in education within many urban slum areas; drawing on its credibility and experience to help UN Habitat develop its Youth Opportunity Fund; working with the very

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<sup>203</sup> See for instance an adaptation matrix developed for climate change responses that address the concerns for urban children -- Bartlett, S note 133.



wide range of partners involved in urban youth initiatives to coordinate their efforts. UNICEF's proven capacity to bring partners to the table could play a vital role in catalyzing more focused and integrated attention to the critical concerns faced by the growing population of poor urban children and adolescents. Engaging with some of the larger development partners "can be hairy" as one UNICEF retiree put it. But the fact that UNICEF, has the mandate to work with civil society as well as having a holistic, multi-dimensional focus, makes it the ideal driver for coherent UN strategies that address the crisis of urban poverty in energetic and collaborative ways.

## 5.6. Include grassroots networks and federations of the urban poor

UNICEF can be most effective playing an upstream role within the urban arena if it has strong partners on the ground. Broadening the network of partnerships to include groups and federations of the urban poor is entirely compatible with UNICEF's strategic framework for collaboration.<sup>204</sup> These networks have a nascent commitment to children that is often not spelled out. UNICEF could accept the challenge of partnering with these groups, helping explore with them demonstrable actions that can be added to what communities do (for example, using the tools that CFC is developing, as discussed in 6.3), and this can form the basis for dialogue with city and state. The trick is to keep the engagement light and carefully calibrated, not trying to drive the agendas of these groups but finding ways to provide the support necessary to help these networks do what they are best equipped to do, to expand their vision of what is possible, to provide the necessary support for them to more explicitly include boys' and girls' perspectives. UNICEF's engagement on this front would also be an important acknowledgement of the citizenship and capacities of the urban poor. A first step, whether at municipal or national level, would be to scope out the effective actors and find out what they are doing. An excellent platform for starting to pursue this could be involvement with the Cities Alliance, members of which include Slum Dwellers International, along with a network of local governments, a number of national governments and several multilaterals.

## 5.7. Systematic engagement with adolescents and youth

The large and growing population of urban adolescents and youth, male and female, presents both a challenge and an opportunity for UNICEF. This age group faces numerous threats and difficulties in the context of urban poverty – including the lack of suitable educational and training opportunities, high unemployment rates, the absence of appropriate and gender specific health services, the potential for exploitation and abuse, and the violence that impedes opportunity and security. The survival and protection challenges for young migrants are a particular concern. These young people also represent a significant and largely untapped resource in the efforts to address urban poverty, and it is widely accepted that a genuine engagement in solving local problems can have a significant protective effect. The particular contribution that this age group can make is well documented – whether as contributors to household survival or to broader community efforts. They have a fund of knowledge about local realities and a particular and valuable perspective to bring to bear. But it is also important that opportunities for engagement take young people's time and energy seriously– they can react with

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<sup>204</sup> UNICEF (2009b).

cynicism to token efforts to involve them. Opportunities should as far as possible be built into on-going governance structures and processes, or integrated into larger community development efforts – as opposed to being isolated short term projects that may wither when support is withdrawn,

There is considerable scope here for UNICEF’s involvement and capacity to convene and coordinate; while an increasing number of agencies and organizations are focusing attention on the “youth problem” and while there is growing recognition that this may more productively be seen as a “youth dividend,” there is little coordination in the multiplicity of efforts. Of particular interest would be the potential for UNICEF to help negotiate space and opportunity within local governance structures for a more active role for young people, building on, collaborating with and systematizing the many useful precedents that already exist – including for instance UN Habitat’s Youth Opportunity Fund; or collaborating with urban poor federations to explore the systematic and meaningful inclusion of young people. It has been pointed out that UNICEF’s attention to adolescents should go beyond those in poverty, since even more affluent young people are exposed to violence, organized crime, drug smuggling, drug and alcohol abuse, HIV and other problems, and since they in the near future will be the people who play a lead role in the policies, economy and social decisions of their countries.

## **5.8. Explore the gap between organizational priorities and constraints, and the strategies that work best for the urban poor**

Many organizations with a theoretical commitment to supporting the involvement of the poor in improving their own situation face a dilemma. Most agencies need control over the agenda they are pursuing, with clearly established, pre-planned objectives and outcomes within set time frames. This can conflict with the reality that genuine lasting solutions move slowly, respond to opportunities and challenges as they come along, build on learning and relationships developed over years. “Participation” of community members within the development world, and certainly within UNICEF, more often refers to creative projects, such as journalism for children or appearances at high level events for youth, than it does to the opportunity for the poor to help determine policy and action around the realities of their everyday life. Taking participation seriously means finding ways for it to move from being a programme “deliverable” to becoming the underpinning for real partnerships. This might mean an uncomfortable abdication of control. But it can be explored in small and careful ways.

## **5.9. Local children’s funds**

Consider, on this front, new modalities for stimulating child and adolescent sensitive engagement and initiative at community level, that are compatible both with UNICEF’s organizational constraints and its need for some visibility, as well as with the proven strategies of the poor. An example would be support for city based “children’s funds” that build on the learning from such related initiatives as local funds, community-based cash transfers, participatory budgeting etc, and that permit scope for collaboration among higher level partners.<sup>205</sup> Although this is presented

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<sup>205</sup> It’s worth a reminder that the World Bank planned a regional fund of this sort several years ago as part of the MENA-based urban Child Protection Initiative, with the objective of being able to respond rapidly to the risks faced by vulnerable urban children in the region.

here as a “new” modality, in fact it hearkens back to the innovative use of block grants in Indonesia’s UBS programme. As Cousins describes it: “They proposed that in the budget there should be a small sum of money under the heading of ‘block grants’, which could be used to support flexibly a variety of self-help activities originating from the people themselves. While the proportion of the budget was small, the importance of this kind of institutionalized flexibility was enormous. It amounted to a legitimization of the use of ‘unprogrammed funds’ to support self-help activities. It also meant that as other UNICEF offices began to start UBS projects, they could always cite the precedent of ‘block grants’ in Indonesia to justify ‘unprogrammed funds.’”<sup>206</sup> (p 48)

A children’s fund would differ from other models in being specifically earmarked for initiatives to improve the lives of local boys, and girls, with the assumption that this age group would be involved, along with adults in their communities, especially caregivers, in determining priorities. While these priorities might involve amenities or services specifically related to children – such as improved play space, safe ways to get to school, or a youth centre – this wouldn’t necessarily be the case. Experience indicates that when children and adolescents are involved in decisions about local priorities, they often point to things like covering open drains, improving community toilets, installing street lights, finding solutions to waste collection, planting trees. Small, easily accessible amounts could stimulate a lot of activity, which could in turn encourage horizontal learning and exchange, and the incorporation of children’s and adolescents’ participation into broader community development. This kind of fund could quite easily be a component of CFC initiatives, or of such approaches as Brazil’s Urban Platform.

## 5.10. Urban expertise

Although UNICEF may not need an urban section to pursue more systematic urban work, it needs people with urban experience and commitment, probably at regional level, to encourage and support efforts in this direction. The often expressed need for support in this area from country offices is unlikely to be met through publications or directives, but will require staff that can distill learning, bring people together, encourage engagement, and provide momentum when attention flags.

These are some initial and partial recommendations that will ideally spur discussion among people with a far better sense than I have of the possibilities and practical limitations within the organization. I look forward to being part of that discussion

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<sup>206</sup>Cousins, note 157.

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