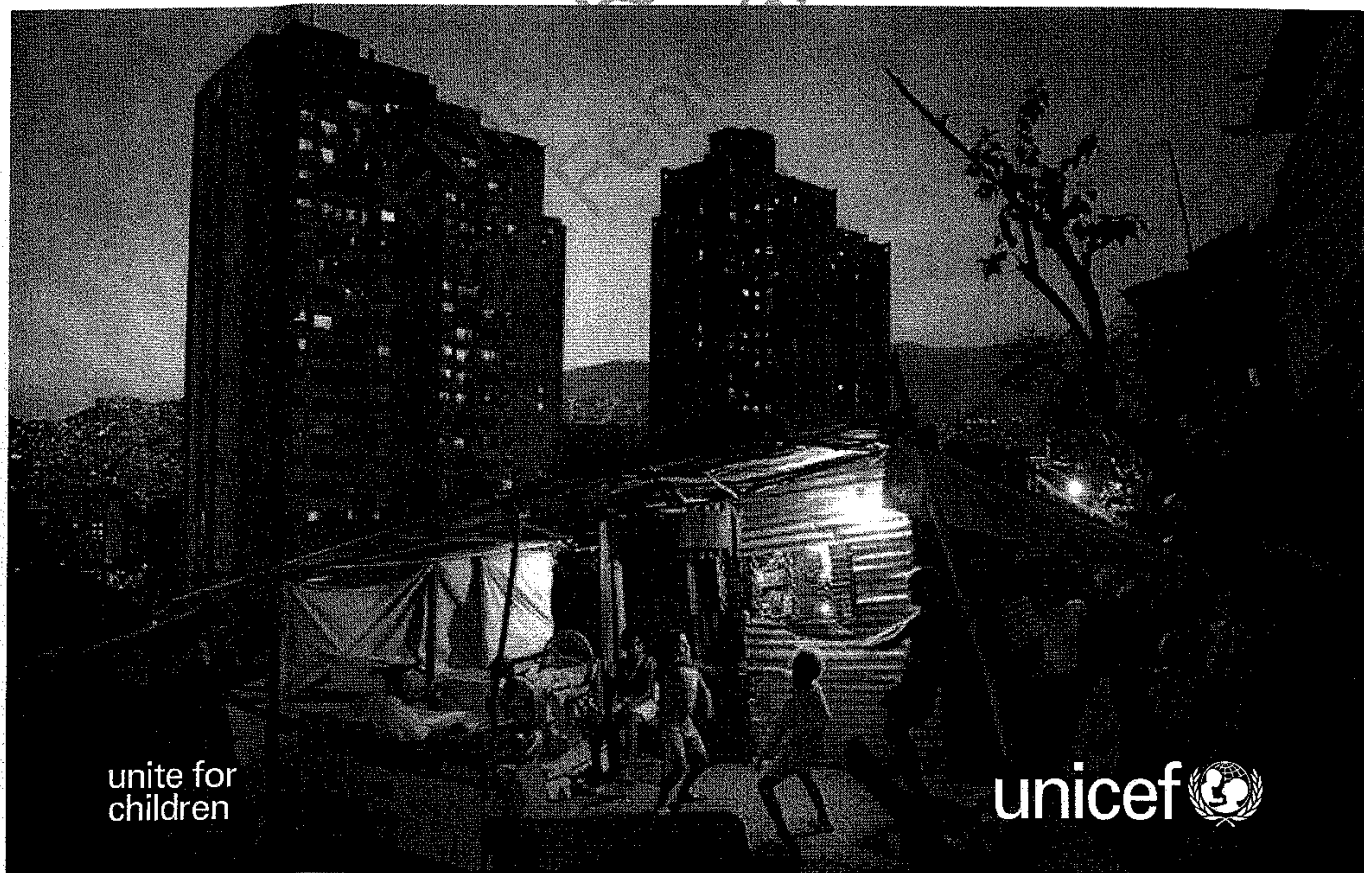


THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2012 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children in an Urban World



THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S CHILDREN 2012

CHILDREN IN AN URBAN WORLD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key recommendations

Increasing numbers of children are growing up in urban areas. They must be afforded the amenities and opportunities they need to realize their rights and potential. Urgent action must be taken to:

1. Better understand the scale and nature of poverty and exclusion affecting children in urban areas.
2. Identify and remove the barriers to inclusion.
3. Ensure that urban planning, infrastructure development, service delivery and broader efforts to reduce poverty and inequality meet the particular needs and priorities of children.
4. Promote partnership between all levels of government and the urban poor – especially children and young people.
5. Pool the resources and energies of international, national, municipal and community actors in support of efforts to ensure that marginalized and impoverished children enjoy their full rights.

These actions are not goals but means to an end: fairer, more nurturing cities and societies for all people – starting with children.

Introduction

The experience of childhood is increasingly urban. Over half the world's people – including more than a billion children – now live in cities and towns.

While cities have long been associated with employment, development and economic growth, hundreds of millions of children in the world's urban areas are growing up amid scarcity and deprivation. *The State of the World's Children 2012* presents the hardships these children face as violations of their rights as well as impediments to fulfilling the Millennium Development Goals. The report examines major phenomena shaping the lives of children in urban settings, including migration, economic shocks and acute disaster risk.

Progress is possible. *The State of the World's Children 2012* provides examples of efforts to improve the urban realities that children confront and identifies broad policy actions that should be included in any strategy to reach excluded children and foster equity in urban settings riven by disparity.

Children in an increasingly urban world

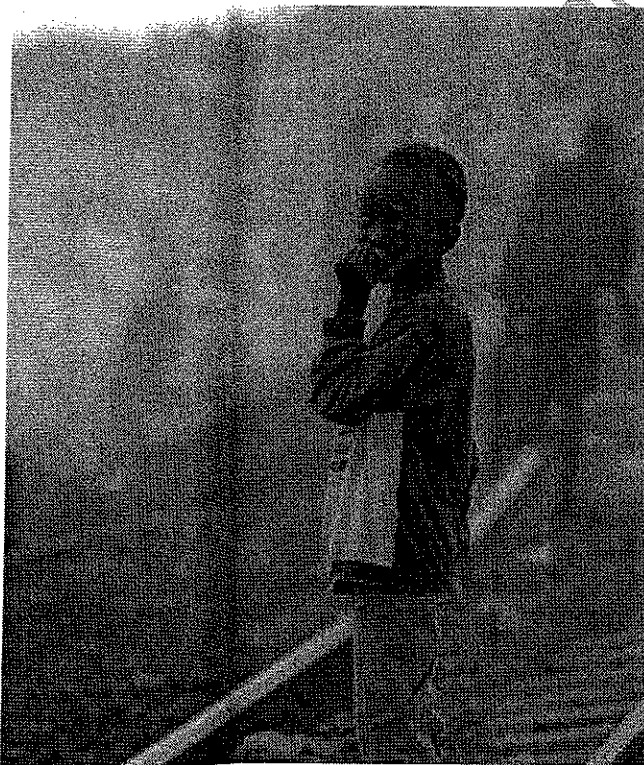
Every year, the world's urban population increases by about 60 million. By 2050, 7 in 10 people will live in cities and towns. Most urban growth is taking place in Asia and Africa. Migration from the countryside has long driven urban expansion and remains a major factor in some regions. But the last comprehensive estimate, made in 1998, suggests that children born into existing urban populations account for around 60 per cent of urban growth.

Many children enjoy the advantages that urban life offers, including access to educational, medical and recreational facilities. Too many, however, are denied such essentials as clean water, electricity and health care – even though they may live close to these services. Too many are forced into dangerous and exploitative work instead of being able to attend school. And too many face a constant threat of eviction, although they already live under the most challenging conditions – in ramshackle dwellings and overcrowded settlements that are highly vulnerable to disease and disaster.

The hardships endured by children in poor urban communities are often concealed – and thus perpetuated – by the statistical averages on which development programmes and decisions about resource allocation are based. Because averages lump everyone together, the poverty of some is obscured by the wealth of others. One consequence of this is that children already deprived remain excluded from essential services.

Where detailed urban data are available, they reveal disparities in children's rates of survival, nutritional status and education resulting from unequal access to services. All over the world, hundreds of millions of children in impoverished urban neighbourhoods and informal settlements confront daily violations of their rights despite living close to institutions and services. In many countries, children living in urban poverty fare as badly as, or worse than, children living in rural poverty when it comes to undernutrition and under-five mortality.

The urban experience is all too often one of poverty and exclusion. About one third of the world's urban population lives in slum conditions, and in Africa that proportion is greater than 60 per cent. Some 1.4 billion people will live



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

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

in informal settlements and slums by 2020. The difficulties the poor face are exacerbated by such factors as illegality, limited voice in decision-making and lack of secure tenure and legal protection. Exclusion due to poverty is often reinforced by discrimination on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, race or disability.

Not all of the urban poor live in slums, and not every inhabitant of a slum is poor. Nevertheless, slums are an expression of, and a practical response to, deprivation and exclusion. Denied proper housing and security of tenure by inequitable economic and social policies and regulations governing land use and management, impoverished people resort to renting or erecting illegal and often makeshift dwellings.

Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions facilitate the transmission of disease – notably pneumonia and diarrhoea, the two leading killers of children younger than 5 worldwide. Outbreaks of measles, tuberculosis and other vaccine-preventable diseases are also more frequent in these areas, where population density is high and immunization levels are low.

In addition to other perils, people living in slums frequently face the threat of eviction and maltreatment, including from authorities intent on 'cleaning up' the area. Evictions cause major upheaval and can destroy long-established economic and social systems and support networks. Care must be taken to minimize the extent to which the reality and fear of displacement disrupt children's lives.

Children and adolescents are among the most vulnerable members of any community and will disproportionately suffer

from poverty and inequality. In addition to poor and marginalized children in slums, children living and working on the streets, those who have been trafficked and those engaged in child labour deserve special attention and targeted solutions.

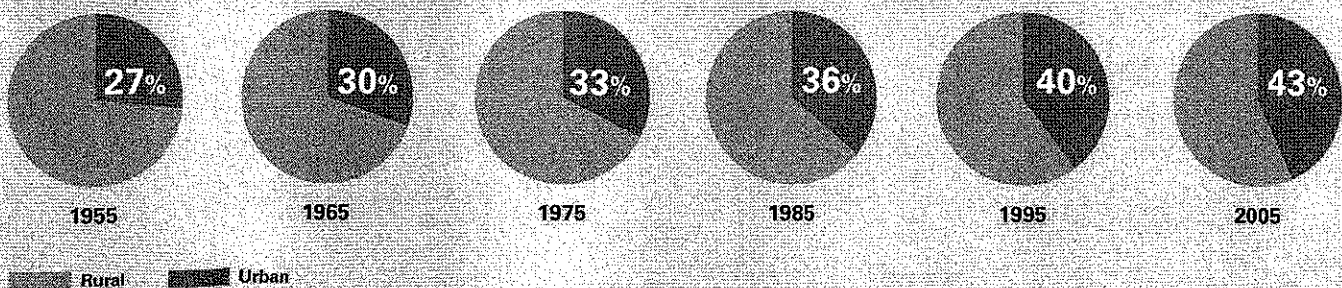
A focus on equity demands that priority be given to the most disadvantaged children, wherever they live. Children's rights cannot be fulfilled and protected unless municipal and national governments, donors and international organizations look beyond the broad averages of development statistics and address the poverty and inequality that characterize the lives of so many children in cities throughout the world.

What is 'urban'?

The definition of 'urban' varies from country to country and, with periodic reclassification, can also vary within the same country over time. This makes direct comparisons difficult. An urban area can be defined by one or more of the following: administrative criteria or political boundaries (the area within the jurisdiction of a municipality or town committee, for example), a threshold population size (where the minimum for an urban settlement is typically in the region of 2,000 people, although this varies globally between 200 and 50,000), population density, economic function (where a significant majority of the population is not primarily engaged in agriculture, or where there is surplus employment), or the presence of such urban characteristics as paved streets, electric lighting or sewerage. In 2010, 3.5 billion people lived in areas classified as urban.

Almost half of the world's children live in urban areas

World population (0–19 years old)



Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), Population Division.

Children's rights in urban settings

Children living in urban settings have the full range of civil, political, social, cultural and economic rights recognized by the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international instruments. These rights include survival; development to the fullest; protection from abuse, exploitation and discrimination; and participation in family, cultural and social life.

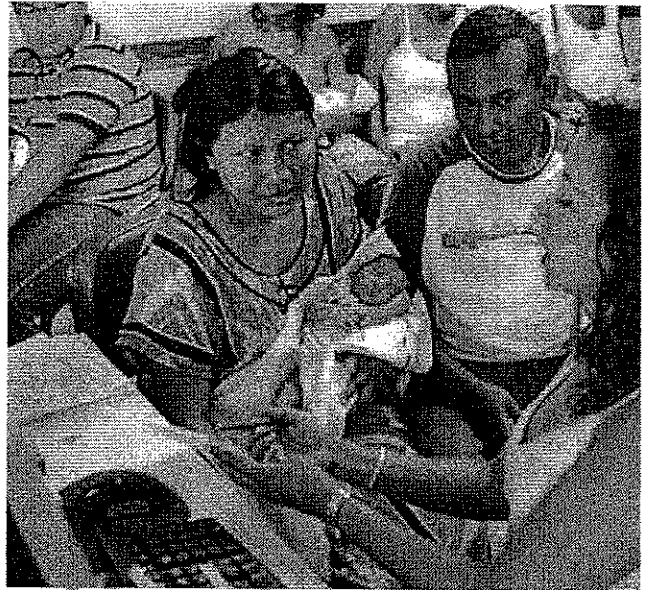
Children's rights are not realized equally. Over one third of children in urban areas go unregistered at birth. This is a violation of Article 7 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and can lead to further violations, because the lack of an official identity impedes children's access to vital services and opportunities and increases their vulnerability to such forms of exploitation as forced labour.

Those children whose needs are greatest also face the greatest violations of their rights. The hardships children endure in urban areas may include hunger and ill health; substandard housing; poor access to water and sanitation; and insufficient education and protection.

Inadequate living conditions are among the most pervasive violations of children's rights. Without decent and secure housing and such infrastructure as water and sanitation systems, it is so much more difficult for children to survive and thrive. There is no enjoyment of health within a contaminated environment, and no effective right to play without a safe place to play.

Health and nutrition

Article 6 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child commits States parties to "ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child." Article 24 invokes every child's right to "the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health." While urban areas are home to the majority of modern health facilities, too many children who live in the vicinity are nonetheless deprived of even rudimentary services.



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An indigenous Wayuu woman holds her newborn daughter in Maracaibo City, Zulia state, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. The family is participating in the Ministry of Health Trio por la Vida programme, which promotes birth registration, breastfeeding and immunization.

Sum: The five deprivations

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) defines a slum household as one that lacks one or more of the following:

- **Access to improved water**
An adequate quantity of water that is affordable and available without excessive physical effort and time
- **Access to improved sanitation**
Access to an excreta disposal system, either in the form of a private toilet or a public toilet shared with a reasonable number of people
- **Security of tenure**
Evidence or documentation that can be used as proof of secure tenure status or for protection from forced evictions
- **Durability of housing**
Permanent and adequate structure in a non-hazardous location, protecting its inhabitants from the extremes of climatic conditions such as rain, heat, cold or humidity
- **Sufficient living area**
Not more than three people sharing the same room

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Nearly 8 million children died in 2010 before reaching the age of 5 – most from pneumonia, diarrhoea or birth complications. In urban areas, high concentrations of poverty combine with inadequate services to drive up child mortality.

Lower levels of immunization lead to more frequent outbreaks of vaccine-preventable diseases in communities that are already more vulnerable owing to high population density and a continuous influx of new infectious agents. Global vaccine coverage is improving but remains low in slums and informal settlements.

More than 350,000 women died in pregnancy and childbirth in 2008, and every year many more sustain injuries that can turn into lifelong, ostracizing disabilities. Many such deaths and injuries can be averted if expectant mothers receive care from skilled professionals with adequate equipment and supplies, and if they have access to emergency obstetric care. Urban settings provide proximity to maternity and emergency services – but access, use and quality are, again, lower in poorer quarters.

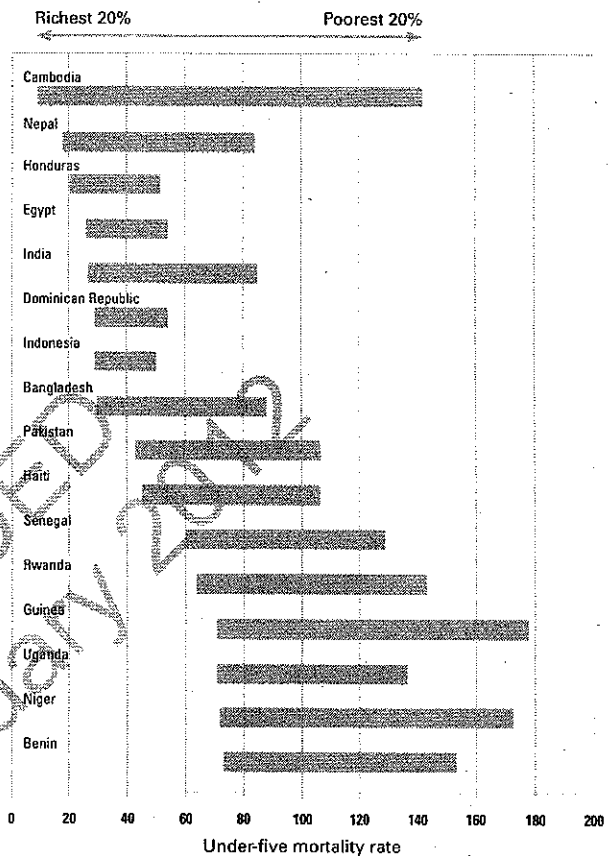
Hunger and undernutrition wear an increasingly urban face. The number of the poor and undernourished is increasing faster in urban than in rural areas. Even the apparently well fed – those who receive sufficient calories to fuel their daily activities – can suffer the ‘hidden hunger’ of micronutrient malnutrition: deficiencies of such essentials as vitamin A, iron or zinc from fruits, vegetables, fish or meat. Without these micronutrients, children are at increased risk of death, blindness, stunting and lower IQ. Poor nutrition contributes to more than a third of under-five deaths globally.

Every year, polluted indoor air is responsible for almost 2 million deaths among children under 5 years of age. The use of hazardous cooking fuels in badly ventilated spaces – common in low-income settings – is among the factors contributing to the problem. City life also exposes children to high levels of outdoor air pollution.

In addition to spewing toxic exhaust fumes, vehicular traffic also represents a physical threat to children – one heightened by a lack of safe play spaces, sidewalks and crossings. The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates that road traffic injuries account for 1.3 million deaths annually worldwide. These injuries are the leading single cause of death among people aged 15–29, and the second for those aged 5–14.

Wealth increases the odds of survival for children under the age of 5 in urban areas

Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births) in urban areas in selected countries (right end of bar indicates average under-five mortality for the poorest quintile of the population; left end indicates that for the wealthiest quintile)

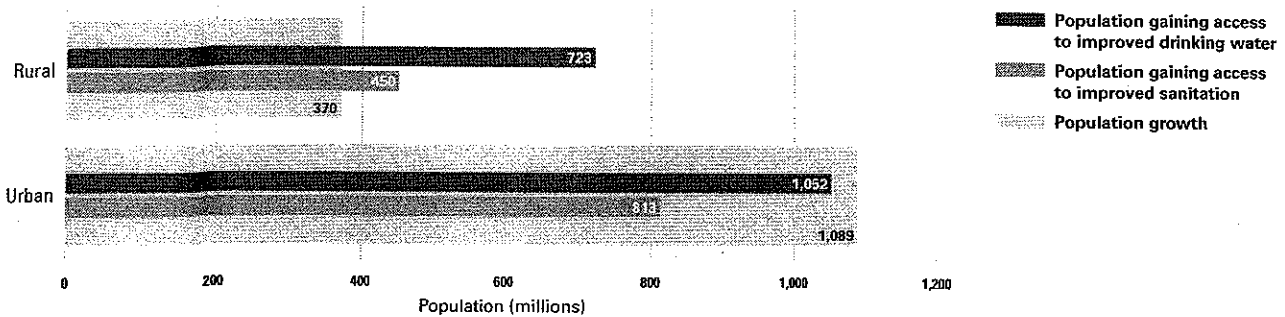


Source: WHO estimates and DHS, 2005–2007. Countries were selected based on availability of data.

Recent data suggest that new infections with the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) are decreasing amid improvements in access to services preventing transmission of the virus from mother to child during pregnancy, labour, delivery or breastfeeding. About one fourth as many cases of HIV infection among children are believed to have occurred in 2010 as in 2005. Despite this progress, about 1,000 babies a day were infected through mother-to-child transmission in 2010. A further 2,600 people aged 15–24 were infected per day that year, mainly as a result of unprotected sex or unsafe injection practices. HIV prevalence remains generally higher in urban areas.

In urban areas, access to improved water and sanitation is not keeping pace with population growth

World population gaining access to improved drinking water and sanitation relative to population increase, 1990–2008



Source: WHO/UNICEF Joint Monitoring Programme, 2010.

Water, sanitation and hygiene

Under the Convention on the Rights of the Child, “the highest attainable standard of health” extends to providing clean drinking water and eliminating the dangers of environmental pollution. Unsafe water, poor sanitation and unhygienic conditions claim many lives each year, including an estimated 1.2 million children under the age of 5 who die from diarrhoea.

Taken together, urban dwellers worldwide enjoy better access to drinking water and sanitation than people living in rural areas. Even so, water and sanitation coverage is struggling to keep pace with urban population growth. Access often entails long queues and high costs. Without access to mains, the urban poor often pay up to 50 times more for a litre of water than their richer neighbours. Sanitation also remains a major issue – as urban populations increase, so does the number of people practising open defecation. That number rose by 20 per cent between 1990 and 2008. The impact of open defecation in densely populated urban settlements is particularly alarming for public health. Where public sanitation facilities exist, they are frequently overcrowded, poorly maintained and contaminated; special provision for children is rare.

Congested and unsanitary conditions make urban slums particularly high-risk areas for communicable diseases. Without sufficient access to safe drinking water or an adequate water supply for basic hygiene, children’s health suffers. Improving access and service quality will be vital to reducing child mortality and morbidity.

Education

In Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, States parties recognize children’s right to education and commit to “achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity.” But urban inequalities undermine children’s right to education. In urban areas blighted by poverty, ill health and poor nutrition, early childhood programming is often notable by its absence. This is lamentable because the first few years have a profound and enduring effect on the rest of a person’s life. By one estimate, in developing countries, more than 200 million children under 5 years of age fail to reach their full cognitive potential.



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

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Inequalities – based on parental income, gender or ethnicity, for example – persist in grade school despite the progress many countries have made in pursuing universal primary education. As of 2008, 67 million primary-school-aged children were still out of school, 53 per cent of them girls. Again, urban areas show pronounced disparities in the amount of schooling children receive. In countries as diverse as Benin, Pakistan and Tajikistan, the gap in total years of schooling between the richest and poorest 20 per cent of the population has been found to be greater in urban than in rural areas.

Urban areas are home to diverse groups, including ethnic minorities, refugees, internally displaced people and children who may be living or working on the street. Care should be taken to extend suitable educational options to those children who speak a different language, lack official registration or have had their schooling interrupted.

Especially in slums, where public education options are scarce, families face a choice between paying for their children to attend overcrowded private schools of poor quality or withdrawing their children from school altogether. Even where schooling is free, ancillary expenses – uniforms, classroom supplies or exam fees, for example – are often high enough to prevent children from attending school. A recent survey of Sao Paulo, Brazil; Casablanca, Morocco; and Lagos, Nigeria, showed that families in the lowest income quintile spent more than a quarter of their earnings on children's education. For all the expense and hard work that go into them, young people's educational achievements all too often fail to result in suitable employment. Creating career opportunities for youth in urban areas – and tailoring training to match available vacancies – must be a priority.

Child protection

Child protection begins with birth registration. Ensuring that all children are registered and documented must be a top priority because, however ardent the efforts to promote equity, the fruits of these efforts are likely to elude children who lack official documents. Over a third of all births in urban areas are not registered, and that proportion is closer to 50 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Article 19 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child commits States parties to “take all appropriate legislative,

administrative, social and educational measures to protect the child from all forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse.” Article 32 addresses economic exploitation and hazardous work, Article 34 targets sexual exploitation and Article 35 focuses on trafficking.

At any given time, nearly 2.5 million people are in forced labour as a result of trafficking – an estimated 22 to 50 per cent of them children. Even in the absence of trafficking, many children are forced to work to survive. About 215 million girls and boys aged 5–17 were engaged in child labour in 2008, 115 million of them in hazardous work.

Estimates also suggest that tens of millions of children live or work on the streets of the world's towns and cities – and the number is rising with global population growth, migration and increasing urbanization. Living on the street exposes children to violence, yet crimes against them are rarely investigated, and few people are prepared to act in their defence. In fact, many countries and cities have outlawed vagrancy and running away from home, and children living or working on the street often become the principal victims of such criminalization. Researchers, national bodies and international human rights groups have reported that police and security forces have abused children on the streets of cities all over the world.



A five-year-old girl sells goods to commuters on a train in Buenos Aires, Argentina. She has been working in the city's mass transit system selling hairpins and other products since she was 3 years old.

Urban challenges

Migration

Children play no part in creating social hierarchies, classes or castes. They are born into deeply unequal societies and live out their lives hampered (or, in the case of a privileged few, aided) by collective perceptions, conventions and stereotypes. It is easy to regard them simply as victims of forces beyond their control. But as they grow, children often play an active role in shaping their lives.

While most child migrants move with their families, accompanying parents or caregivers seeking employment or opportunity, a significant proportion of children and young people move within their countries on their own.

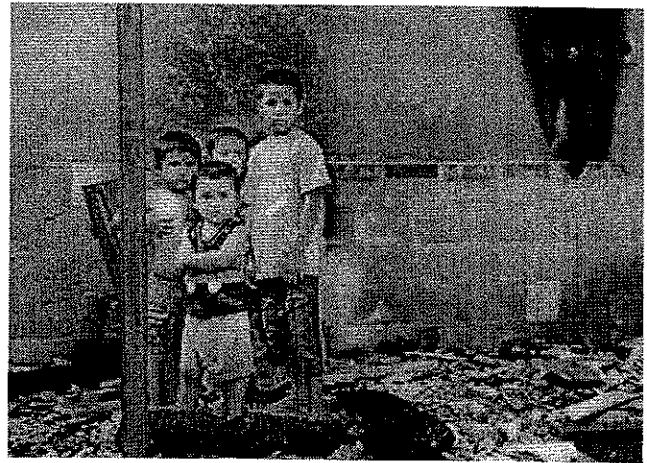
Like adults, children migrate for many reasons. Some move to secure better livelihoods or educational opportunities, or simply to escape poverty. Others move to escape conflict or disasters and the upheaval and food shortages that accompany them. Family circumstances, such as the loss of a parent or an unstable or difficult situation at home, often play a role.

Be it forced or voluntary, migration entails risks that require age-appropriate measures to protect the children involved. Children who migrate unaccompanied by adults are particularly vulnerable to exploitation, abuse and trafficking. Similar predations may await children who are, or who move with, refugees or internally displaced persons. More than half the world's registered refugees live in urban settings.

All too often, young people who arrive in urban areas with hopes of educational advancement find it unattainable because they need to work, and their jobs are too demanding to permit them to attend school.

Economic shocks

The effects of the economic crisis unleashed in the financial capitals of high-income countries in 2007 continue to be felt around the world in high unemployment, deteriorating work conditions, dwindling real incomes, and food and fuel prices that are high and difficult to predict. The poor are especially vulnerable to rising food and fuel prices because they already spend 50–80 per cent of their money on food.



Brothers, aged 3–9, stand in the burnt-out ruins of their home, where they continue to live with their parents following ethnic violence in the city of Jalal-Abad, Kyrgyzstan, June 2010.

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Globally, there were 30 million more unemployed people in late 2010 than before the crisis broke, and the number continued to grow in 2011. The burden is disproportionately borne by workers aged 15–24. In an economic downturn, youth unemployment can fuel upheaval. Young people frustrated by a lack of economic opportunity accounted for a significant proportion of demonstrators in the protests that spread across North Africa and the Middle East in 2011.

Statistics on youth unemployment tend to be weak, partly because many young people work outside the formal sector. Nevertheless, evidence suggests that the global economic crisis has swelled the ranks of the 'working poor' – a category in which young people are overrepresented – and slowed progress in poverty reduction, education and health care. Governments have an obligation to protect the poorest and most vulnerable children and young people from such adverse effects.

Urban violence

Crime and violence affect hundreds of millions of children in urban areas. Some are targets and others, participants or witnesses. Early exposure to a violent environment can undermine children's faith in adults and the social order and can also impede children's development. Those growing up amid violence display poor academic performance and higher school dropout rates, as well as anxiety, depression, aggression and problems with self-control.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The causes of violence are many and complex, but prominent among them are poverty and inequality. High rates of crime and violence often arise where provision of public services, schools and recreational areas is inadequate. A study of 24 of the world's 50 wealthiest countries confirmed that more unequal societies are more likely to experience high rates of crime, violence and imprisonment.

In many parts of the world, urban gangs made up entirely or partly of young people are known for committing crimes ranging from extortion to armed robbery and murder. On average, children join gangs around age 13, but evidence suggests that the age of gang initiation is falling. In marginalized urban settings, such groups lure young people with the prospects of financial reward and a sense of belonging.

Successful strategies to prevent violence involve all levels of the community and serve to strengthen ties among children, families, schools and other institutions, and local and national governments.

Disaster risk

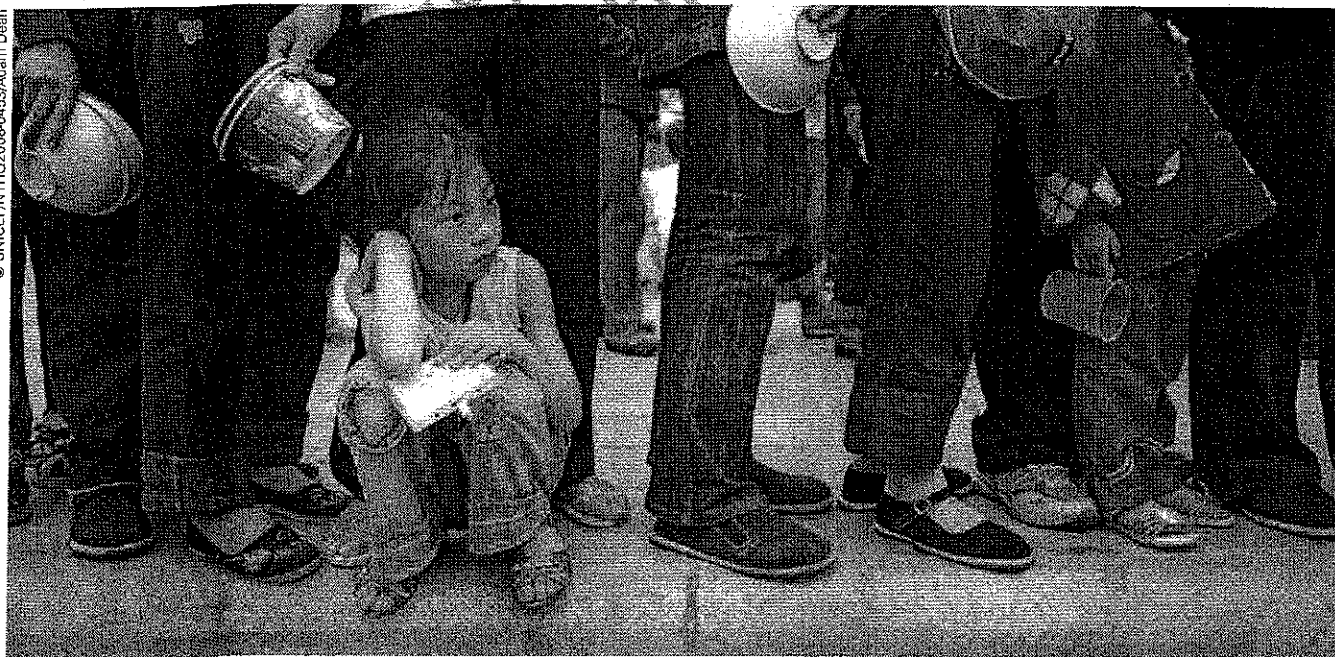
For millions of children, urban poverty is complicated and intensified by exposure to such hazards as cyclones, floods,

mudslides and earthquakes. Since the middle of the twentieth century, recorded disasters have increased tenfold, the majority stemming from weather-related events. Vulnerable locations and great concentrations of people can make cities especially dangerous. Children are among the most susceptible to injury and death.

Disasters take a particular toll on urban residents who live in precarious circumstances and are ill-equipped to prepare for, or recover from, extreme events. Children of the urban poor tend to live in flimsy homes built on the least desirable land: on slopes susceptible to landslides, on low ground that is easily flooded or near industrial waste sites, for example. Moreover, poor health and inadequate nutrition leave children more vulnerable to the effects of environmental shocks.

Recent years have seen the emergence of initiatives aimed at reducing disaster risk. The Hyogo Framework for Action, endorsed by 168 governments in 2005, calls for enhancements in communities' and countries' resilience. And experience from Southeast Asia and the Caribbean shows that efforts to reduce local risks have succeeded by tapping the knowledge and perspectives of community members and disaster survivors – children in particular.

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Queuing for food at a camp for people displaced by the 2008 earthquake in the city of Mianyang, Sichuan Province, China.

Uniting for children in an urban world

Hundreds of millions of children and young people struggle to subsist in the same cities where political, cultural and commercial elites live in comfort. Too many spend their childhoods working rather than going to school, and living under threat of eviction or on the street, where they are at risk of violence and exploitation. Too often, urban environments are not designed with children in mind – nor are children and adolescents invited to participate in shaping them.

Nearly half of all children already live in urban settings. As their number increases, the following urgent action is required to promote their development and secure their rights.

1. Improve understanding of the scale and nature of urban poverty and exclusion affecting children.

The tools of data collection must be honed to more precisely reflect disparities in children's situations and to help determine which children and families are most marginalized.

Greater disaggregation of urban data must be accompanied by solid research and evaluation of interventions intended to advance children's rights to survival, health, development, sanitation, education and protection in urban areas.

To be effective, information must be disseminated widely and analysed to expose causality and to enable effective responses to inequality and exclusion. And more must be done to understand how poverty and exclusion evolve and affect children in urban environments – and why these deprivations persist from generation to generation.

2. Use the improved understanding of exclusion to identify and remove the barriers to inclusion that prevent marginalized children and their families from using services and enjoying such core elements of citizenship as legal protection and security of housing tenure.

Discrimination, income poverty, direct and indirect costs, poor transportation and lack of official documents are among the factors precluding access to available urban services. Coverage can be enhanced through more equitable policies, such as abolishing user fees, setting up

The Millennium Development Goals

The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) cover a spectrum of issues, including poverty and hunger, education, child survival and maternal health, gender equality, HIV/AIDS and the need to build a global partnership for development. Progress towards achieving the goals is measured against 21 specific targets.

MDG 7 contains the commitment to ensure environmental stability. One of its urban facets, Target 11, aims to have achieved a significant improvement in the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. This is also known as the 'Cities without Slums' initiative. In addition to environmental concerns and a specific focus on urban slums, MDG 7 also contains a commitment to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Although one of the targets of MDG 7 is dedicated specifically to slum dwellers, the goals should be seen as a continuum of development priorities. The lives of people in the world's slums cannot

improve substantially without concerted action to eradicate poverty and hunger (MDG 1); achieve universal primary education (MDG 2); promote gender equality and empower women (MDG 3); reduce child mortality (MDG 4); improve maternal health (MDG 5); combat HIV/AIDS (MDG 6); or create a global partnership for development (MDG 8).

Evidence suggests that national approaches to slums are moving away from negative policies such as neglect, forced eviction or involuntary resettlement towards more positive approaches such as community engagement, slum upgrading and rights-based policies. Nevertheless, the number of slum dwellers worldwide has increased by 60 million since Target 11 was established in 2000.

Slums are the physical manifestation of the urbanization of poverty. Growing numbers of urban dwellers are poor, and inequality in the urban sphere shows no signs of abating. Future international targets will have to take into account the expanding scale of the problem.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

community partnerships and enhancing the promotion and use of services. Innovative efforts including conditional cash transfers have proved successful in a number of Latin American and African countries. Identifying the bottlenecks specific to each urban setting helps target interventions to promote equity.

3. Maintain a sharp focus on the particular needs and priorities of children in urban planning, infrastructure development, service delivery and broader efforts to reduce poverty and disparity. Age, ability and gender must be taken into account.

The international Child-Friendly Cities Initiative provides an example of how children's rights can be integrated into urban governance. Enhanced accountability must be the cornerstone of these efforts. Too many municipal governments are prepared to accept the status quo, which often involves vast, unplanned informal settlements that fail to meet residents' needs.

The agenda must also encompass protection – from violence, drug abuse and vehicular traffic, for example. Notable international initiatives include Safe and Friendly

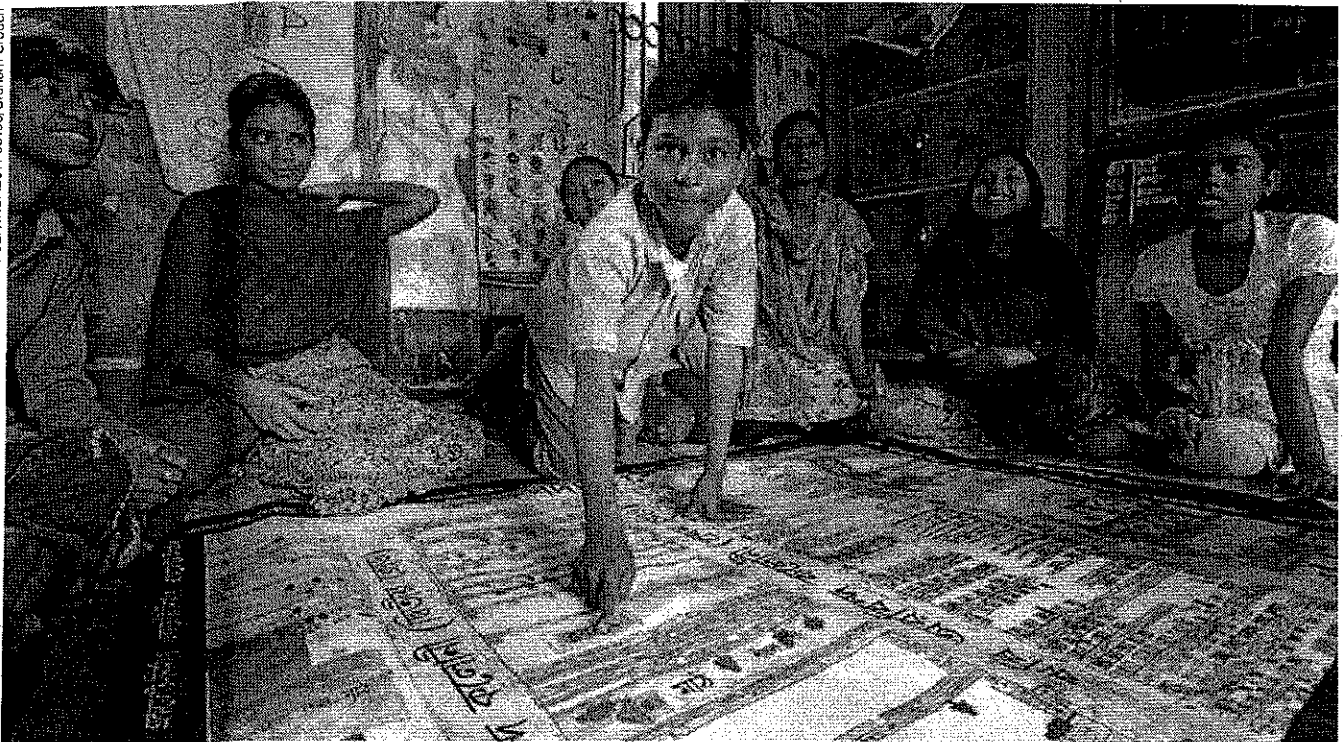
Cities for All, a joint effort of UN-Habitat, UN-Women and UNICEF that brings together women, children, the police, town planners and policymakers to find ways to reduce gender-based violence. National initiatives in Colombia, Sweden and the Netherlands have reduced injuries and deaths resulting from traffic accidents through a combination of car-free areas, dedicated bicycle and pedestrian routes, and public transport.

4. Promote partnership between the urban poor and government at all its levels. Urban initiatives that foster such participation – and particularly those that involve children and young people – report better results not only for children but also for their communities.

Examples of positive outcomes include improvements to public infrastructure in Rio de Janeiro and Sao Paulo, Brazil; higher literacy rates in Cotacachi, Ecuador; and expanded birth registration in Ciudad Guayana, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Local authorities and communities will need to coordinate their efforts more closely so that limited resources are used

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Children put their sprawling slum on the map – literally. The data they have gathered about Rishi Aurobindo Colony, Kolkata, India, will be uploaded to Google Earth.

most effectively, so that the hard-won assets of the poor are not undermined, and so that people living in poverty – often the majority of the population – are meaningfully included in urban development and governance.

5. Work together to achieve sustainable improvements in children's rights. Especially in these straitened times, actors at all levels – from the local to the global, and from civil society to the public and private sectors – need to pool their resources and energies to create urban environments conducive to children's rights.

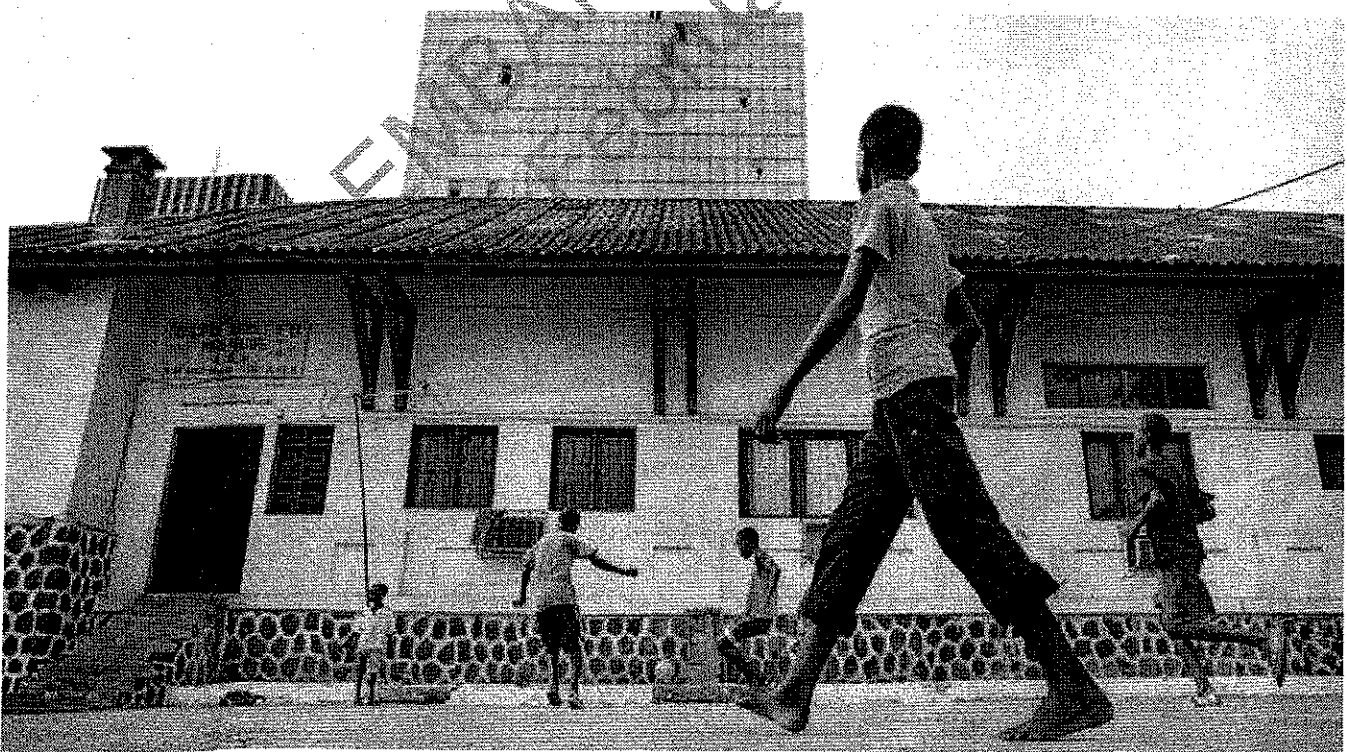
International partnerships among civil society organizations can tap into the power of their constituent organizations to further children's interests and link communities around the world. One example is Shack/Slum Dwellers International, a network that brings together grassroots federations of the urban poor in 34 countries and enables them to exchange solutions to problems including tenure, housing quality and basic infrastructure. Such networks have the power to bring together communities, local and national authorities, and international agencies to promote urban development that benefits the most marginalized.

Non-governmental organizations and international agencies can play a crucial role in fostering the engagement of children in municipal governance and community decision-making.

Towards fairer cities

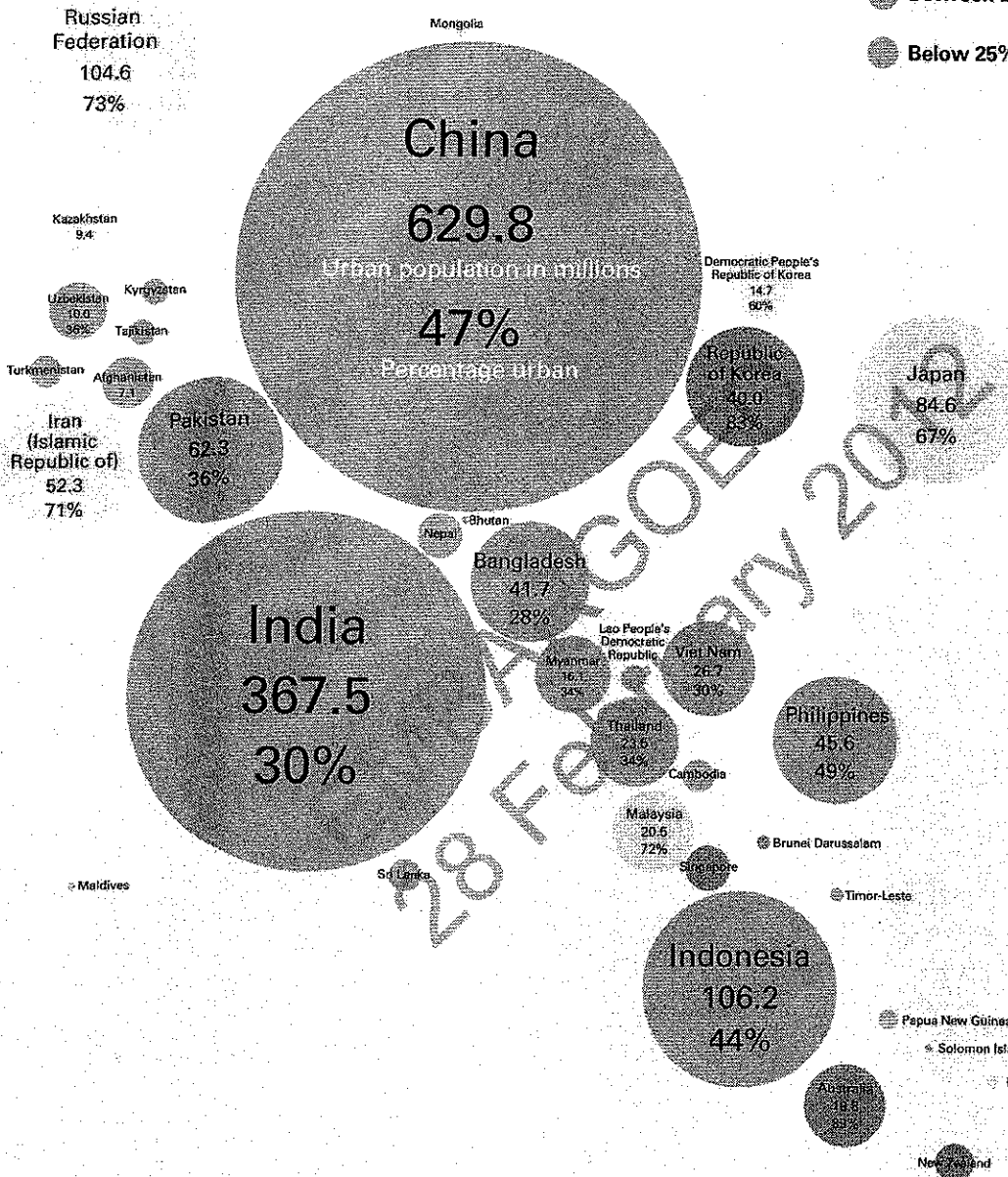
More than half the world's people already live in towns and cities, and ever greater numbers of children are growing up against an urban backdrop. Their urban childhoods reflect the broad disparities that cities contain: rich beside poor, opportunity beside struggle for survival.

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



Boys play football in the courtyard of the Centre Sauvetage BICE, which offers residential and family services for vulnerable children in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

- Above 75% urban
- Between 50% and 75% urban
- Between 25% and 50% urban
- Below 25% urban



Notes: Because of the cession in July 2011 of the Republic of South Sudan by the Republic of the Sudan, and its subsequent admission to the United Nations on 14 July 2011, data for the Sudan and South Sudan as separate States are not yet available. Data presented are for the Sudan pre-cession. Data for China do not include Hong Kong and Macao, Special Administrative Regions of China. Hong Kong became a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of China as of 1 July 1997; Macao became a SAR of China as of 20 December 1999. Data for France do not include French Guiana, Guadeloupe, Martinique, Mayotte and Reunion. Data for the Netherlands do not include the Netherlands Antilles. Data for the United States of America do not include Puerto Rico and United States Virgin Islands.

// Hundreds of millions of children today live in urban slums, many without access to basic services.

We must do more to reach all children in need, wherever they are excluded and left behind. Some might ask whether we can afford to do this, especially at a time of austerity. But if we overcome the barriers that have kept these children from the services that they need and that are theirs by right, then millions more will grow up healthy, attend school and live more productive lives.

Can we afford not to do this? //

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Cover photograph:
Children dance in an informal settlement on a hillside
in Caracas, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2007).
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