

The child-rights perspective in urban development

Urban children, especially those affected by poverty or discrimination, are at risk in many ways. The lack of secure, functional housing and safe supportive neighbourhood space, as well as the lack of water, sanitation, drainage and waste removal affect children more seriously and in different ways from adults.

The significance of these influences tends to be poorly understood, and often overlooked by urban policy and planning actors, while social development actors tend to overlook the impact of living conditions on children's development.

Our planet is increasingly urban, with most growth in developing countries. By the year 2025, some 60 percent of children in the developing world will live in urban centres and half of them are expected to be poor.

Key issues

The importance of involving children in community development

Children are the experts on their local environment: when playing, going to school or work they utilise spaces where adults rarely go. Children and young people should not only be encouraged to identify the problems and solutions in their neighbourhoods, but also be part of the action for change. Making children's concerns more visible helps insure that resources are spent in ways that take their concerns into account. Living environments that work better for children work better for all.

Health and Safety

The quality and quantity of water used in a household is directly tied to the health



Children in Pune, India.

of young children. The location of the source affects the quantity used by households. Even good water can easily be contaminated in storage. Children, most often girls, often carry water vessels that are too heavy.

Lack of water and other services make housework harder for caregivers, and girls more than boys often contribute at the expense of school attendance.

Sanitation is often far from adequate for young children and their caregivers. Very few young children use community latrines, which often leads to health hazards.

Children are more vulnerable to pathogens, toxicants and pollutants as their immune systems are less developed; they take in more air, water and food relative to their body weight. Open fires and exposed kerosene heaters and cookers are examples of high risk hazards for children.

The AIDS pandemic is increasing the number of child-headed households.

Affordable housing or cash transfers are needed for these households.

Traffic and transport systems are seldom designed with children's needs in mind. Without adequate transport or security, many children, especially girls and children with disabilities, cannot go to school.

Social and Emotional Security

Forced evictions are comparable to war in terms of psychological trauma. Evictions can lead to family separation when parents are forced to leave in search of work. Schooling is frequently interrupted. At times children are pushed into the labour market or onto the street. Around 640 million children (one in three) live without secure tenure in slums or inadequate housing in the developing countries.

Overcrowding has been shown to result in behavioural difficulties for children. Lower academic achievement is one such result. Overcrowding also makes it easier for infectious diseases to spread. Sub-standard living conditions create feelings of humiliation, especially among older children and adolescents, forcing some to seek a better life on the streets.

Play and Recreation

Play is fundamental to children's development and shapes their capacity for learning and social growth, particularly in the early years. If a neighbourhood is dirty and dangerous children are exposed to hazards as they explore, touch and put things in their mouths.

Adolescent girls and boys need safe places to relax and socialise with friends. Girls especially often find it difficult to identify safe places. In unsafe environments many families impose a curfew on girls.

Many limitations in housing can be compensated for by a well-planned neighbourhood. Well-lit streets and alley-

PHOTO: SARA STENHAMMAR

ways, places to sit and socialise, plants and trees, shops and other facilities increase interaction between neighbours and decrease crime and anti-social behaviour. Protecting the places where children play and socialise will result in neighbourhoods that are good for all community members.

Strategic areas for support

The Swedish Policy for Global Development promotes a pro-poor perspective and a rights-based approach and underlines the importance of strengthened human rights and democracy, and in particular children's rights. Sida's Division for Urban Development is working towards promoting and protecting children's rights and strengthening the active participation of children in all urban development programmes. Strategic areas for support include:

- developing a deeper understanding of the effects of urban poverty on children of different age groups, using e.g. child impact assessments and action-oriented research with children (with input from caregivers, teachers, community workers etc.), in order to strengthen its response;
- developing awareness that girls and boys often have different needs and demands
- developing methods for planning and evaluation by building on children's expertise on their local environment
- supporting efforts at local and national levels for appropriate policies and law enforcement in slum areas regarding, for instance, regulations concerning land use and the availability of legal tenure, and the level of protection from pollution
- strengthening the capacity of local governments to become responsive to the quality of life for children in poverty and their families.
- promoting adults' understanding of, and action for, living conditions that are conducive to children's right to a healthy, safe, and stimulating environment.

SOME INTERNATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS PROVISIONS IN RELATION TO CHILDREN

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR 1966):

Art. 11(1): right to an adequate standard of living.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989):

- **Art. 1:** a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.
- **Art. 2:** protection from discrimination
- **Art. 3:** consideration of the best interest of the child

- **Art. 6:** protection of survival and development
- **Art. 12:** opportunity of participation
- **Art. 16:** right not to be subject to arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy, family and home.
- **Art. 24:** right to the highest attainable standard of health.
- **Art. 26:** right to benefit from social security.
- **Art. 27:** right to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development.

- **Art. 28:** right to education
- **Art. 31:** right to engage in play and recreational activities
- **Art. 34:** right to be protected against all forms of sexual exploitation and sexual abuse.

Subsequent international agreements like **The Habitat Agenda** (1996) recognize that "the needs of children and youth, particularly with regards to their living environment, have to be taken fully into account" and **Agenda 21** (1992) pays particular attention to children's role as active participants in development.

To be aware of

Due to the gender-specific division of labour in many countries, women and girls do most of the direct care-giving within families and communities. As such, women are also central to urban planning and development, both as key users of urban space in their role as home managers, and as key producers of residential environments in their role as community and network leaders. Engaging children and young people in research and consultation ensures that their perspectives and voices are taken into account. It is important to develop ways of involving children that build on their own strengths, and that pay attention to their own use of language, developmental level, and social reality. Research demonstrates that the involvement of youth in the design and delivery of programmes results in positive health and educational outcomes for youth. Peer-to-peer programme models in particular are recognised as one of the most effective ways of engaging children and youth.

Examples of Sida Support

- Support for a study entitled: "The Flight and Plight of War Affected Children in Africa", Save the Children Sweden, 2005.

- Safer Cities, a global programme to prevent crime and violence in urban areas.

- Support to a seminar, co-organised by Sida and Save the Children Sweden, entitled "A Better Childhood in the City", 2006.

Swedish Resources

Sweden is considered advanced in the protection and promotion of children's rights and has a number of large child rights organisations, including Save the Children Sweden, ECPAT Sweden and BRIS. Sweden also has a Children's Ombudsman appointed by the government.

Sida references

Available at www.sida.se

Fighting Poverty in an Urban World, (2006) Sida Policy, and related *Urban Issue Papers*

Published separately

A Better Childhood in the City (2006) Sida, Save the Children Sweden.

Bartlett, S (2002) *Children's Rights and the Physical Environment*, Save the Children Sweden.

Tannerfeldt, G and Ljung, P (2006) *More Urban – Less Poor, An introduction to urban development and management*, London, Earthscan

REMINDERS

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| ☐ Are children's concern a basic component of planning, implementation, follow up and evaluation? | ☐ Do impact assessments on urban planning e.g. water and sanitation, waste management, and transportation reflect consequences for duty bearers, caregivers and girls and boys of different age groups? | ☐ Do policy and programme development ensure non-discrimination of especially vulnerable groups of children, e.g. teenage mothers, child-headed households, children living on the streets, working children, orphans? |
| ☐ Do analyses of urban poverty include the perspectives of girls and boys of different age groups? | ☐ Are children involved as active participants (not passive recipients) in a meaningful and ethical way in urban community processes? | |