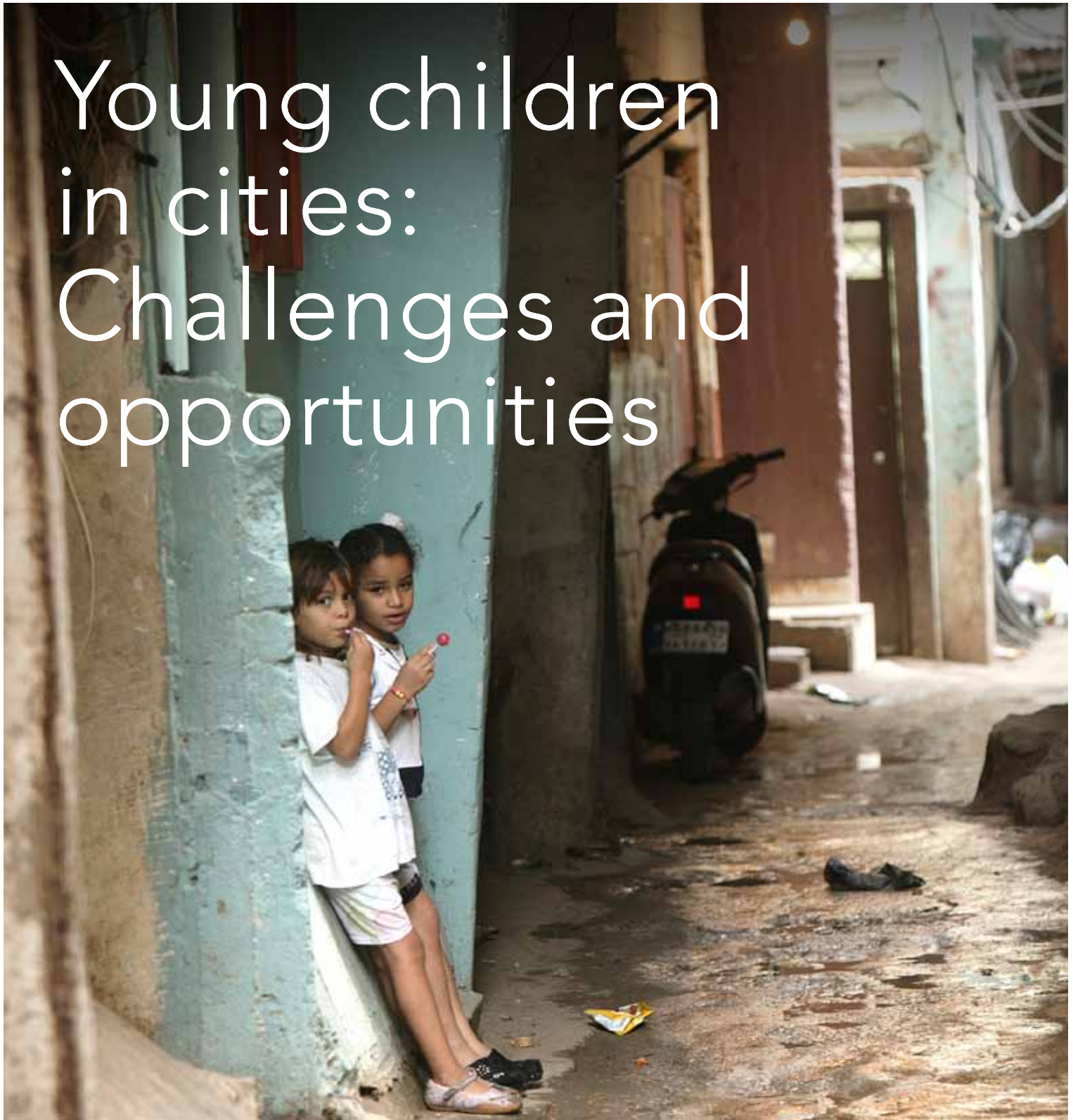# Young children in cities: Challenges and opportunities

Early childhood matters

Bernard van Leer Foundation

Contents

Editorial

This edition of *Early Childhood Matters* looks – from various different angles – at young children's experiences of growing up in urban settings.

It is widely known that more than half of the world's population is urban. It is much less widely known that a quarter of the world's children live in poor urban settlements. Dr Sheridan Bartlett points out this frightening statistic in her overview in this edition of *Early Childhood Matters* (p. 4). She rightly states that this situation represents a global emergency but is currently low on the priority lists of decision-makers.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation aims to change that situation through our work on young children in urban settings, as part of one of our three new goals: improved health and nutrition through improvement of the physical environments in which children grow up. Cities are important not only because so many people live there, but also because moving to the city dramatically changes children's lives. The ways in which this happens are well explained by Dr Bartlett, by contrasting her recent experiences of young children growing up in a coastal Kenyan village and a Mombasa slum.

The contrasts between rural and urban living for children are also explored in the context of Europe's largest minority, the Roma population. An article by Catalina Ulrich of the University of Bucharest (p. 10) explains how the cramped nature of urban living in poor-quality apartment blocks puts stress on the child-friendly tradition of the extended family structure in rural Roma societies, while also pointing out the greater potential of urban areas to deliver services at scale.

At the Foundation, much of our work will have to do with children's health, but not in the direct sense of improving medical facilities: we will, rather, be concentrating on various root characteristics of urban physical environments that impact the physical and mental development of young children throughout their lives. The angle we take will differ from country to country.

Here in the Netherlands, for example, much of our work in urban settings will focus on domestic violence. We were pleased therefore to have the opportunity to interview the Alderman for education, youth and families of the city of Rotterdam (p. 14), about the "Rotterdamse Meldcode" – the Code of Conduct for reporting violence against children which is now being adopted at national level – as well as other aspects of the city's policies for children. They include calming traffic and creating pavements on the sunny side of streets that are wide enough to play on.

Freedom to play is also explored in the Australian context by Karen Malone, Asia-Pacific Director of UNESCO's Growing Up In Cities project

(page 20). She explores how children are prevented from playing outside by an exaggerated fear of the dangers they face. She explains that even though the odds of a child being abducted by a stranger in Australia are 1 in 4 million, less than in previous decades and roughly comparable to the chance of them being struck by lightning, merely presenting these statistics seems to have little impact on parents' perceptions.

Violence on a different scale is the subject of two other articles in this edition. Gloria Perdomo from the *Luz y Vida* Foundation in Venezuela reports (p. 26) on how a community classrooms initiative is making a difference in the face of normalisation of violence in parts of Caracas: "one morning, the teachers at a pre-school centre in one of the neighbourhoods came across the body of a young man who had been murdered, lying in the corridor leading to the school entrance… the children's parents protested at the teachers' refusal to hold classes that day … one of the mothers quite calmly lifted her daughter over the body and handed her over to one of the teachers".

From Ciudad Juarez in Mexico comes the inspiring story of the *Hazlo Por Juárez* (Do it for Juarez) campaign (p. 32), a coalition of community groups that is breaking the cycle of violence by intervening in the early years – and pressuring the city government to embrace its responsibilities towards securing the future of the city's children.

Organising communities to demand access to existing resources is taking shape as a major part of our work in slums in India. On page 38, Geeta Dharmarajan tells the story of her organisation, Katha, which means 'story' in most Indian languages. "Our classrooms and community-focused projects teach children to think for themselves", she writes, giving the example of a classroom project to map a previously unmapped urban district of Delhi which enabled the authorities to lay new water pipelines. "We help children understand that education makes individuals strong, but that individuals must also contribute to strengthening society."

The theme of community organisation is also at the centre of an article by Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI, p. 43). This international alliance of slum dweller organisations in 33 countries, describes how "SDI community organization in urban slums has always been tied to the developmental needs of the children who live there" – from the *Sadak Chaap* ('Stamp of the Street', a term that Bollywood has now appropriated and popularized) movement in India to the *Mwamko wa vijana* ('youth awakening') movement in Nairobi's slums.

From the Kusi Warma organisation in Peru comes an update (p. 46) on the Foundation-funded 'Community Tailored Monitoring' project, to improve the care of children in Ventanilla, a district of Lima. Elsewhere

in Peru we have started to focus our efforts on the city of Iquitos, an urban slum on the edge of the jungle, where we see great potential in partnering with the private sector on eco-friendly businesses which have potential both to generate employment and improve health outcomes for children: for example, recycling, eco-toilets and child-friendly stoves (an idea proposed by the children of Iquitos themselves).

Brazil is a target country in which we are still strategising how our future priorities will play out in urban areas. The Brazil contribution to this edition comes from *Associação Brasileira Terra dos Homens* (p. 52), and makes clear the need for detailed research and long term engagement with poor urban dwellers. By understanding the situation of families and working with them, "community families were able to have a different experience of social assistance – one in which suitable living conditions are a right, and they are no longer 'someone receiving assistance' but a more equal co-participant in the process".

Finally, we explore an under appreciated implication of the global urbanisation of society: that proportionally more emergencies and natural disasters will happen in urban areas. What implications does this have for young children? Mary Moran of ChildFund International describes how Child Centred Spaces worked in Nairobi during the recent emergencies caused by political violence followed by food insecurity, and stresses the

importance of working broadly with community members to put plans in place before disasters happen (p. 60).

We are in the century of the city: it is estimated that by 2030 sixty per cent of the world's population will live in cities. And if the current trend continues, the world's urban population will double every four decades. Most of this growth is forecast to take place in developing

countries, particularly in Asia and Africa. In relation to young children this presents challenges of the kinds discussed in the articles in this issue. But it also presents opportunities to provide accessible and cost-effective services. Our role as a foundation will be to assist in bringing together research and practice, so as to help the world's growing cities overcome the

challenges and seize the opportunities to improve the lives of their youngest inhabitants.

Children living in urban poverty: A global emergency, a low priority

Sheridan Bartlett, Human Settlements Group,
International Institute for Environment and Development

Among the world's rapidly expanding urban populations, poverty is having catastrophic implications for millions of young children. However, in the context of good governance and well supported grassroots organizations, urban settings can also offer considerable advantages, allowing for economies of scale and proximity. In this article Dr Sheridan Bartlett of the International Institute for Environment and Development gives an overview of the scale and nature of the challenges and identifies the ways forward. (www.iied.org)

It's common knowledge now that more than half the world's population lives in towns and cities. We also all know that most cities have their slum areas, and that these can be very challenging places to live and raise children – we've seen Slumdog Millionaire. But how widespread is this phenomenon? Reliable figures are hard to come by, but a practical estimate suggests that fully a quarter of the children in the world live in poor urban settlements, and are growing up in conditions that challenge their resilience and that can consign them to lifelong poverty.

This sounds surprising. Don't the figures tell us that poverty is more of a rural problem? They do, but the figures can be misleading. Poverty is usually defined in monetary terms, and it costs a lot more to live in an urban area. Households that are well above the national poverty line may be struggling to survive. The reliance of city dwellers on the cash economy, the density of population, the absence of protective infrastructure and services, and some of the social factors within poor urban areas all play a role in the vulnerability of the urban poor and especially their children.

We also hear more often about rural and urban averages than about the depth and scale and quality of deprivation. This focus on averages can also be misleading. Wealth is concentrated in cities, and average figures, whether for income or mortality or malnutrition or school attendance, can mask the extent of the disparities and the depth of the deprivation. Many of the poorest urban residents also remain invisible and uncounted when data is collected, living as they do outside formally recognized residential areas, in illegal settlements, under bridges, on sidewalks, next to railway lines.

No one really knows how many critically poor households or children there are in the world's towns and cities. But when the cost of basic survival is taken into account, when urban averages are disaggregated to reveal the depth of poverty, and when attempts are made to count illegal residents, the number of urban residents acknowledged to be living in poverty begins to skyrocket. UN

Habitat estimates that one out of every six people in the world lives in deprivation in an urban slum. The demographics of poor countries and poor communities, where young children are a disproportionately large part of the population, leads to the estimate of approximately one young child in every four.

But it's not just a question of numbers. It shouldn't matter to us whether there are more deprived children in rural or in urban areas. The issue is to understand what poverty means in their lives, and to find ways to help their households and communities to protect their health, support their right to development, ensure that they have the tools to cope productively with the world they live in. Doing this means understanding more about the nature of poverty for children in different settings.

Not all of the urban poor live in slums and informal settlements; nor do all slum dwellers qualify as poor in income terms. But these settlements are for the most part the material expression of poverty in urban areas, and the quality of poverty can be uniquely challenging here. The lack of a formal address can mean no credit, no insurance, no access to government schools and health centers, or even to the vote. It can mean little protection against forced eviction, no rule of law, hazardous housing sites, and a lack of provision for any basic amenities – like sanitation, running water, waste removal or emergency services. The implications of extreme weather conditions in some of these areas are intense. Climate change is not something to worry about in the future – it's here, and in many cites people living in flimsy shacks, crowded on steep hillsides or in flood plains with no drainage, are coping with extreme conditions in very immediate and often very frightening ways.

Sheer density changes the way that many deprivations are experienced. Toilets, ventilation, drainage, waste collection, open space for play, for instance, all become far more critical in the context of high density. All of these factors can contribute to the anger, frustration and high stress that is often manifested in higher urban rates of crime and violence. The intent here is not to downplay the realities of rural poverty, but to stress that urban deprivation and exclusion present some different challenges. The same standards for adequacy cannot be applied, nor are the same responses always appropriate.

Comparing conditions in urban slums and poor villages
On a recent trip to Kenya for the Aga Khan Foundation, I had the chance to spend time in households in very poor coastal villages and in Nairobi and Mombasa slums. It was a good reminder, once again, of how very particular the conditions are that shape the lives and prospects of young children.

In Kakayuni village, five year old twins, Naima and Abdullah live in a mud shack with an earth floor, along with their three cousins and their very overburdened grandmother. Their mother and their cousins' parents are off working in the city, but times are hard and they seldom visit or send money. The household income is far below the international poverty line. The one-room shack is small, but the children spend most of their time outdoors in a shady compound surrounded by trees. Cooking, washing and social life all happen out there. There is no latrine – they just use the bush. Water is collected from a pond nearby – their grandmother can't afford the kiosk water that is available in the village for a price.

For health care they rely on the local dispensary, which is free but not always staffed. When the dispensary runs out of medicines, people have to travel to the nearest town, an expensive trip. But the twins are not often sick, says their grandmother, although they have skin and eye problems sometimes, and they get stomach aches from worms. Food is a real concern though; she owns no fertile land, but works whenever she has the chance: ploughing or weeding for other people. She prepares one meal a day, and the rest of the time the children forage for whatever they can find – mangoes when they are ripe, the kindness of neighbours. The older grandchildren sometimes bring home boiled maize to share from the school

feeding programme. They look a lot more robust than the skinny twins.

In Mombasa, six-year-old Salim lives in rented accommodations with his parents and three siblings just off Mwembe Kuku street, a very busy hawking and vending area. Their one small room has a cement floor and they have an electric fan. They share a latrine and a space for cooking in the hallway with the five other families in the building, and there is piped water from the municipality. Salim's father earns about USD 300 a month at a regular job and his employer provides free health care for his family at a hospital near where he works. There is a community ECD centre down the alleyway in the local madrasa, and Salim attends every day. By almost any standard – income, consumption, material assets, access to services – Salim is far less deprived than Naima and Abdullah, who would certainly qualify as the poorest of the poor.

But it's not clear that Salim is actually any better off. He is all eyes and bones, as is his year-old sister, and they both cough constantly – a problem that their mother says is chronic. Both children have malarial fevers about three times a month, and each time it takes a few days to recover. There is a screen on their one small window and they sleep under a treated net, but the narrow alleyways that are the only space between buildings are filled with fetid standing water and mosquitoes breed freely. The free health care at the hospital is a boon, but it's so far away

that transport costs more than just going to a local pharmacist.

The latrine is close by, but shared latrines are always hard to maintain, and this one badly needs emptying. The children in any case are frightened to use the dark smelly space with its large hole. They squat in the alley and their mother cleans up after them. The municipal water piped to the building for USD 4 a month is a convenience that is unusual for many urban dwellers, but it is not safe to drink, and drinking water costs another 50 cents a day. Rent, water and electricity add up fast, and all food must of course be purchased. The family has nowhere to store food, so they buy it in small quantities as they use it – not the most economical way to do it. ECD costs another USD 3 a month, and then there are school fees for the older boys, rent, transport. According to Salim's father, it's barely possible to survive on what he earns.

They're very lucky to have the madrasa down the alleyway. Salim's father is the caretaker, and the space makes a huge difference to their lives. Their own room, about 8 by 8 feet, is virtually filled by the double bed and the wardrobe where all the family's possessions are kept. But Salim's older brothers can do their homework in the madrasa and sleep there on the floor, if they wait until 8 pm when the space is no longer being used either for classes or meetings. The other great asset in their life is the social cohesiveness in their neighbourhood. All their

Many poor neighborhoods offer rich, varied environments for play, learning and social growth; but opportunities in poor urban can also be seriously limited by safety concerns.

Photo: Peter de Ruiter

neighbours come from the same coastal area, and there are none of the social tensions that so often characterize life in poor urban areas. Neighbours are cooperative and friendly, and they count on each other a lot.

One of the biggest differences between Salim's life and the twins' is the quality of their play. Except for the couple of hours each day when ECD is in session, Salim is restricted to the bed in their room, and to the narrow alleyways outside, filled with murky water and construction debris. When there is heavy rain, a more and more frequent occurrence, the alleyways are impossible, and water even comes into the house. Salim's father says the boy

will have to be quite a bit older before he can go out alone to the busy street 100 feet away – there are just too many risks for a young child, not only the heavy traffic, but the unpredictable anger and aggression that can flare up between people. Salim's year-old sister spends all her time either on the bed or on her mother's hip – there's no place to put her down. Generally she is too miserable with her coughs and fevers to be put down anyway – she just clings to her mother.

The twins , by contrast, have a large dirt yard to play in with trees and shrubs all around and paths leading to neighbours' houses. While I was visiting, they chased each other around,

played with their two-year-old cousin on a mound of dirt, and built a little house out of sticks. It was breezy and pleasant under the huge shade trees. Salim's house, even then in the coolest part of the year, was stifling and it apparently becomes almost unbearable when the weather is hot. They have the fan and they keep the door and window open, but everything is so tight and close, there is no way for air really to move around.

The effects of poor living conditions
Salim's experience is repeated over and over again, with variations, in cities around the world. Yet this global emergency has not been a high priority

for governments or aid agencies. The problems of an estimated billion slum dwellers are clearly key to eradicating global poverty and urban children are central to this struggle. Most investment in children focuses on increasing their human capital through education and health services. Yet inadequate living conditions are the most pervasive violation of children's rights worldwide, and can exacerbate and underpin the failure to realize many other rights. The principles of non-discrimination and best interests call for attention to the environments of poor urban children, taking account of their particular needs and of the fact that their rights are independent of those of adults.

We know more about the impacts of slum dwelling for the health of young children than for their well being in other areas. There is copious documentation of the implications of overcrowding and a lack of provision of basic amenities and services for rates of diarrheal disease, other water and food borne illnesses, respiratory illness, worms, skin and eye conditions and malnutrition. The burdens are highest by far for young children – over 80 percent of all diarrheal disease, for instance, affects children under five. A growing body of evidence also points to the high toll of injuries, most apparent in the alarming increase in rates of road traffic injuries, with urban child pedestrians the most likely to be the victims. But burns and falls are also common for young children

living in crowded homes and congested neighborhoods. Extreme weather also takes the most serious toll on small children, who are at higher risk of heat stroke, drowning, illness, injury and death.

Aggregate figures generally point to better health and survival rates for children in urban areas, thereby encouraging health policy objectives to focus on the very considerable rural problems. But in a growing number of countries, this gap is narrowing, and we increasingly see an 'urban penalty' associated with the growing numbers of the urban poor and the consequently deteriorating urban conditions. The infant survival advantage in big cities in Latin America and the Caribbean, for instance, disappeared by the early 1990s. The same thing is happening now in sub-Saharan Africa. While rural child mortality rates drop, sometimes quite dramatically, urban averages hold steady or grow worse. In the rare cases where datasets allow for a comparative focus on urban slums, the evidence indicates, and has for some time, that mortality and morbidity rates for children in slums are worse than national averages, and considerably worse than in other parts of cities.

A common response to the environmental causes of poor health, given the expense and complexity of proper provision, is to focus on care giving practices and hygiene – boiling water, disposing of excrement, keeping small hands clean. These measures are effective, but can be very time

consuming and even unrealistic. Difficult living conditions almost inevitably mean some level of neglect for young children. Exhausted, frustrated caregivers are more likely to compromise in their desire to do their best for their children. A lack of sanitation, long distances to water points, unsafe cooking equipment in crowded rooms, dilapidated housing, an absence of safe play space often occur in clusters; overburdened caregivers can be forced to leave children unsupervised and to cut corners.

Health is not all that's at stake. The close links between disease, malnutrition and children's cognitive and social development have been well documented for many years. More recent research looks at the toxic effects of poverty-related stress for children's brain development and cognitive capacity, especially where poverty is of long duration. There is little child-focused research from low income countries on the cognitive and psychological impacts of the everyday environments of poverty, but the evidence we have is that 'environmental chaos' (overcrowding, high levels of noise and a lot of people coming and going) contributes to stress and affects not only children's attention and motivation, but even the architecture of their brains.

Mental and social development also depend on available opportunities. Violence and insecurity at neighborhood level contribute to the challenges, restricting mobility and eroding the rights of children to play, associate with others, and take part in the lives of their communities. The emotional impact of violence is also undeniable, not only for children themselves, but for the adults whose capacity to nurture can be undermined by the stress and anxiety of their lives. There is increasing

> The same measures that provide more protection for children's health, are also the kinds of support that reduce stress generally.

awareness of the extent of stress-related mental health issues especially for poor urban women.

The opportunities of urban settings
Clearly, not all slums are the same. Children's health and their opportunities for development, are dramatically better in comparatively well served settlements. Good ECD programmes for young children that can function as both refuge and opportunity in challenging settings – places like Salim's madrasa-based ECD center, are a critical contribution. But the right of children to survival and optimal development requires adequate provision in all aspects of life, thoughtfully geared to their needs and those of their caregivers.

The same measures that provide more protection for children's health – adequate housing, good drainage, reliable water supplies and sanitation – are also the kinds of support that reduce stress generally and help families climb out of poverty. (They also, conveniently, offer the most effective protection from the impacts of climate change.) There is also plenty of evidence that reasonable solutions can be found in the course of upgrading to children's need for play and stimulation when people put their minds together on this.

Living in urban poverty does not necessarily doom children to spend their early lives on a bed. But the alternatives have to be a priority for everyone. With the awareness, support and involvement of their communities, it should be possible for them to enjoy the richness, excitement and companionship of urban living without putting their lives and their futures on the line.

An under-studied question

The urban experience of young Roma children

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In its work at regional level within the EU, the Bernard van Leer Foundation focuses on Roma populations, who across Europe face higher risks of discrimination and difficult living conditions. Catalina Ulrich of the University of Bucharest recently produced a report for the Foundation entitled 'Research findings and best models of intervention supporting Early Childhood Development for young Roma children'. In this article she discusses her different experiences of working with Roma children in urban settings compared to rural ones.

Compared to the general population, the Roma remain a more rural people: in Bulgaria, for example, only around half of Roma live in urban areas, compared to over two-thirds of the general population. Unfortunately, few other hard statistics exist. Information on Roma living conditions and poverty are scant, fragmented, and often anecdotal. Research on Roma housing, health and access to educational and care services is still very limited. Until more studies are done specifically addressing the needs of Roma children in an urban context, observations can be offered only on personal experience.

From my research with Roma populations in rural and urban areas of Romania and Bulgaria, some differences in the experiences of young Roma children are clear. Rural settlements tend to be isolated and young children tend to be shy, with little exposure to the wider world – many have never been on a bus, or traveled to the next village. In cities, by contrast, it is not uncommon to see Roma children displaying exceptionally precocious social intelligence to solicit food or money, an activity

which requires a range of social skills: assertiveness, persuasiveness, the ability to read people. For example, I once watched as an urban Roma girl of five or six confidently approached a beautiful blond woman and complimented her on her looks, saying that she has a Barbie doll at home who looks just like her.

Observe the same children in a primary classroom, however, and they are likely to display none of the same confidence. The inadequacies of the formal education system in including Roma children are well documented, and among the ways they fail Roma children is through not nurturing and giving a positive direction to the streetwise skills developed outside the classroom.

In general, Roma children in urban areas tend to appear less secure than their counterparts in rural settlements, where the sense of close-knit community protection and solidarity tends to be stronger. Raising children is traditionally seen by the Roma as the responsibility of the whole community, with the child occupying a central place in the social and cultural world and

afforded an adult respect from an early age. As Charlemagne (1983) notes, "Children live in a climate of freedom within the extended family, where affective warmth and permissiveness dominate… The Gypsy child lives in a community which supports and reinforces his sense of belonging".

However, in urban areas these traditional family roles tend to weaken and break. Why is this? Part of the reason has to do with the wider reach of media in urban areas gradually diluting and undermining the traditional culture and ways of life. Satellite TV has yet to penetrate many poor and isolated rural Roma settlements, but it is common to see a satellite dish outside every apartment in urban Roma areas. Soap operas are especially popular, as demonstrated by how many babies in Roma communities are named after their leading characters. In urban Roma populations with a higher penetration of media, I observe that conspicuous consumption is more noticeable and childhoods appear shorter, with children dressing like mini-adults from a young age.

Low quality housing is a major problem for young Roma children
An even more significant influence on the breakdown of Roma community spirit in urban areas is, however, the impact of housing. The quality of housing for the Roma in urban areas tends to be the worst: small apartments in the most poorly-constructed blocks,

and overcrowded conditions with many family members living in a small space. While most Roma in cities tend to be found on the peripheries, some also live as squatters in city centers, occupying houses deemed legally unfit for human occupation and subject always to the threat of removal through litigation.

It's true of course that housing is also likely to be cramped and poor quality in rural Roma settlements: a 2004 UNDP survey in Bulgaria showed that on average Roma lived in 0.76 rooms per household member (compared to a population average of 1.58), while the average size of Roma housing units was 15m2 (compared to 34m2). But an advantage of rural areas, at least when it comes to preserving traditional community relationships, is that villages tend to provide more communal spaces in which extended family members can meet and interact.

Cases of particularly bad housing conditions and lack of infrastructure for the Roma can be observed throughout the EU. For example, in

a city in Greece, according to a 2007 media report, around 350 Roma families lived in tin shacks served by two water outlets; 60 of their children were hospitalized in November 2007 with Hepatitis A. The FRA report 'Housing conditions of Roma and Travelers in the European Union'(2009) details the discrimination Roma peoples face in access to housing, poor housing conditions, segregation and forced evictions.

Action to remedy the poor quality of Roma housing is badly needed but tends not to be found acceptable by the general public: efforts to relocate the Greek families into nearby areas, for example, were opposed by non-Roma local residents. It is common for the public to want assistance to the Roma to focus instead on the education of the young generation or employment for their parents, rather than improving conditions of housing.

This is unfortunate as it fails to recognize that housing conditions have a negative impact on a child's education, health and employment

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prospects, prolonging the cycle of deprivation and social exclusion. Miloon Kothari, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Adequate Housing, states: "in its essence, housing as a living impulse creates roots, entailing security. The house is to be seen as a home, the one stable point in the child's life where she/he can return to. It is a place where the child can eat, laugh, play — where she/he will find love and peace.[1]"

Many Roma communities in cities are segregated from non-Roma, if not quite ghettoized, and this has also been shown to negatively affects employment chances, access to and attainment in education, health and access to health care. UNDP research in Slovakia shows that the worst education structure was found

amongst the inhabitants of segregated settlements. In these communities there was a much higher rate of incomplete primary education (up to 44.2%) than for Roma living in mixed settlements (23.5 %). Segregated-settlement inhabitants were much less likely to have completed primary and especially secondary education (8.5% compared with 18-19%).

The advantages and opportunities of urban settings
Despite the living conditions being more challenging in some ways, the Roma people are not immune to the global trend towards urbanization: they, like others, are much more likely to be attracted from rural areas to cities than to want to relocate from cities to the villages. Rural Roma settlements are often far from health services and schools, over bad roads and with no public transport, lacking in infrastructure such as sewerage and clean water. In these basics of access to services, Roma in urban areas tend to be better off – although an exception, in Romania, at least is that kindergartens tend to be so oversubscribed in urban areas that they can be easier to access in villages.

A number of policy initiatives offer the potential to improve conditions for urban Roma children. The Roma Education Fund's 'A Good Start' project is expected to support 5,000 children from ages zero to six to access early childhood education and care services in 16 locations across four countries

(Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia). In Sofia, the Health and Social Development Foundation (HESED) provide an alternative community based ECD service for socially disadvantaged children, with trained Roma outreach workers improving parenting skills of pregnant women and mothers of toddlers.

In Romania, Multifunctional Centers (MCS), implemented by the Step by Step Center for Education and Professional Development, and funded by UNICEF and ISSA, provide service irrespective of children's social status, income, ethnicity and religion and focus on parent involvement, especially of the mother. The MCS were organized in existing crèches and in kindergartens where directors and representatives of local authorities were interested in changing the old system. In Bulgaria, the 'Roma Educational inclusion through school improvement' project (a collaboration of MATRA, Step by Step Program Foundation Bulgaria, SLO Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development and educationalists from Romania) focused on effective transitions from preschool to primary school, by developing an inclusive school approach, individual educational approach and family involvement.

Finally, a programme focused specifically on urban areas is *Fiecare Copil in Scoala* (Every Child in School), provided by Ovidiu Rom, an NGO which advocates for national summer school preparation programmes

for all low-income children age 5 and above. It provides free school materials, uniforms and hot lunches for children from low-income families, and its methodology encompasses neighborhood kindergarten and school registration drives, teacher training, summer and after-school programmes, family counseling and participation and incentives to parents for children's attendance and achievement.

In conclusion, it is difficult to generalize about the experiences of Roma in urban as compared to rural settings, because both encompass such a wide range of conditions: in some villages discrimination is a serious problem, while in other villages there is integration between Roma and non-Roma people with children happily playing together. What can be said is that more research is needed, and that urban planning in European cities should not forget the Roma.

Note
1 http://www.2010contralapobreza.msps.es/actoPresentacion/Roma/Kjaerum-En.pdf

An interview with Hugo de Jonge

Making Rotterdam child-friendly: "Cooperation and a wide-angle view are key"

Rotterdam has a reputation within the Netherlands and beyond for its progressive approach to social policy and its focus on improving life for the city's children – in particular the 'Rotterdamse meldcode', a Code of Conduct on domestic violence that the city pioneered and which is being taken up at a national level. *Early Childhood Matters* interviewed the Alderman for education, youth and families of Rotterdam, Hugo de Jonge, to find out more about what the city does for its young children.

Rotterdam was the European Youth Capital in 2009. Why do you think the city deserved that title?

Rotterdam is one of the few cities in the Netherlands with a growing population in the age group under 27. Most cities are 'getting older', Rotterdam isn't. Given that fact, our ongoing dedication to support the development of Rotterdam talent is largely focused on youth. The European Youth Capital project provided a central stage for all sorts of activities.

The project proved that Rotterdam is a lively city with a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and a shipload of youthful talent. Our youths are quite capable of organizing events for their peers. Their fresh, professional approach was very successful in terms of attracting the right crowd, and combining the cultural and educational aspects of our city.

In addition, the project showed the overwhelming amount of activities initialized and run by both public and private institutions. It is clear that the city itself takes the initiative, not just the 'city hall'.

Why do you feel the city of Rotterdam is a good place for young children to grow up?

Children usually only experience the street or neighborhood they live in, so the city of Rotterdam works closely with schools and other institutions to provide our children with a dynamic and pleasant environment to grow up in. We pride ourselves in Rotterdam on having an exceptionally wide view of our social policies, pro-actively involving all stakeholders who can possibly be relevant in improving life in the city.

In October 2010 we summarized our approach in an English-language booklet entitled *Rotterdam, city with a future: How to build a Child Friendly City*. This set out four practical building blocks; each with numerous specific metrics we aim to reach:

- Child Friendly Housing: for example a minimum of 85 m2 floor space for apartments with a private outdoor space;
- Public Space: for example a pavement big enough to play on, at least 3-5 m wide, on one side of

every street, preferably the sunny side;

- Facilities: for example a minimum of 300 m2 surfaced area in school playgrounds, with a 2:1 ratio of surfaced area to greenery;
- Safe Traffic Routes: for example speed reduction measures and no-through-traffic zones.

The booklet describes other practical ideas Rotterdam is pursuing, such as cultivating semi-wild green areas for children to play freely in, and establishing 'play streets' with go-karts and skipping ropes provided for children to borrow. The booklet will be published on www.rotterdam.nl/kindvriendelijk.

What do you think are the biggest problems faced by young children living in Rotterdam?

One problem is the space they have to play. This is under increasing pressure. The growth in traffic and the increasing density of population and buildings are providing direct competition for playing spaces, even in the suburbs.

That is why, as part of our 'Child Friendly Rotterdam' programme, we invited the people of Rotterdam to look at their surroundings and tell us what they think needs improvement; for example school children taking digital photos of things they like and dislike in their environments and providing ideas on how to improve these.

Often the results were surprising. For example, we found out that some cycle routes which adults are happy to use are frightening to kids, because they are secluded and dark or because they have to cross difficult and busy streets.

A pilot in eleven focus areas was very successful, encouraging us to roll it out into more areas. The sense of pleasant living and safety have actually improved, according to surveys.

A second problem is that many young children have parents who do not speak Dutch very well. As young children are mostly guided by their parents, these young children do not participate in social activity as much as they might. Of course, this adds to the problem of them not learning the language.

My policy on education puts more emphasis on language than before. One of the key factors is pre-school education, where very young children start learning Dutch from age two and a half while acting out everyday situations.

"The city of Rotterdam works closely with schools and other institutions to provide our children with a dynamic and pleasant environment to grow up in."

"When targeting hard-to-reach groups, we take their social environment into account and focus on their needs" - Hugo de Jonge, Alderman for education, youth and families of Rotterdam.

The Bernard van Leer Foundation is concerned with the question of how we can ensure cities are as supportive as possible to the care and learning needs of young children. One important aspect of this is consulting children themselves about what they want from aspects of city life such as urban planning, early learning services, housing, etc. Does the city of Rotterdam have policies on getting input from the children themselves on decisions impacting their lives (e.g. city planning, early learning services, housing etc)?

The European Youth Capital project and the programme 'Child Friendly Rotterdam' are good examples of the way we involve children at several ages. We focus mainly on input from children slightly older, generally from about ten years old. Also we have an important youth board: the Young Economic Development Board. They advise the mayor and aldermen on youth issues.

I feel it helps our city in two ways: the input helps us to understand, reach and help the Rotterdam youth through our policies. And, of course, it's a marvelous way to find and develop young talent. If you take the time and make the effort to involve children and youths in creating new policy, you will be surprised at their creativity.

From our work throughout the Netherlands, we are very aware that certain disadvantaged groups tend to find it more difficult to access quality services in early learning and care for their children. Rotterdam is progressive in its policies towards disadvantaged groups. Which groups are most difficult to reach in Rotterdam and why? What is the city doing to make services in early learning and care available for these children?

These are people with low education and low income, they combine poor language skills with low education and relatively high unemployment. The city provides pre-school and in-school education, so that children start learning Dutch at a young age. We do this in close cooperation with day care

centers and schools throughout the city.

What lessons can you share with other cities in terms of effective policies and programmes when trying to reach these groups?

When targeting hard-to-reach groups, take their social environment into account and focus on their needs. What this means in practice is that we don't just rely on traditional media channels to reach these groups. So for instance we might set up an information stall in a marketplace near a mosque, and stand there offering to answer questions or provide information. We learn a lot about what concerns the groups we're trying to reach. For example, when we used this approach to publicize language courses for migrants which would enable them to communicate more easily with public servants such as teachers at their children's schools, we came to understand that some parents were avoiding contact with schools because they were worried they would get in trouble for not speaking Dutch. This understanding helps us to design better policies and programmes to reach these groups. Nothing beats two-way personal communication.

Rotterdam is well known for its high-profile campaigning on domestic violence. Why is this a priority in Rotterdam?

It is a priority in Rotterdam because of the high rate of domestic violence and the damage it causes, especially when it concerns young children. I want Rotterdam children to grow up safely and healthily. Domestic violence seriously jeopardizes their development and can keep causing harm, long after the violence has stopped.

Does Rotterdam share experiences with other cities in the Netherlands and abroad on this issue?

Of course we do. We have regular meetings with the other three major cities in the Netherlands (Amsterdam, Utrecht and The Hague). We also take part in the International Family Justice Centre Movement, based in San Diego (USA).

Furthermore, we cooperate with the city of Göteborg and we share information with several European cities like London and Milan and with European Regions like Andalucia (Spain). Finally, the city of Rotterdam and the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs cooperate with the city of Casablanca (a so called Matra-Project).

One important aspect of the Bernard van Leer Foundation's approach to reducing violence in the lives of young children is to collect more data on the issue. We feel that without good data, it is hard to establish clearly the extent of the problem and what needs to be done, and to track how successful different approaches

are. Do you agree? What kind of data exists on the impact of domestic violence on children in Rotterdam?

Of course, the extent of the problem is a continuous concern. An important objective in our campaign against domestic violence, is uncovering the hidden violence.

We have data/reports from a number of sources: the Centre for Advice and Reporting of Child Abuse (AMK); the Advice and Support Centre (ASHG), on domestic violence, honor related violence, female mutilation, child abuse, forces marriages, parent violence, sexual abuse and lover boys; several other organizations like the Rotterdam Police and mental health institutions.

What challenges does the city face in collecting data?

The biggest challenge we face is the taboo on both domestic violence and child abuse. Neither a problem family itself nor its social environment (i.e. relatives, neighbors and friends) are likely to blow the whistle. Problems like this are usually hidden as much as possible, and sometimes they are not even perceived as problems.

In some cases, both the victims and the perpetrator regard a certain level of violence as 'normal'. Any official number on domestic violence and child abuse is bound to underestimate the extent of the problems, both in families of Dutch and foreign origin. We really

need to expand the awareness on that: it never was and never will be normal.

Another important aspect of domestic violence which is under-appreciated is the impact on children witnessing violence - they can be severely affected by this, even if they are not physically subjected to violence themselves. What is Rotterdam's experience with early detection of violence against or witnessed by children 0 – 3?

In 2007 Rotterdam developed a Code of Conduct in partnership with other stakeholders in the future of our city's children, ranging from schools and kindergartens to medical service providers.

The initiative emerged from an awareness that a more holistic and integrated approach was needed to tackle this issue. It was pioneering work

"When collecting data on violence, the biggest challenge we face is the taboo on both domestic violence and child abuse."

and reflected our strong commitment to try to really solve problems using the policy tools at our disposal, rather than just regarding policy implementation as a box-checking exercise.

The Code of Conduct consists of a variety of tools such as protocols and training courses which we adapted

for different groups of professionals who work with children, to detect and report signs of violence and abuse.

For example we have Centers for Youth and Family (CJG), where all children between 0 and 19 years see doctors at various moments and stages in their lives. The purpose is not just to check physical health; the medical professionals also look for signs of domestic violence or abuse. If they suspect a child lives in a violent, or even life-threatening environment, there are protocols they can follow to report problems and have them addressed accordingly. This approach is quite useful.

Our focus is on abused children as well as children whose parents have violent relationships. Institutions such as the Centre for Advise and Reporting of Child Abuse (AMK) and the Bureau for Youth-care are priceless partners in the battle against violence, for the city of Rotterdam and numerous other parties.

A relatively new instrument has also proven useful in our battle: the possibility to prohibit violent offenders access to their own homes, thus protecting the other members of the family.

The Code of Conduct we developed has had a real impact. Since it was introduced in 2007, reports of abuse have increased from many sources, showing that taboos are being broken and people are becoming more willing to speak up. We are glad that this success has been noticed elsewhere in

the Netherlands and is to be adapted into national legislation, probably in 2011.

What are the main challenges?

The main challenges are:
1. the provision of sufficient care for children as victims and as witnesses;
2. the prevention of domestic violence and child abuse;
3. to put an end to the transfer of domestic violence from one generation to the next generation.

What is Rotterdam's policy on ensuring care is provided to children that are a witness to violence?

Our policy approaches the problem and the environment as a whole, and we involve all possible parties to address any issues. More concretely:
- We subsidize youth care.
- We give added priority to youth programmes.
- We set up close cooperation between several organizations through tools like the Code of Conduct.
- We established so-called Local Domestic Violence Teams, which form a powerful link in the entire network. Such teams consist of people from the police, general welfare services, children's welfare services, and the regional health department, to name a few.

Again, cooperation and a wide-angle view are key.

If there were unlimited resources, what else would you ideally like to do to prevent child abuse?

Ideally, I would like to set up a long-term, multi-spectrum prevention programme for children who have suffered from violence as a victim or as a witness. I would like to include all relevant private and public parties, to ensure the problem is addressed holistically, from every possible angle.

What are the main lessons Rotterdam can share with other cities interested in tackling domestic violence (specifically on early detention and care for children under the age of 8)?

We learned that these measures can be very successful:
- The introduction of the Code of Conduct of reporting domestic violence and child abuse ('Rotterdamse meldcode').
- More intense cooperation between partners (e.g. Police, ASHG, AMK, Women's shelters) in the local domestic violence teams.
- Enhanced involvement of daycare centers, kindergartens, family doctors, social workers and schools.
- A network of mentor mothers for families at risk.
- Specialized approaches to various types of domestic violence, such as elderly abuse and honor related violence.

International experience (for example in Sweden) indicates that the involvement of men is crucial in campaigns against domestic violence. Do you agree? How does the campaign in Rotterdam approach men?

The entire approach includes men. That applies to the help we offer to offenders and to families. Offenders are often obligated to accept this help, and are helped by men. The campaign also includes men, both in the target audience and in the material supporting the campaign.

Who would be an ideal spokesperson to approach men in Rotterdam (and the Netherlands) on the issue of domestic violence?

One needs several ambassadors for specific target audiences. Ideally, one should have someone that people feel familiar with and close to, since the problem of violence and abuse is such an intimate thing.

Freeing children to contribute: building child-friendly cities in the Asia Pacific region

Karen Malone, UNESCO Asia-Pacific Director, Growing Up in Cities project; Chair, Child Friendly Asia Pacific Regional Network, Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong, NSW Australia

Large sections of many cities in the Asia-Pacific region are effectively out of bounds for children, whose freedom to explore their urban environments is limited by a lack of child-friendly places and transport routes, and a culture of fear about traffic and 'stranger danger'. In this article Karen Malone, regional director of UNESCO's Growing Up In Cities project, and Chair of Child Friendly Asia Pacific explores the reasons and some possible solutions.

In the fast-urbanising majority world countries of the Asia-Pacific region, many governments struggle to provide basic infrastructure for services such as safe water. Children face serious danger from pollutants and pathogens in the air, water, soil or food, and – especially for the region's millions of street children – traffic accidents. In the region's higher-income countries, however, the problem is a very different one: a culture of anxiety, depression and stress is increasingly evident.

UNICEF-IRC's Report Card 7, *Child poverty in perspective: an overview of child well-being in rich countries*, reported that many children feel awkward and out of place in their community. The most striking individual result was the 30% of Japanese children who said they felt lonely – three times higher then any other country. While troubling in itself, this also has equally troubling implications: Palmer (2007: 2) believes the "knock-on effects of this epidemic is the increase in drug and substance abuse among teenagers along with binge-drinking, eating disorders, self-harm and suicide".

When parents are asked to reflect on their childhoods, they usually remember having far more freedom than their own children have today. A generation ago, children were far more likely to play independently in their own neighbourhood. So why do today's children from middle-class families in developed nations in the Asia Pacific region spend so much less of their time playing outside?

Partly it's because they have less time available, as they are often engaged in more indoor and adult-organised activities such as sport, music, homework or tutoring – a trend to 'over-occupy' and 'over-organise' children's lives. And partly it's due to the erosion and pollution of natural or wild spaces; the loss of parks and playgrounds because of the increasing need of land for housing or industry; increased car traffic, and poor quality public transport.

But in large part it's also due to an increased fear of violence and crime. Children are more likely to be driven to their adult-organised activities, not only because of the distances involved but also because of the increased fear of both traffic and 'stranger danger'. I will consider these in turn.

Traffic danger: breaking the vicious circle

The fear of the danger posed by traffic to pedestrian children is a vicious circle: as parents strive individually to shield their children from danger by driving them, they contribute collectively to the busier roads. In Australia the most prevalent increase in pedestrian accidents for children is when getting in or out of cars or crossing the road outside their school or childcare.

How can this vicious circle be broken? One possible solution pioneered by David Enwright and widely used in the Australian state of Victoria is the 'walking school bus' initiative, in which schools coordinate parents to walk their children to school in a group. While initially popular, however, the programme often did not become self-sustaining when the initial funding to a school dried up. Enwright envisaged this programme as a transitional phase which would lead to children walking to school in groups on their own, whereas schools tended to see it as something that they needed to structuralise.

Enwright's ultimate aim was a cultural shift to get people more used to the idea of children using the streets, but in Australia this is a challenge. Children's independent mobility, their freedom to explore their own neighbourhood or city without an adult, is low in Australian cities compared to many other countries – and will worsen if car travel continues to rise. By contrast, when I spent time in Japan I was struck by the evidently strong culture of children's independent mobility: very young children walk to and from school, use public transport and can access parks and playgrounds close to their homes on a regular basis. Colleagues in Japan were surprised that I found this surprising.

Research is now being done to quantify the differences in cultures of independent mobility, building on the One False Move research of Mayer Hillman, which compared how children's mobility in the UK and Germany had changed from the 1970s to the 1990s. This work is now being replicated in different locations across Europe, Asia and Africa and data is beginning to come in, which should provide insights into what factors contribute to building a culture of independent mobility.

'Stranger danger' and social trust

One such factor which is already well understood from Hillman's initial work is social trust – a sense of shared values. This could explain why relatively homogenous societies, such as Japan and Scandanavian countries, seem to be more comfortable with allowing children to get around independently. The question of how to build social trust in the diverse cities of today's globalised world is an urgent one if we wish to create a more child-friendly urban environment.

In Australia we are always reminded of the centrality of social trust when we do research with parents, as 'stranger danger' invariably comes out as their top issue – no doubt influenced by media scares about predatory adults and large-scale terrorism making the world feel like a more dangerous place. In one recent study we asked 4-8 year olds in a very safe, low-crime neighbourhood if they were allowed outside their front garden gate. Given their ages we were not surprised that 90% said they weren't, but we were saddened by some of the reasons they gave:

"You might get lost or kidnapped" – *Sara, age 4*

"My dad says unsafe" – *Michelle, age 5*

"Mum is scared I may get hurt" – *Hayley, age 6*

"May get lost, kidnapped, killed, all those things" – *Darah, age 6*

"I would like to go outside my garden but I might get killed" – *Sally, age 6*

As Louv (2006) notes, this culture of fear can be very harmful to children's sense of connection to the world.

In fact the odds of a child being abducted by a stranger in Australia are 1 in 4 million, less than in previous decades and roughly comparable to the chance of them being struck by

lightning. But merely presenting the statistics seems to have little impact on parents' perceptions. Other ways must therefore be found to encourage parents to overcome their fears about letting their children out to play.

One promising route is to emphasise the benefits of outdoor play in fighting obesity and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). These are conditions which also concern Australian parents, so we need to drive into public consciousness the fact that children who miss out on regular

research with over 1000 children in both large and small cities in Australia has revealed that they actually prefer to be playing at the park, playing with friends, or interacting with nature and animals; using technology came low on their list. As Richard Louv argued in his infamous book *Last Child In the Woods*, we need to view exposing children to nature as a matter of health rather than merely one of leisure.

Recognising the value of being 'streetwise'

We also need to acknowledge that a freedom to move around from a young age allows children to develop important life skills: the capacity to read the urban environment and to assess and manage risk, or, in other words, to be 'streetwise'. If you walk the streets of many majority world countries you are likely to encounter many 'streetwise' children, often engaged from an early age in activities to support their families such as delivering or selling goods, shopping in the local markets or performing other domestic chores.

This tends to offend the sensibilities of adults from developed countries, but we need to acknowledge there is another side to the story: there is a benefit in our children becoming capable and competent and resourceful. A report on street children in the Asia Pacific region West (2003: 12) recently states: "… despite the inherent dangers, many children find life on the street to be liberating. For some, it provides

> Why do today's children from middle-class families in developed nations in the Asia Pacific region spend so much less of their time playing outside?

exercise because they stay indoors and are driven everywhere are at greater risk of obesity, type II diabetes and other 'lifestyle' diseases. In emphasizing the benefits of outdoor play, we can learn from the UK government's successful Play England initiative that focused on building play environments but also play communities for children.

Parents are often shocked to discover how much their children enjoy outdoor play; they tend to assume that, because their children spend so much time playing with computers and other technology, this must be what they most want to do and not something they do for lack of options. Our

Children without helmets, a typical sight in many Asian cities.

Photo: Karen Malone

the possibility to earn money, eat reasonably well, and do things children usually are not allowed to do at home. The problems of life on the street may become apparent only when they grow older and their perspectives on life change. The notion of street children being 'out of place' may primarily be a perception held by adults. Much depends on individual experience".

It is notable that one of the triggers for the aforementioned Play England initiative was the UNICEF research showing that English children reported the lowest subjective wellbeing of the countries surveyed. These were all rich countries, but this research is now being replicated in the wider world and

this new round of research should give us interesting insights into the kinds of lifestyles that make children happier. It should also offer policy insights for city planners, who unfortunately tend generally to see children only as a 'problem' to be 'solved' by "[tidying them] away behind railings, in parks, in gardens and – best of all – indoors".

There may be more sensible policy alternatives: for example, in a recent visit to the Indonesian city of Solo I found a programme that supported working street mothers and children by providing on-site child care workers in market places to ensure very young children and babies weren't endangered, and mothers and

older siblings could work without fear. Another programme by a city council in Indonesia, which has been anecdotally reported as a great success, is the provision of helmets for parents to borrow as they take their children around on the front or back of motorbikes: this can be a high-risk activity, and this programme offers a way to ameliorate the risks to children without 'tidying them away'.

Indicators by children, for children
As we devise ways to make cities more child-friendly, it is important to value and respect children (especially young children) as active participants and decision makers in those design

processes. Research on children in cities throughout the world shows that despite diversity of place, children value similar qualities in urban environments. UNESCO's *Growing Up in Cities* used the participation principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child to emphasise that cities should be evaluated not merely for children, but by children themselves. The result was a set of indicators of quality of life by children and for children.

The list of positive socio-physical indicators for urban environments

invisible or harassed, are deemed not child-friendly.

While these are features that commonly tend to come out of research with children to develop indicators, there are also variations from place to place, so it is always important for a city to design their own indicators through consultations with their own children. In our recent work with children aged 4-6 years old in Brimbank, Australia, for example, the children designed a set of positive indicators which included places with

Towards more child-friendly cities
To understand better what is happening in children's lives, we need to strengthen data collection and monitoring with children. As a UNICEF report stated, "often, national averages conceal the adverse health conditions disproportionately experienced by the poor, and a lack of reliable statistical data disaggregated by geography and socio-economic groups makes analysis of the Asia-Pacific region difficult". Decisions need to be made using data that reflects the realities and diversities of children's lives.

The UNICEF Child Friendly Cities (www.childfriendlycities.org) self-assessment initiative has an important role to play in the development of this data. The principles of CFC emphasise the importance of supporting mayors and municipal councils to work in partnership with communities, families and especially young children in evaluating the quality of their environments. In the Philippines, for example, with the support of UNICEF and the government a multi-sector nation-wide partnership has been set up and a 'Presidential Award' established which awards cities 'child-friendly' status if they can document have they have attained 24 goals/ indicators on survival, development, protection and participation, developed within the national plan of action for children.

> It is always important for a city to design their own indicators through consultations with their own children.

identified by children in cities includes provision of basic needs, social integration, safety and free movement, peer gathering places and safe green spaces – places where they are protected from crime, violence, pollution and traffic danger, able to meet friends and explore freely. The negative indicators include social exclusion, violence and crime, heavy traffic, lack of gathering places, boredom and lack of political power. For children, a child-friendly city is one which supports social integration, where they feel welcome and are valued as part of a caring community. In contrast places that provoke feelings of alienation, marginalisation, or being

animals, places to be creative, and places to relax indoors.

From their suggestions we then compiled a list of 50 child-friendly places in Brimbank, and took children to visit each of them and assess them using the indicators they had developed. Often this revealed that even the most child-friendly places scored well on only a couple of indicators. The city council has embraced the research and is using it to look again at municipal places for children, to see how they can be made to meet more of the children's indicators.

In addition, cities must present four 'gifts' to children: a local development plan for children; a local investment

plan for children; a local code on children; and a state of the children report. In Pasay City, for example, which regularly scores highly in the Presidential Awards, the city mayor delivers an annual 'State of the Children' address.

As we seek to build more child-friendly cities across the Asia Pacific region, the main focus for many cities will unfortunately still be on ensuring that children survive to their fifth birthday and beyond. But beyond these fundamental questions of poverty and survival, we need also to appreciate that some aspects of life in the crowded cities of the majority world can potentially equip children well with the resilience to cope with the ever changing and unpredictable world of the future.

The challenge is to find the right balance between protecting children and giving them the freedoms and opportunities to engage with their communities and build competencies. While wealthy parents fill their children's lives with activities, intent on giving them the best chance to succeed in life, this can also leave them with no time to "relax, play on their own, or let their imaginations wander". Our research has shown that when given a choice and a voice, children do inherently choose activities that benefit their health and psychological well-being and allow them to make a significant contribution to their community.

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Community classrooms for the all-round protection of Petare's boys and girls

Gloria Perdomo, Executive Director, Luz y Vida Foundation, Venezuela

In an area of Caracas where street violence has become a normal part of everyday life, and where children grow up admiring and wanting to emulate the leaders of local gangs, a group of women set out to build a community programme of care for children who were not in school. Their motivating belief is that education can save children from growing up into a life of violence. In this article Gloria Perdomo discusses how the Luz y Vida Foundation coordinated these efforts, what difficulties the community women faced, and what has been achieved.

Petare is an urban parish located in the municipality of Sucre in Miranda State, in the metropolitan area of Caracas. Conservative estimates place its urban population at 750,000 residents, making up over 800 communities. A great many of them live in conditions of poverty, evidenced in unemployment, sporadic and unstable family income, overcrowding, inadequate and hazardous housing, absent or irregular basic services such as drinking water, sewage disposal, access roads, transport and so on. Social exclusion is rife under these circumstances. Thousands of boys and girls grow up here without enough suitable food for their age, leading to malnutrition and a shorter than average stature. Thousands of children and adolescents have no identification documents and grow up on the margins of all types of formalities, which means they are not registered for basic schooling. Many of them begin work from a very young age to help support their families, often in jobs that are unsuitable for their young bodies, such as loading building materials, carrying rubbish, etc. They

are not provided with sufficient and appropriate educational, recreational and cultural services to ensure their protection and overall development. For thousands of boys and girls in this area, their basic care and education is no longer a priority for their families, often because their fathers are absent, leaving their mothers to face the daily battle for economic survival alone. The children do not receive the protection they need and are vulnerable to difficult situations. However, what Petare is most notorious for is violent delinquency, which has become the overriding feature of this urban environment; the growing number of crimes committed here have turned it into an extremely dangerous place.

In this context, violence takes many guises, including serious aggression towards children on a continuous basis and from a very early age.

The daily occurrence of street violence has become the norm, an everyday matter that no longer surprises anyone: it is part of life and is starting to be regarded with indifference. A case that amazed us, for example, was that one morning, the

teachers at a pre-school centre in one of the neighbourhoods came across the body of a young man who had been murdered, lying in the corridor leading to the school entrance. Faced with this situation, the children's parents protested at the teachers' refusal to hold classes that day for small children aged between 3 and 6 years old and seemed unconcerned about the risk of further gunshots or of a possible 'tribute' to the dead man (almost always involving gunfire). Nor were they worried about allowing their children to witness such a macabre scene. In fact, one of the mothers quite calmly lifted her daughter over the body and handed her over to one of the teachers, while her neighbours verbally attacked this same teacher for "cancelling classes just because of a dead body".

In such a violence-based social context, the prevailing culture is one of violence and death, in which the weak and vulnerable seem to have no chance of survival. Children in this urban environment grow up admiring the people they see as leaders in their community, the gang leaders, and trying to imitate them. We have heard more than one child say: "when I grow up I want to be a gangster so people will respect me". This kind of view is the product of impunity, of the absence of community protection and safety, of resentment and defencelessness.

This generalising or 'naturalising' of violence is invading all aspects of life, including customs and traditions. It has even reached sacred places, like chapels and wakes, and community public spaces, like football pitches, schools, hospitals, etc. It hinders study or work because residents reject or fail to make full use of opportunities open to them, owing to the virtual curfew under which these communities live. As a result, many of the options that might be suitable for bringing violence to an end, such as sport, recreational activities or social services, either do not work or take place sporadically, precisely because of all these safety-related issues.

> The daily occurrence of street violence has become the norm, an everyday matter that no longer surprises anyone: it is part of life and is starting to be regarded with indifference.

A response from the community
Against this background of poverty, violence and the huge impact of these on basic human values, a group of women, mothers and girls living in these communities decided to embark on a battle, or rather to pursue a dream, driven by the hope of being able to offer children growing up in this disturbed social climate the chance to enjoy a different way of life.

They began their work feeling a real trust in the ability of human beings' to overcome adversity and all kinds of problems. They had seen many children born only to die very young and their experience of life convinced them that many could have been saved, actually with very little effort. If they had gone to school, if their parents had not beaten them so harshly, if they had not been roaming the streets for so many years, etc. Without being sociologists or great specialists, they had the ability to predict who, out of the sweet and innocent children in their neighbourhood, would, in only a few years, turn into the most feared and antisocial youths in their area. And sadly, they were not wrong; they could pinpoint which children and youths were growing up without proper protection.

They came out of their homes, took action and with effort and initiative built up a community programme of care for children who were not in school. They started by going round the streets in their neighbourhood and visiting homes with children who had not been able to attend school, asking parents and the children themselves if they would like to go and study at a school. After only two weeks of making these visits, they identified 980 boys and girls between 5 and 17 years old, who had never had access to school, either because of a lack of places in

schools in Petare or because of the extreme poverty in which their families lived. They were all invited to join the community classrooms, which were simply community spaces set up by the women's neighbours and relatives.

This was a real social movement that involved talking to residents, sharing experiences – even with the gaggles of youths drinking liquor on street corners – and calling on the area's families and inviting them to collaborate so that no child in their neighbourhood was deprived of the chance to study. For several weeks, after compiling lists of children not at school, letters were written and sent, formal procedures were carried out and meetings were attended to show the education authorities the clear need for schools to be set up and more classrooms provided, as well as special programmes developed for supporting the most poverty-stricken families. But there was no firm response from the State, and having been let down by the authorities in charge, these women from the communities decided to become teachers, and started giving daily lessons to all the children whom they had told that studying was both important and necessary.

A total of 24 community classrooms were set up in eight different communities within the municipality and each year since 2001 they've admitted an average of four hundred boys and girls who have been excluded from formal education.

This work grouped the resident-teachers together in the *Luz y Vida* Foundation, a community organisation that the majority of them already belonged to and whose priority at that time was to promote social and family participation in protecting the right to education. This mission was rooted in the conviction that being integrated into the education system and the type of protection offered by schools could save the majority of these children from a fate that was not necessarily inevitable and against which action had to be taken.

Achievements gained from the experience

To summarise, the most outstanding achievements gained from this experience are the following:

1. In less than two weeks, the women, community groups, residents, parents and representatives set up eight community spaces that became classrooms for schooling and literacy. The basic necessities for working with the children on a daily basis (chairs, desks, tables, blackboards, etc) were donated by people at a community *cayapa*, or joint effort. Motivating and recruiting community teachers was the responsibility of community members, and each neighbourhood identified people who were willing to do educational activities with the children.

2. Every year, visits are carried out to the children's homes and observation days are held in each of the neighbourhoods, enabling pressing needs to be assessed and ways of solving problems to be found. This meant that a social diagnosis of the state of children's rights in the municipality could be made and updated on a yearly basis. The assessment showed the chronic absence of spaces for play; the notorious drug trafficking and drug-taking (including by children) in the majority of neighbourhoods; the deterioration or complete lack of basic services such as drinking water, entrance steps and communication services; the absence of institutional programmes and resources for repairs to community infrastructures; and difficulties obtaining access to justice. Since in Petare there is no Protection Prosecution Service, or law courts, the Protection Council works in a constant state of collapse because of the huge demand. There are only two defence lawyers for promoting and defending children's rights, which are constantly being violated.

3. The absence of educational opportunities and exclusion from school was shown, according to these experiences, to the following causes:
   - Lack of places in schools, because no new school buildings have been built in Petare for more than thirty years.
   - The abject poverty in which families are living (which forces

According to Luz y Vida Foundation, community classrooms help children to learn that school too, is a place where they can have experiences that change their lives.

Photo: Courtesy Fundacion Luz y Vida

children out to work or stops them from getting tickets, school equipment, uniforms or packed lunches).
- Parents' negligence or neglect.
- The disabilities that some boys and girls are supposedly suffering from (to justify their exclusion).
- The ignorance or laziness of school managers who fail to register people who have no identification documents or who are not in possession of some kind of formal qualification.
- The situation of violence and insecurity endured by communities, leading to lack of access to school or to learning; this also affects very young children.
- The situation of girls, who from a very young age shoulder the responsibility for looking after their younger siblings at home and are therefore not registered for school.

4. The women of the community who came up with this initiative discovered their teaching vocation when they discovered that children, even older children, learned with them. This brought out their sensitivity, commitment and talent

as community teachers. Recognising this opportunity, the *Luz y Vida* Foundation forged an alliance with the Simón Rodríguez Experimental University, to develop a university-level professional teaching course. Its on-the-job training strategies and research projects, inclusive nature and cooperative learning system led to 16 of these community teachers gaining a university teaching qualification after six years of training. They graduated with a degree in Overall Education, setting

> The women of the community who came up with this initiative discovered their teaching vocation when they discovered that children, even older children, learned with them.

an example and motivating their families, communities and especially the pupils in the community classrooms.

5. Although community classrooms adhere to the requirements and demands of official basic education programmes, their top priority is to safeguard the full protection of boys and girls not registered for school. Working in the classrooms means getting to know the circumstances in which pupils live, and this involves finding out, for example, that they have no official papers, that they do not live with their parents, that they have never been to a health centre,

etc. In all these cases, the teacher and the volunteers who support the teacher mobilise institutions and services, visit homes and work alongside families, ensuring that safeguarding townspeople's basic human rights is their number one priority.

6. Perhaps an alternative educational model is emerging from these classrooms, one that involves using non-conventional strategies and requires knowing and respecting the educational needs and expectations of children taking part, adapting teaching content to cater to their interests, experience and real-life situations. A need has been demonstrated for educational projects that allow mothers to express affection for their children, to call them by their names or celebrate their birthdays. This work helps children to learn that school too, is a place where they can have experiences that change their lives and make them happy. One of the main strategies or principles of this kind of teaching is that children feel recognised, valued and loved by their teachers. This is made possible not only through teachers' conscious intentions, but also through their capacity for love and for being supportive, one of the greatest and most wonderful qualities of these community teachers.

7. Contrary to what is generally assumed, the non-school population proved that they wanted to study

and welcomed their 'pupil' status. The majority have not left the school, in fact they get annoyed when a fair is held because it stops them attending class. They enjoy and appreciate their school time.

8. This programme is delivered in a flexible and open way, winning it many allies, such as the food company that provided a daily nutritional supplement. The educational community in the French College and the British School contributed resources for repairing buildings and donated educational material. Unilever Andina assisted with teacher training scholarships and some university teaching staff donated their consultancy time to the project. We could make an extensive list of people whose generosity has enabled this community work to continue for several years.

But the greatest and most fundamental achievement has been the educational inclusion of four thousand hitherto unschooled boys and girls, allowing them to escape from the violence and exclusion that marked their lives. As the residents themselves can see, in the past they were seen as 'street kids', a term that was used even for the smallest children. Today they are pupils, they attend class or they have completed their schooling. In recent years, an institutional agreement has been set up with the Fe y Alegría Association, under which these

children can be awarded certificates and given academic recognition for their studies in these community classrooms. Projects currently being developed include setting up a community pre-school section for the next school year, funded from municipal sources and with teaching staff trained for this purpose. This means job opportunities, with social security and stability, for seven of the teachers who set up this venture.

Final thoughts
Organised communities should not replace the State, providing answers in the face of the absence or blatant negligence of the people responsible for policy and educational programmes. The strategic role of social organisations is to demand rights, denounce the lack of proper protection and promote the development of basic social policy in favour of overall childhood development. But ten years of working on this experience have shown that there are circumstances and situations that by their nature and complexity require hands-on intervention. Learning comes from committed action, in which those affected work alongside those striving for cultural harmony: people who are able to get close and understand those who live on the margins and are unable to access institutions and schools. In these cases, it is essential to generate non-conventional strategies alongside suitable teaching provisions, that both guarantee the effectiveness of

educational objectives, and are rooted in and available to the community as a whole. They will give rise to new models, approaches and projects that will promote equality and enable people to overcome the huge social gaps that exact a significant toll on society.

Hope for the children of Juarez

Jean Friedman-Rudovsky, freelance journalist[1]

As the new 'ground zero' in the war on drugs – and the homicide capital of the world – Ciudad Juarez in Mexico is a challenging place in which to grow up. This article describes the inspirational work being done by the *Hazlo por Juárez* (Do it for Juarez) campaign, a coalition of community groups, to break the cycle of violence through working with young children and pressuring the city government. (http://hazloporjuarez.blogspot.com)

It's 6:30 am on a sunny Friday morning in Ciudad Juarez and Raul and Fatima Valenzuela yawn as they slide out of their mom's dilapidated white pick-up truck. They kiss their mother Leonor goodbye and head down the hallways of the OPI (Popular Independent Organization) Daycare Center, their brightly colored back packs - disproportionately large for their tiny bodies - bouncing along behind. Except for the muted adult conversation near the entrance, the building is virtually silent. You'd never guess that it was already full. The majority of the 75 children there that day were dropped off almost two hours earlier but went promptly back to sleep as their moms rushed off to arrive on time for their 6 am shift at the *maquila* (a network of foreign-owned factories). Raul and Fatima woke up slightly during the 20 minute bumpy car ride from their house to the center, but gladly lay down on their cots alongside their slumbering classmates and drifted back to sleep.

Outside the day begins to unfold. That late-June Friday in the world's most dangerous city was couched in a week of exceptional bloodshed: the two days prior had a death toll of 37

murders. Kidnappings and extortions don't even get tallied anymore: their total probably reached into the hundreds over the course of the week. For the past two years, Juarez has plunged into a state of perpetual grief as the new 'ground zero' in the war on drugs. More than 5,000 people have been killed since 2008 and no relief is in sight. As the number of murders rises, so too does the number of those touched by the violence. Most alarmingly, the tentacles of this violence now wrap themselves around Raul, Fatima and their peers: kids witness the murder of loved ones, they happen upon dead bodies or are killed themselves.

As if adding insult to injury, the city lags desperately behind in providing services for this waist-high population. Juarez has more mothers working outside the home than any other city in Mexico and family relationships have fundamentally changed in the *maquila*-centered city. Yet two-thirds of the city's 6 year-old don't attend kindergarten. Only 6 of every 100 young children have access to day care centers like OPI and so more than half of these kids are left home alone at some point during the day or night. These statistics may

seem unrelated to the city's violence problem but many now believe that no two phenomena that could be more linked: without quality services for early childhood development, the cycles of violence that maintain their city as the global homicide capital will never end.

Through a campaign named *Hazlo por Juárez* (Do it for Juarez), a coalition of community groups are pressuring government to improve and expand current services including doubling the current number of day care spaces available and creating programmes that train providers in early development. They have used various campaign strategies, from coalition building to advocacy to graffiti sessions to achieve their objectives. It's an uphill battle in a virtual war zone, but it's being waged with dignity, force, and – recently – success.

Supporting working families

"No one goes hungry in Juarez," says 40 year-old Leonor Valenzuela, Raul and Fatima's mother. It's a common refrain. Over the last 20 years, Juarez has become an economic hub of northern Mexico because of the *maquila* industry – the network of foreign owned factories along the US-Mexico border that provide everything from electronics to shoes to skirts for immediate, tax free export to the US. The *maquila* employs 90% of the city's work force and because there's always demand for the cheap goods produced, unemployment in Juarez is consistently

the lowest in Mexico. (The 2008 global economic downturn cast a shadow over this minor worker's luxury. Juarez's formal sector alone lost 90,000 jobs between 2008 and 2009. Some of these jobs have resurfaced, though, and Juarez is still a working city.)

Yet the *maquila*, though reliable, is no dream job: shifts begin at dawn, benefits are poor, and tasks monotonous. Most importantly, wages have not risen with the cost of living: families in Juarez now have one-quarter of the buying power they had

> Without quality services for early childhood development, the cycles of violence that maintain their city as the global homicide capital will never end.

in 1975 and are thus forced to have two incomes whenever possible. Half of Juarez's women of reproductive and child-raising age work outside the home – 10% more than Mexico's national average.

In many places in Mexico, familial networks cover for parents who must leave the home to work. But more than 50% of the city's population are migrants and these networks have not been able to compensate for the work pace. According to recent studies, 44% of mothers leave their children at home at some point during the day. OPI Director Mikaela Castillo recalls TV news highlights showing 3 and 4 year

Among others, Hazlo por Juarez campaign advocates
for the creation of 'small safe spaces' in neighborhoods
around Juarez that allows kids to be outside without the
fear of violence.

old kids walking on the streets alone.
"Parents would say, "oh, I had to leave
and my husband was supposed to have
arrived really soon"", says Castillo.

"The *maquiladora* fundamentally
changed the way kids were being
taken care of", says Clara Jusidman,
honorary President of *Incide Social*,
a Mexico City-based social research
organisation that has studied labor and
familial relations in Juarez for years.
Despite 30% of the city's population
being under the age of 14, the
government did not provide for social
development as the fabric of families
changed, she says, explaining: "There
has been no policy for improvement in
housing, health care or child care. The

government cared more about building industrial parks than caring for its people."

A quick overview of child services illustrates this government's negligence: in Juarez there are half as many childcare spaces as in the state's capital city of Chihuahua, despite Juarez having double the population. "Our goal is to have the same number of spaces as in Chihuahua", says Lourdes Almada, who heads the *Red por la Infancia en Juárez*, a coalition of child advocacy organisations that started the *Hazlo por Juárez* campaign. "This would mean adding 2,000 openings so that a total 16,000 kids are covered", she says, adding: "it doesn't even seem like much but it would make a world of difference".

But Almada and her team realize that it's not just about increasing the number of spots available. Rather, one of the most impressive aspects of the campaign is that it understands that these services must be designed in a way that makes them work for those who need them most and pressures government accordingly.

"There is no recipe for what a comprehensive child care system in Juarez should look like", explains Almada, "because in every neighborhood and with each sector of the population the day care centers and their services are going to have to be designed to be able to serve those communities' specific needs".

For example, when meeting with public officials, *Hazlo por Juárez*

campaign organizers make clear that new centers need to be built in the areas where the poorest residents live because they are often the ones that are forced to work outside the home. Similarly, say campaign members, centers must be able to meet the needs of the *maquila* workforce – opening and closing hours that align with *maquila* shifts, coordinated transport and making sure the day care centers are integrated into the UMSS system to ensure that tuition can be covered by the *maquila* rather than by the working parents. "All of this has to be taken into account as social policy is designed in Juarez", Almada concludes.

In need of healing
It was a steamy summer night but the air conditioner remained off because it drowned out all other sound in the large wood-paneled church meeting room. For the one dozen attendees of the weekly parent grief support group gathered, acoustics were more important than temperature.

"My three year old grand-daughter saw her father killed", says Maria, a 50-something blond woman, eyes turned downwards. The parents are there to discuss their own healing but inevitably the conversation circles back around to the children who have been affected. Maria is taking care of the little one in the wake of her daughter's tragedy and, she says, what breaks her heart most is her granddaughter's denial: "She says it was her uncle who was killed".

Silvia Aguirre, who founded a network of grief support groups because of a personal loss to cancer just before Juarez's violence made such groups a necessity, says this is common: "Juarez is a city that is contaminated by grief. We now offer groups for kids because it's clear that they are internalizing the trauma differently than adults and need their own restorative process", she adds.

Moreover, the city has become a ghost of its former self. As murders began to happen anywhere and everywhere – outside schools, near churches, in parks - *juarenses* began to cede public spaces to the drug war. "There's a civil war going on outside", says Jusidman. "You feel that you are safer inside so that's where you stay." Parks are vacant, corner stores close-up shop and for the city's children the word 'street' has become synonymous with danger. Many parents keep their children in the house. Others don't have to because kids stay indoors themselves.

"This makes child care centers and quality schools even more important", says Lorenzo Almada, Lourdes' husband who also works on the *Hazlo por Juárez* campaign. His son Esteban was six when he saw his first two dead bodies, in a car four blocks from the family's middle class home. Esteban cried and pestered his father with questions for weeks afterwards: "even if they did something wrong, they didn't deserve to die, right daddy?"

Lorenzo remembers that Esteban's school was his saving grace. "Playing with friends and being around his classmates really helped him recover", says the father. "Kids need that safe space for socialization since they can't get it informally as in the past." With this in mind the *Hazlo por Juárez* campaign is aware that providing safe and nurturing spaces for young people in their city is more important than ever. They decided that they would use this year's elections to obtain promises from elected officials to comply with their goals.

Bringing about change

"This place is a God-send", says Valenzuela, as Raul and Fatima disappear down the hallway into the OPI day care center. "I feel great relief everyday, knowing that they are here in this space, especially in the city we live in."

The school feels like a sanctuary: the building resonates with life in a city characterized by death. There are coos and wails from the room with the 45 day-old babies, half-articulated words from the toddlers and giggle, yelps, songs and snores from the older ones. Some mothers, like Valenzuela, pay about $20 per week. Mothers who work in the *maquila* are covered by their company's benefit programme, but obligatory coverage stops at age four.

The center, which was founded after two neighborhood children were killed by a landslide because they were left home alone and locked inside

their house, is also a testament to possibilities for positive change.

"We really felt the violence come home in 2008", Castillo says, explaining that her students became more boisterous and aggressive when the violence began to take hold. "They would talk about violence with a shocking normalcy and specificity, using words like execution or assassination." She says her staff developed strategies for dealing with this – they encourage empathy building, they try to help parents discourage violent tendencies and they offer a safe space: "We would never throw out a kid for aggressive behavior or speech. That kid needs us even more than the others."

Castillo says that specialized training for her staff to be able to deal with trauma, or perhaps the opportunity for degrees in early childhood development or education would be very helpful. (None of Juarez's institutions of higher education offer such a title). But she affirms that their self-made strategies have been effective. "The kids who were with us in 2008 are calmer now", she says, continuing: "Every time a new child enters, they are considerably more aggressive than the others and it takes time to get those tendencies out of their system".

OPI's experience of watching kids lose their aggressiveness over time matches what experts have said for years: "Intervening in the early years can break cycles of violence", says Maria Teresa Montero, Academic Director of

the Autonomous University of Juarez who's been studying the situation of children in Juarez for decades. "In Juarez this is crucial. Kids in our city have seen their parents die and they are internalizing and normalizing the violence. They need quality care while their parents are working so that their situation isn't made worse by feelings of abandonment."

Seeking government commitment to secure the future

The *Hazlo por Juárez* goal would require an investment from city government of $7.5 million dollars and a strong commitment from local politicians to make it a priority. For months, volunteers and staff of the *Red por la Infancia* worked tirelessly to educate the public on the need for these programmes and to pressure candidates in the recent municipal and state elections in July to sign a promise of commitment to the campaign. They stood in the blazing sun between rows of traffic handing out flyers and stickers, they lobbied candidates, they painted murals and billboards and in the end, were able to convince all major local candidates to sign the promise, including the PRI mayoral candidate who won the elections.

"It is [the government's] responsibility to ensure that our children's rights are respected", says Almada. She notes that the Mexican constitution obliges the state to ensure respect and dignity for all children, as well as to enable them to

exercise their rights fully, including the right to nutrition, good health, education and recreation. "These needs are not being met in Juarez and the government needs to live up to its obligations", she says, adding that beyond its constitutional commitment, the Mexican government signed the UN declaration on the children's rights decades ago.

Over the next several months, the *Hazlo por Juárez* campaign has many projects appearing on the horizon. In November, the coalition will organise a forum for pertinent civil society and government groups and individuals with the objective of helping advance the understanding that investing in early childhood care and services can bring about long term peace and security for the residents of Juarez. Also, the forum will aim to obtain commitments from and create synergies among the various strategic actors, in order to generate a plan of action and achieve common goals, which may focus not just on early childhood, but also on adolescence.

In addition, Almada and her team will be initiating a new stage of the campaign named *Escúchame, juega conmigo*, or "Listen to me, play with me". This public education campaign will seek to make understood how offering young people safe recreational areas is crucial for the youngest children of the city to be able to heal from traumas and to help them live a more animated and joyful childhood. In view of the government's obligations

to its people, the organizers plan to advocate for the creation of 'small safe spaces' in neighborhoods around Juarez that allow kids to be outside without the fear of violence.

"We aren't asking for handouts. We don't want the government to give money and then disappear", she explains. "We demand their active involvement in ensuring better services and a better future for our city's youth." The hard work of making sure the elected leaders comply with their promises lies ahead, but Almada and her team are ready.

Note
1 Some of the names in this piece have been changed, and some last names have been omitted, as requested to protect the identity of those who spoke with the author.

Inspiring slum children through education: a story from Delhi

Geeta Dharmarajan, Executive Director, Katha, India

In a personal account of the 22 years since she set up Katha (which means 'story' in most Indian languages), Geeta Dharmarajan reflects on how education services can inspire children and women from urban slum environments to become active in improving their communities. The article explains how Katha's model of classroom education combined with community-focused projects teaches children to think for themselves and contribute to strengthening their society, and looks at how Katha's work with government to take their ideas to scale could provide a model for India's rapidly-urbanising society. (www.katha.org)

In April 2010 we brought together leading thinkers from government, academia and the nonprofit world at a workshop to discuss 'The Child and the Megacity' – a look at the impact of slum environments in Delhi on the lives and education of children. The issue will become more and more important. From 18 million today, the population of Delhi is predicted to rise to between 21 million and 26 million by 2030. Across India, by 2030 an estimated 590 million people - nearly twice the current population of the USA - will be living in cities.

According to a report by McKinsey [1], approximately 170 million of 2030's urban Indians will be tomorrow's pre-/primary schoolers – and yet we are not investing nearly enough in those children today. Even the Right to Education Act [2] that India has finally enacted gives only a sideward glance at early learners. Things are changing, though, and we hope that our engagements in Delhi today can show the way for other metropolisses in India.

First we need to tell the story of how our organisation evolved from its original aims to our present plans. Katha is an organisation based around the idea of 'story', we started in 1988 with the mission to enhance the joy of reading, through a health and environment magazine for first generation school-goers. But soon we realised we were putting the cart before the horse. Didn't children and women first have to know how to read before they could walk the road out of poverty to self-reliance?

Our first creche and school for slum children

On September 8, 1989, by fortunate chance also World Literacy Day, Katha was registered as a nonprofit striving to make a difference in the literacy to literature continuum. I still remember my first visit to Govindpuri, one of the largest slum clusters in Delhi. Govindpuri already had thousands of families, about 50% Hindu, 50% Muslim. Families had many children; most of them didn't go to school. When I asked, mothers said, "Yes, we want

our children to go to school, but they have to support the family".

At that time, many of our mothers were bravely managing their families, single-handedly, with 7-14 year olds helping out. I saw girls with little siblings tucked into their hips, often almost as big as they themselves. Four year olds were working - though to be fair, their mothers thought they were sending their toddlers to 'schools' that provided lunch.

The main culprit? Poverty. When they migrated to Delhi for work, these families settled in the most neglected spaces - degraded land infested with mosquitoes and flies with no drainage or water, electricity or garbage disposal. They could not afford anywhere else. This, for them, was one way of being invisible, of not being evicted.

So started the Khazana Experiment, our 'deschool' that would also strive to make the environments of children living in urban slums a little better, with a little less violence, a little more hygiene.

By November 1990, we had five precious children and five 10x10 foot rooms given by the Delhi Government's Slum Wing. I wanted schools that were fun for little children who seemed more at ease handling a hammer than a pencil. The children came - with their baby sisters and brothers. Within a month, we'd started a crèche. Soon we had 25 babies in it, and as many children in our classrooms.

Shifting the focus onto income generation for mothers
Yet, as the months rolled by, more children were difficult to come by. When daily living and staving off hunger were their top priorities, how could mothers think school? What moral right had we to speak of long term goals and futures that were nowhere in their reckoning? We decided to coax and induce mothers into income generation activities, so that once we had increased the incomes of women we could more reasonably ask them to send their children to school.

By the end of 1991, Katha Shakti [3] was helping women to own and nurture their own economic freedoms and thoughts on empowerment. Since then, 90,500 women have come into Katha and moved on, carrying with them the need to fight for their rights, the need to dream, to see a different future for their children, to stand tall on their own two feet. With our Income Generation Programme (IGP) training they were bringing themselves out of poverty.

The early 1990s were heady days. Children and women were walking into our school, eager to learn, curious about everything and everyone. And the question looming over us all: our children seemed perfectly happy, and impervious to their poor physical living conditions, so how could we help them become agents of change, leaders in their community? How do we persuade first generation learners coming from oral traditions, into reading and 'formal education'? How do we increase performance, attendance and retention in children who were more used to learning through hearing than through reading? There were no easy answers. Every wheel had to be invented.

The Katha education system is not so much teaching a child as finding the seed of potential, nurturing this spark and giving each child space to grow. Our classrooms and community-focused projects teach children to think for themselves. To look after their own environment. We help children understand that education makes individuals strong, but that individuals must also contribute to strengthening the society. To be happy is the end purpose of all education, isn't it? And what happiness can we have as

> The Katha education system is not so much teaching a child as finding the seed of potential, nurturing this spark and giving each child space to grow.

individuals, as a society, if we do not all have a level playing field?

Devising a relevant curriculum for urban slum children

The Katha Pre-school Curriculum, the *Katha Bal Taleem*, addresses these very issues, uniquely designed for early learners living in urban slums. So too our teacher education curriculum. I had started learning classical dance when I was 7, and all the succeeding years of deep learnings from Bharata's *Natya Shastra*, India's 2000-year old treatise on dance and drama, influenced Katha's thinking on pedagogy, teacher training and communication to a largely non-literate population about SHE [4]: 'Safe water and Sanitation. Heath and Hygiene. Education and Empowerment.'

Theories and state-designed curricula got examined and a new ideology was put in place that would help children stay in school. By 1992, we had our relevant education curriculum that was based on caring and sharing, and brought the community into the classroom. Teachers had to write a paper on 'The teacher as the centre of community action' to get their Katha diplomas. Our children now proudly say that they're "Dreamers-Doers".

I remember that by 1995, children were talking of the importance of safe drinking water. They were able to see when water was 'dirty' and advise their families on simple ways of purifying them, like putting out bottles of water in the sun for a few hours. By 2001, we had expanded the IT programme with the support of the UK's BT and Intel. Science classes were focused on issues like water and sanitation. Social studies was learnt by a complete social mapping exercise of the community, with students doing a door to door survey and recording data on their computers. And when I had the ambitious plan of getting a geographic information system (GIS) map for Govindpuri, and found it too expensive, it was classwork that came up with a solution. Our students went *gali* [5] by *gali*, measuring literally foot by foot, and drawing a detailed map of their entire area, showing houses, temples, open spaces, and water points. They digitized this in their IT classes to make our own GIS.

One trimester when we were looking at urban conditions, students did a water availability survey, analyzed the data using Excel, and made an impressive presentation showing which pockets were worst affected. On the day Delhi's Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, visited our school, they used this to convince her enough to make a call to the CEO of Delhi Water Board, the DJB. When the DJB people came and threw up their hands for the lack of a map of the area, it was the GIS map made by the children which saved the day – they used it to plan and install 13 new water lines.

When we started we had to get the mothers to bring the children into the school, and now it was our children who were getting their mothers into the school and helping their communities. Education is not just about traditional subject knowledge. It is also about community and starts with their own stories. The SPICE Route to education that Katha follows helps students of all ages understand the Social, Personal, Intellectual, Cultural or Environmental strengths that formal education gives. SPICE helps them plan to bring themselves out of slums through classrooms that interest and challenge them.

KREAD - the Katha Relevant Education for All Round Development - weaves history and geography, science and maths, vocational and leadership skills into stories about their own community and lives. Learning by doing - rather than learning to do - is the mantra of any Katha School. How book learning can help students cooperatively find solutions to civic problems, how each child can do her bit to help her family and community. Katha does not use normal textbooks in class, but storybooks and material from the internet, newspapers, magazines and students' own experiences. Teachers develop materials to make learning joyful, relevant and creative, increasing lifelong learning skills and habits in children. Our children work on a number of projects, many with special relevance to their community, depending on the theme adopted for each trimester.

Katha teachers develop materials to make learning joyful, relevant and creative, increasing lifelong learning skills and habits in children.

Photo: Courtesy Katha

Going to scale with quality learning in urban environments

We were always acutely aware, however, that our work was reaching only a small fraction of Delhi's children. About 9 million (nearly 50% of Delhi's population) live in slums. Nearly 1 million children just in the 0-4 age group live in this urban squalor and poverty. We knew we *had* to go to scale. One of our first attempts to do so was the Schools on Wheels, inspired by a 2001 study on street children who worked rather than going to school. Thanks to a USAID grant in 2004 and EU funding, by 2007 we were working with communities in 50 slums to set up early learning centres. Dialogues with Government went from small to big where our women engaged directly with the Chief Minister and asked

her for essentials like primary health centres and pre-schools.

In 2008, in a first of its kind, the Delhi Government entered into an agreement with us to introduce the Katha tested reading pedagogy into government and municipal schools, to get children to read for fun and at grade level. And through reading we were able to discuss a variety of issues with children - hygiene, school and domestic violence, as well as their own dreams for their future. Our evaluations show significant improvement in performance, attendance and retention.

Building on this success, we are now engaged more intensely in these 50 municipal schools in a school improvement programme focusing on grades 1 to 3. UNICEF, UNESCO, the Bernard van Leer Foundation and

other partners support the programme - our teacher support plan and the unique zero (compressed pre-school) module.

But there is still a long way to go. A 2009 baseline survey[6] by Katha in 74 slums, as part of our study for the Foundation on the pre-school to primary education link, showed that out of 253,000 children aged 4 to 14, a full 95,000 were not in school. With roughly 800 children/school, that means we would need some 120 schools. But such a large number of schools with buildings and teachers can be done only by the government or the Municipal Corporation of Delhi, MCD[7]. And this is in only 74 of Delhi's slums. Imagine the challenge if we project this onto 1700 slums with thousands of at risk children. If we want a good future for our children, civil society must join hands with government.

In India we have lobbies for various issues, but none for early learning. In 2009-10 Katha spearheaded civil society discussions on children and poverty issues: Three major conferences with major partners were organized: the 'Roundtable on the education of 4-8 year olds' with the National Council for Education Research and Training, NCERT; a national ECE conference with the National University of Educational Planning and Administration; and an International Conference on Social Movements for Women and Children with the University of Delaware, USA. We preceded each of these with community-level consultations,

bringing our youth and women into the last two. The 'Child and the Megacity' workshop referred to at the beginning of the article was part of this process, and we continue to deepen engagements with government – in September 2010, the CM asked to visit Katha's Gender Resource Centre, to listen to our women. A responsive government can indeed make a difference.

Our plans for the future

Today, of the 50 MCD Schools we work in, only about 25 have pre-schools in the premises. And if you count the 50 slums we are working in, then of the 75 or so schools near our communities, not even 50% have pre-schools. We have written to the government for permission to help start pre-schools in every one of the MCD schools, starting with our 50, that we hand over to Government once they are stable. We also plan to establish simple pre-schools at very low cost in each slum that does not have pre-schools: we started 12 in September 2010. Finally, as influencing policy is important, we plan to make sure our young people learn about how to make governments work.

Change comes slowly, but with whole communities involved, a groundswell of demand and informed debate and engagement with policymakers, the bureaucracy, academia and media develops. From 2010 to 2012, with support of the Government of India, we've embarked on an ambitious study of poverty, social exclusion and the education continuum, from pre- to high school. A first of its kind, the action- research started in 50 slums to derive a roadmap for Delhi. We've begun with consultations at the community level and through a series of workshops/ seminars will engage other stakeholders in civil society for building this lobby for quality education for children in slums, including pre-school education. This is Katha's Education Master Plan, Delhi.

Writing this story has been a contemplative and deeply satisfying journey to find out what of the old we must keep and what of the new we need to bring in when scaling up urban equitable education alongside environments and family wellbeing. But we all know this is the way. Our brave children and women will bring hope, as they always have. And India is lucky to have hundreds of really active and effective NGOs to work with them. And as we together get governments to listen, just imagine the sounds of happiness from millions of children. Surely a call for celebration, that!

Notes
1 India's urban awakening: Building inclusive cities, sustaining economic growth: India's lack of effective policies to manage its rapid and large-scale urbanization could jeopardize the nation's growth trajectory. But if India pursues a new operating model for its cities, it could add as much as 1 to 1.5 percent to annual GDP growth, bringing the economy closer to the double-digit growth to which the government aspires; McKinsey Global Institute, April 2010.
2 The RTE Act enacted by India in 2010, makes education for all children from ages 6-14 free and compulsory.
3 Shakti means power.
4 SHE is a Katha programme for youth and women: Double woman power!
5 Gali: narrow pathway inside a slum.
6 Draft Report can be obtained upon request
7 MCD is the biggest of the three municipal bodies Delhi has, and governs 1,397 sq. kms, or 94% of the city. MCD runs 1800 primary schools for almost 1.8 million 5-10 year olds. So the way they teach, and look after the physical environments of all these children is important.

A safe passage to adulthood
Reaching slum children through women-led savings

Joel Bolnick, Manager of the Secretariat, and Benjamin Bradlow, Research
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Slum/Shack Dwellers International (SDI) is an international alliance of slum dweller organisations in 33 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, which originated in 1991 when slum dwellers from South Africa visited an alliance of three organizations in India dealing with urban poverty. This article explains how the bedrock of SDI's work, women-led savings schemes, creates space for young children to develop their own initiatives to improve their lives and their communities. (SDInet.org)

In 'Soul Boy', a new film by Kenyan director Hawa Essuman, a young boy and girl race through the railway line slum of Kibera in Nairobi, Kenya. Over the course of the magical realist story, they shelter a cell phone thief from informal street security enforcers, take part in a HIV/AIDS awareness play, and play a game of 'chicken' with the Kisumu Express, the train that runs through the heart of Kibera, one of the largest slums in Africa. It is all part of a mystical plan on the part of a witch doctor to cure their father's alcoholism and neglect.

The film is a rare depiction of the lives of urban poor children as they see it. The universal mystery, wonder, and promise of childhood comes face to face with the specific realities of being a young child in an urban slum. The main character of Abi lives in a shack that doubles as his father's corner store along a main dirt road in a neighborhood of Kibera known as Soweto. His mother, thoroughly unimpressed with her husband's philandering ways, works at a textile factory. Abi's aunt is a maid and cooks for a family in a wealthy suburb on the other side of town.

Towards the end of the movie, as Abi lies on the rail in front of the oncoming

Kisumu Express, his friend Shiku asks him, "Abi, what are you doing?"

His reply as the train rumbles ever closer, is delivered with eyes closed. It is strange. "I'm trying to understand."

Shiku shakes her head knowingly. "That's fine, but I don't think this is a good place to do it", she says. "Let's go somewhere else."

Where to go? Such is the question that often leads families to the rapidly growing cities of the Global South. The slums of these cities are home to many, and often the majority, of urban dwellers. They are characterized by poor or non-existent water, sanitation, and other basic services, as well as what is often referred to as "informality", a lack of legal recognition of living spaces, economic, and even social livelihoods.

The bedrock: women-led, daily savings

Children in urban slums have an acute experience of the pressures of place and family. Crowded conditions deny them safe spaces for developmental growth. Domestic and economic demands on parents, and especially mothers, can force children into labor. Problems of health and sanitation in slums affect young people most.

At the same time, it is these pressures of place and family that are central to community organization aimed at upgrading lives and shelter in urban slums. In fact, it is not so surprising that SDI has always had a focus on women. Traditionally the ones responsible for the household, women are now regarded universally as the most reliable managers of finance. SDI federations are organized around the bedrock practice of women-led, daily savings. The fact that this is led by women is an acknowledgment of their capacity to manage money and to serve as the 'glue' for effective, organized communities. As Rose Molokoane, a leader of the Federation of the Urban Poor (FEDUP) in South Africa, and SDI deputy president, often says, "the word 'women' stands for 'well organized *men*'".

The process of SDI community organization in urban slums has always been tied to the developmental needs of the children who live there. As far back as the early 1980s, the SDI alliance in India began to organize the street children of Mumbai. At the time, most agencies involved in this work directed their energies to the rehabilitation of street children, with the primary aims being to provide them with a decent

The process of SDI community organization in urban slums has always been tied to developmental needs of the children who live there.

Photo: Benjamin Bradlow

education and to reunite them with their families. In contrast, the Indian alliance organized street children, all between the ages of 5 and 18, into a loose movement called *Sadak Chaap* – meaning the 'Stamp of the Street' – a term that Bollywood has now appropriated and popularized.

The Indian alliance of SDI made no effort to educate or rehabilitate the street kids. Instead they physically linked them to the women's savings collectives by building dormitories, managed by the kids themselves, situated alongside the railway tracks and the pavement dwellings where the women held their meetings and conducted their daily lives. Without any external instruction the women pavement and railway slum dwellers began to provide emotional support and sustenance to the kids. Instead of directing them to training rooms, classrooms or to the households that they had left behind, the women simply gave them a safe passage to adulthood. Ever since this time, provision of a safe passage has been the defining characteristic of SDI's work with children.

It has taken on a new resonance and meaning in Africa's slums where the AIDS epidemic has made households headed by young children a fairly common reality. In northern KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, an organization allied to SDI, called *Sizakuyenza*, has organized dozens of these households into savings collectives. While these have intrinsic economic value, the main motivation for the SDI collectives is seen in this context to be about creating solidarities and providing safe space to those who are socially, politically and economically marginalized, including children.

Federations of savers have also helped create the space for children to develop their own initiatives for recreation and expressing their imagination. In Kibera and other slums throughout Nairobi, the Kenyan federation affiliated to SDI, known as *Muungano wa wanavijiji*, has been working with street children for the past seven years. These children, who call themselves *Mwamko wa vijana* or 'youth awakening', have led projects such as beauty pageants, reporting and editing an original slum newspaper. and regular neighborhood cleanups.

Facilitating chaos, with startling results

Over time these efforts to organize children have faced challenges common throughout the world when organizing kids as part of building communities: namely their propensity to change direction and interest. The strategy of Muungano and a group of support professionals known as the Muungano Support Trust (MUST) has been to facilitate this chaos and let the kids bring it to order themselves. The results have often been startling. At one point, 544 children from slums across the city participated in a month long soccer tournament, kitted and equipped by the Kenya's leading newspaper, the *Daily Nation*. The older kids negotiated to become newspaper vendors and a few got journalists and advertising agents from the paper to help them put together their own slum newspaper. This effort served as a basis for a new initiative of Muungano, the creation of its own community-led media wing, called *Muungano Habari Mashinani*.

Not only does SDI mobilize excluded communities into safe areas such as savings collectives, their affiliates in all countries get actively involved in the *physical* upgrading of informal settlements. In these situations children are frequently participants, playing a lead role in the mapping and surveying of these communities – essential preconditions for upgrading. And when design turns into implementation the construction of toilets is often a priority. Here, the Indian alliance has also set an important precedent, constructing toilet cubicles specifically for children so that they do not need to compete with adults for the use of these facilities and so that a public space becomes a safe space for children.

For children like Shiku and Abi, and the hundreds of thousands of children among the one billion people overall who live in urban slums throughout the world, the battle to learn and develop in safe spaces is ongoing. We don't know all the answers, but if we return to the Shikus and Abis of Kibera, and elsewhere, as they grow up, we can see how the basic unit of women's savings collectives can begin to provide such spaces. Individually, the real Abi may struggle to 'understand' his own hardship and struggle in Kibera. But as part of the kind of collective organization the SDI network has pioneered over the past two decades, he can begin to change these spaces in deceptively simple, practical ways.

From the outskirts of Lima

An experience of early comprehensive care with children under 3 years old

Gloria González, Executive Director, Gladis Tisoc, Communications Officer, and Susana La Madrid, Nutritionist, Kusi Warma, Peru

The Kusi Warma organisation works on the basic principle that the first years of a child's life are a particularly critical stage, during which their motor, perception, cognitive, language, emotional and social skills are developing and enabling them to have a balanced interaction with their family, school and community. The following describes our experience of working with mothers, including expectant mothers, and children under 3 years old to ensure they get a proper diet and enough stimulation to be able to develop fully.

Ventanilla is an out of town district in the constitutional province of Callao, on the outskirts of Lima; it has a high poverty rate and lacks many basic services. In recent years the town has seen one of the sharpest rises in population recorded in the province, making it the second most heavily populated district in Callao, according to the 2007 Population Census carried out by the National Statistics and Computing Institute (INEI). Ventanilla has a population of 277,895 inhabitants and has the lowest provision of basic services. The population is made up largely of children (39%) and of this group, 48,528 (45%) are boys and girls under the age of 8, according to the population census referred to earlier.

Because of the adverse conditions in which many of Ventanilla's children live, a considerable number of them show (or are in danger of showing) delayed growth and development. This is mainly because their parents, municipal authorities and teachers do not yet pay sufficient attention to early childhood care and its impact on their learning process and on their lives when they reach adulthood.

In fact, only 8.6% of children between the ages of 0 and 2 receive any kind of care from the State or from private organisations, meaning that more than 16,500 children in this age group are left without access to any type of care that would guarantee their proper all-round development.

A community-focused response
The 'Community Tailored Monitoring' project, carried out by the Kusi Warma Association, is being implemented in 20 settlements in this district with the support of the Bernard van Leer Foundation. The project aims to develop a practical childcare plan for 3,862 boys and girls under the age of eight living in the Pachacútec neighbourhood in Ventanilla. It involves care and learning, and equipping parents, children and teachers with the skills to create healthy environments for all-round childhood development. The strategies used are divided according to age groups (from 0 to 2 years and from 3 to 8 years) and are described below.

Early childhood growth and development community observation system

Aimed at children from 0 to 2 years old, the group intervention model on which this system is based combines analysis of socio-cultural problems, family and community psychology with learning and development theory shaped from the mid-seventies onwards. Physical space and the environment play a particularly important role in this model, along with interdisciplinary collaboration between the professionals involved, the participation and efforts of non-professionals (community agents, leaders, facilitators and authorities), as well as systematic and ongoing evaluation of results.

The aim of this strategy is to enable the organised community to identify all children under 3 years old, including those conceived but yet to be born, so that suitable action can be taken to foster these children's potential growth and development. To do this, mothers and fathers who are leading members of the community are picked to be community agents (these are key figures for the project), as they are intrinsically motivated to further their personal growth and fulfilment.

In addition to the components involved in overall care (health, nutrition, hygiene and early stimulation) a number of monitoring tools are also used: mapping to identify pregnant mothers and all the children aged under three years;

weight increase control charts for expectant mothers and weight and height control charts for children under 3 years old; graphs showing the dietary status of both children and pregnant mothers; monitoring notes for mother-child interaction indicators; the work of community agents and the physical environment; control charts for attendance at early stimulation sessions.

The monitoring information collected by the community agents is used at meetings held with health professionals and municipal authorities, for analysing and deciding on steps that need to be taken to prevent situations in which children's nutrition may be at risk and their development delayed.

Community observation centres

The physical environments surrounding everyday life also reflect our individual and collective identity. The link between person and environment is reciprocal and has a major influence on our behaviour and on how we can improve it.

The community observation centres (coc) are physical spaces within the community that are suitably equipped to promote full growth and development in children under 3 years old. They are run by Kusi Warma with the active involvement of families, community agents and municipal and local authorities.

The significance of the cocs depends on how the users (mainly mothers)

view the series of resources available to them there, and how they can establish and nurture these resources to further their development both as mothers and as individuals. In this sense, the primary concern is to ensure that the atmosphere in the COCs is relaxed and friendly. This gives added value to the space they occupy because they bring stability and order to the local area. Their physical nature also has an effect on how they are used and preserved despite external factors such as violence, neglect and poverty. In the case of the Pachacútec-Ventanilla COC, this can clearly be seen when mothers realise that the authorities and municipal managers cannot close or move them because "it belongs to the children and is for their welfare". The area is now being divided up to establish political and geographical boundaries, so that their role and function can be organised to fit in with project goals and intentions.

We should stress here that the centre is not intended to replace the service provided by the health authorities, but that it aims to link up service provision for managing and meeting community demands, as a model for future sustainability. A great deal of work is done in the centres to make mothers aware that they should go to health centres so that they and their children can have regular check-ups. They generally avoid going to the health centres either because they are too far away or because they do not feel well treated there. They are shown that,

firstly, they have the right to healthcare and treatment, and secondly, that they have a duty to look after their children. Equally, health centres are made aware of this so they can improve their contact with families in the communities in their care.

Central intervention themes

Nutrition
People are encouraged to eat easily obtainable foods with a high nutritional value, especially animal protein, such as egg, *sangrecita* [1] and fish. At these sessions, the community agent places special emphasis on the frequency and quantity of food eaten by pregnant mothers and children, as well as on the importance of breast feeding exclusively up to 6 months and on demand up to two years.

Health
Health issues addressed include acute respiratory infections (ARI) and acute diarrhoeal diseases (ADD), as these are the most common in the area because of poor living conditions in houses built from wood, cardboard, rush matting and plastic, and the lack of safe water, as there is no public water supply or mains drainage.

Hygiene
Work concentrates mainly on encouraging people to wash their hands at critical times: after using the toilet, after changing nappies, before

preparing food and before eating, to prevent disease.

Early stimulation
The community agent runs the early stimulation session in the appropriate COC, using a methodological script. The agent trains the mothers who attend with their children and carries out home visits to help them put what they have learnt into practice. The COCs are suitably equipped so that the mothers can help their children to recognise objects (by touching, looking, smelling) and listen to different sounds; they learn to massage them and talk to them; they take them for walks and to meet other children and adults. This is what we mean by stimulating them. These activities are done often and with lots of patience, dedication and love, strengthening children's neurological connections and enhancing their intelligence, happiness and self-confidence.

Addressing these intervention themes systematically has shown us that mothers become aware of the importance of enabling their children to grow well nourished and start to understand their attitude to their children when they stimulate them. The bond between mother and child becomes much stronger. Some mothers quite spontaneously express their sadness at not knowing enough about these issues during their previous pregnancies.

We work with the conviction that the interaction between mother and

child is a reliable structural sign of a child's development. Over the last 30 years, some researchers have produced instruments enabling the communication between mother and child to be observed systematically; these observation techniques are extremely useful in early childhood development.

By positive interactions we mean a type of affective relationship established by the child with the most

important people in their life, who in the majority of cases are their parents. The quality of the interaction depends on the carer's skills to calm them, to protect them when they are distressed, angry or when they feel pain or hunger, and to stimulate them when they want to explore and learn. The interactions between mother and child can be directly observed and can be put into various categories: physical, visual and verbal.

Community communication
Raising awareness of the enormous importance of early childhood in children's development is done by community agents with the help of a range of communication tools. Using

loudspeakers, campaigns that move from one community to another, posters, etc, they publicise young children's rights to health, nutrition and education (early learning).

This also reinforces the ability of municipal authorities to carry out actions with a political impact in their communities and enables them to take part in initiatives in favour of early childhood.

> The interactions between mother and child can be directly observed and can be put into various categories: physical, visual and verbal.

Key agents for development
The community monitoring and communication system runs thanks to the efforts and support of community agents, who are key to ensuring a successful outcome for the project. The agents are community-based volunteers who are committed to children's welfare. They take part in the COCs, facilitating meetings with families, and they carry out home visits to reinforce the issues dealt with at the advisory sessions.

The community agent's job concentrates mainly on motivation and empowerment. They are enormously stimulated and motivated by knowing that their work contributes towards ensuring that

The centres are suitable equipped so that mothers can help their children to recognise objects and listen to different sounds; they learn to massage them and talk to them.

Photo: Cesar Garcia Garcia/ Kusi Warma

children in their communities can develop and grow strong and healthy.

Educational proposal for supporting children's transition to school
In the case of children aged between 3 and 8 years old, an educational project was developed for teachers of first and second year primary and pre-school education. This project delivers training to teachers from 16 educational institutions in the Pachacútec-Ventanilla area on strategies to promote better transitions, when children move from the COCs to pre-school education and from there to primary school. Teachers receive guidance on making children feel loved and secure while they go through these changes; resources to promote democratic coexistence; games and how to play with the children; and programmes focusing on children's rights.

Parents of boys and girls under the age of 8 are trained and informed about the importance of transitions in early childhood and how they can make them easier for their children. We are convinced that families give children the very first foundations for their all-round physical and affective development, enabling them to form healthy relationships in their everyday lives.

The methodology is carried out in the classroom by each of the teachers, so they are able to make children's transitions easier. The technical team provides backup support in the classroom, using tools that teach individual as well as group skills.

A story of change

The Kusi Warma experience in the Ventanilla area has shown that children who take part in the cocs get better grades when they start pre-school. They are better prepared and stimulated, they are more creative and curious, and they have developed their self confidence during their time on the programme.

A good example is Ricardo, who is 6 years old and has participated in the coc sessions from before he was born up to when he was 3 years old. Later, because his family lacked resources, he was unable to go to pre-school. Once he joined the first year at primary school, his grandmother noticed that he responded very well in class and was always praised by the teacher, but she thought nothing of it until she was called to the school one day and told: "Your little boy is doing very well, he's intelligent, he and another girl are the only ones who speak up in class, we're really pleased with his progress; please keep encouraging him and supporting him so he keeps doing well".

The boy's teacher remarked that he was very well stimulated and she was convinced that he must have attended pre-school. When she found out that

he had been going to coc sessions until he was 3 years old, she was surprised at the skills he had acquired. Ricardo has managed to stand out from the children in his school and also in his own family; compared to his cousins, who are one or two years older than he is, he is much better at reading, writing and doing sums.

His grandmother is a community agent on the project and she says: "I'm keen to support our children both now and in the future so they can be successful". It is clear that Ricardo has developed his emotional intelligence in the cocs, and he's an example of why we believe it is vital to give continuity to boys and girls, by working on transitions with children up to the age of 8.

Challenges

Some major outcomes have been achieved in children's growth and development, but we believe it is important that the authorities become more involved. It is vital that they carry out in-depth analysis of each and every one of the causes and consequences that affect children's growth and development, so solutions can be found that benefit early childhood. Community agents also have greater self-confidence in their dealings with their municipal authorities when they see that the authorities play an active role in raising awareness about the importance of early childhood. This enables them to obtain resources for

the monitoring system, especially in acquiring the physical spaces needed for building cocs. The project also needs to be scaled up, as less than 10% of young children in the area are beneficiaries of an early learning programme.

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Note
1 A low-cost prepared food based on chicken blood, very rich in protein and iron.

Caring for the caregiver

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**This article looks at urban street children who are at risk of violation
of their rights, and the possibilities of reversing their families' extreme
poverty. It discusses supporting these children and their families by
reducing violence, providing quality education and improving the
physical environment. It does not offer a "magic formulas" but tells the
story of our desire to get to know each one of these families and their
communities and proceed together along a path to a better future.**

*"The sensationalism, poverty
and violence that characterize
the traditional portrait of poor
communities fall far short of
recognizing the wealth of daily
experiences in these spaces."
(Sílvio Caccia Bava - Le Monde
Diplomatique/ March 2010)*

There are 21 million children aged up
to six in Brazil, equal to 11% of the
population – the largest population
of this age group in the Americas.
According to the 2000 Census, most of
the population live in urban areas, so
the majority of Brazilian children also
live in large urban centers, exposed
to the whole gamut of risks and
misfortunes of city life.

Unfortunately there are few
opportunities for a child who is
economically at risk. A report by
the United Nations Development
Programme (UNDP), released in July
of 2010, indicates that Brazil has the
10th worst ranking in the world for
inequality. As for the gap between
rich and poor, our country is tied with
Ecuador, and in South America, is only
trailed by Bolivia and Haiti. According

to the Comunicado 58 of the Institute
of Economic and Applied Research
(IPEA - *Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica
e Aplicada*, 2010), the regions with
the greatest economic expansion were
not necessarily those that had reduced
poverty and inequality. Poverty is also
common in all of Brazil's big cities in
the form of outlying slums and favelas,
the big cities' destitute communities.

Urban violence is another problem
in the big urban centers which, to
paraphrase the anthropologist Gilberto
Velho, prevents citizens from making
use of the city. All social classes are
subject to this problem, but children
residing in poor communities live
with this harsh reality up close on a
daily basis. The drug trafficking that
dominates these communities, and the
police repression that turns streets and
alleyways into battlefields, expose the
population to a wide range of hazards.
It is common to read in police blotter
news reports of children hit by stray
bullets.

Intrafamily violence is also one of
the situations we encounter working
with small children. This kind of
violence is at the top of the ranking of

reported violent offences[1] perpetrated against children. It was only in July of this year that the President of the Republic signed the law that guarantees the right of children and adolescents to be educated without the use of corporal punishment or cruel and degrading treatment, and there is still a need for a change of culture among Brazilian families in the way they educate their children.

According to the UNICEF report, among the 21 million children under the age of 6, only 15.5% have access to daycare (0 to 3 years old) and 76% to pre-school (4 to 6 years old). Considering that most of these children come from families in a favorable socio-economic position, the majority of children who live in a situation of destitution or poverty (42% of the population) are excluded from daycare or pre-school, and this fact can lead to a series of other exclusions throughout their lifetimes.

In general, the condition of housing is precarious. Without basic sanitation, trash collection or adequate ventilation, small children are susceptible to infectious-contagious diseases, primarily respiratory diseases.

A common phenomenon among families living in extreme poverty is the quest for survival in the urban streets. There is no computerized data covering the whole country[2] to study who and how many there are; or about how street children survive in Brazil. They are not included in the census data gathered by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE – *Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística*), and the information on this urban phenomenon is normally kept in a non-systematic fashion in the files of the municipal social welfare agencies.

According to 2008 estimates of the National Campaign Children Don't Belong in the Street (*Campanha Nacional Criança Não é de Rua* (2008), an initiative by civil society and public institutions, nearly 25 thousand children (up to the age of 18) spend the night in the streets of Brazilian cities.

Most of these children have a past involving violence and lack of protection. The reasons for going into the streets vary widely and include searching for survival, intrafamily violence, or death of the people responsible for them. In the street children are unprotected and exposed to all sorts of hazards. There are three different groups: children who work all day in the street but still live with their families; those who stay in the street during the week and go back to their family on weekends (usually because of the distance between the 'workplace' and home), and those who live in the street and have broken ties with family and community.

Learning about the reality of a small child in the streets of a large urban center
The organisation *Associação Brasileira Terra dos Homens* (ABTH) has accumulated experience from more than 10 years working with street children in the major urban centers. With support from the Bernard van Leer Foundation, ABTH has attempted to survey the circumstances of street children in Rio de Janeiro in the 0 to 8 age group. Among other issues, it has sought to determine their region of origin, their relationship with early education and the socio-economic conditions of the population in their community of origin.

Initially we ran up against a lack of official statistical data and decided to go out into the field to conduct research on the realities of street children. For each of the children that we found in the street, alone or with adults, we attempted to determine their age, where they lived, whether they attended school and whether there were daycare facilities and/or schools in their communities. At the time there was a public hygiene campaign under way to remove street children and other street dwellers, a joint action conducted by the State and Municipal governments of Rio de Janeiro to curtail the right of the poorest people to come and go freely with the aim of cosmetically improving the city to give tourists a false sense of security. Despite these actions we found a substantial number of small children who mostly came from the Baixada Fluminense area, about 30% from Duque de Caxias and specifically from the Mangueirinha community. This community is subject to an aggravating factor that influenced the choice to focus efforts there, the total lack of any

daycare facilities, which encourages children to go into the street with their parents, or else their parents leave them unprotected in the community.

Based on the assumption that daycare centers and schools provide suitable environments for the comprehensive development of children, and that the absence of educational facilities reinforces social exclusion, a challenge was laid down to respond to this situation, especially with regard to early childhood education. It is important to discover

> Initially we ran up against a lack of official statistical data and decided to go out into the field to conduct research on the realities of street children.

the mechanisms in the family and social environment that lead to exclusion from such things as decent housing, safety, and healthy nutrition of good quality. In general, families live through a cycle that has been repeated through generations of street life, separated from formal education, living in settings that undermine health, and with no way to improve employment conditions that could break this legacy for future generations. The assumption is that parents who are more secure, with greater financial and emotional

resources, should be better able to take care of their children.

Discovering the reality of a community on the urban periphery of Rio de Janeiro
The field research highlighted the need to learn more about the community of origin of the street children: Duque de Caxias, in the Baixada Fluminense area. This municipality is 16 kilometers from Rio de Janeiro.

It was decided to conduct a socio-economic survey and a separate socio-political study with a statistically significant sample from two communities where we were already initiating a project and that are part of the Centenary Complex.[3] The objective was to identify the key characteristics of the population of street people who were excluded from the education system.[4]

In the socio-economic survey the primary indicators were: family characteristics; education; work/income; health; local infrastructure/urbanization; perceptions of residence in the community; and expectations.

This survey indicated that 45% of the families had one or more members who were unemployed and seeking to survive in the informal economy, which was one of the principal causes of entering into street life. The age group between 25 and 40 is the most affected, since it is generally the group with small children.

The lack of jobs impacts the employment situation of these

individuals, who end up seeking subsistence in the streets. Most of these individuals (81%) are street vendors or collectors of recyclable materials.

This aspect of the community prompted us to reflect on whether informal economic activity makes it easier for families to accept as natural the street existence of their small children. Are they often taken along to help with work because there is no one to leave them with, considering that the provision of daycare in the community is extremely inadequate?

The socio-economic survey was carried out with the participation of various local actors, a sampling representative of macro conditions, to allow for a clear and balanced reading of the reality experienced there. This strategy was the only one that could give us an adequate view of conditions and catalyse the potential of the residents of Mangueirinha. In terms of method, it was decided to divide the participants into particular focus groups,[5] based on their duties and activities, taking into consideration their individual characteristics. This was done through the development of a differentiated list of questions for each case, broken down as follows: teachers; children up to 8 years old; adolescents; local leaders / service networks.

The inquiries included: What help should be offered to the parents of small children who have to work and are faced with the total lack of daycare facilities in the community? How can schools be a more attractive place for our children? What would be an appropriate rescue intervention for children who drop out of school because of a premature need to work, forcing them to migrate to other work sites in the street, whether in Rio de Janeiro or elsewhere? Does this phenomenon thus contribute to the removal of children from school and family, creating child street workers? Are schools prepared to receive and assimilate children with street experience in their classrooms? How can families be helped to see the importance of school to end the cycle of misery prompted by the pressing need for survival?

Street vendors and collectors of recyclable materials – their children and their realities

The more involved we became with these issues, though they were not new to us, the more we felt prompted to delve more deeply into them. At this point we wanted to understand specifically how the children of the families of Mangueirinha who made their living from selling things in the street and collecting recyclable materials were being cared for; what was their relationship with quality education; and what was their quality of life. A new survey was undertaken.

During the 2 years of daily experiences in Mangueirinha we where often faced with the lack of official data concerning its population. Although we did not have official standing to do so, and acting out of our concern for the children, we undertook a demographic census that would provide as its result the number of people, the average number of inhabitants per household, levels of education, the number of children by age group, occupations, and opinions on what was lacking in the community. In addition, we developed a map of the streets of the community, since the government agencies do not have one – which is, perhaps, one explanation of the invisibility of that population in the Duque de Caxias municipality.

The census questionnaire also included a second part, for trash collectors and street vendors only, in which we sought to develop a better understanding of the profile of residents involved in these activities and the situation of the children who live with them. The first discovery is that this population lives primarily in three streets of the community.

With greater linkage established with the community, and having worked to empower local leaders, community families were able to have a different experience of social assistance – one in which suitable living conditions are a right, and they are no longer 'someone receiving assistance' but a more equal co-participant in the process.

Along these lines, the community was able to participate in the drafting of the questionnaire for the collection of census data: making suggestions; adjusting the language so it would be easier for the residents, their neighbors, to understand; and facilitating access

Ecology Walk - sign says: 'Respect for the natural world!'

Photo: Courtesy Terra dos Homens- Brazil

to the streets and alleys by providing guidance in the drawing of the community map, which was also done by a young person in the community. Twenty residents, selected, trained and supervised, went out into the field to collect the data. Children were also given a chance to express their views about the community and their street experience, through play activities in focus groups.

The census tallied 6,000 residents in Mangueirinha, of whom 80% had only elementary education, for the most part incomplete. The population of children under 18 accounts for 35%, of whom 52% fall within the 0 to 8 age group. The community does not have any daycare center or early childhood educational institution, leaving a great many children excluded from formal education.

Of the residents of working age, 45% are unemployed, and of those who work, 46% are engaged in the informal economy. Most of the

residents, nearly 50% of whom are working, have occupations that do not require much formal education, and as a consequence, they do not provide a family income that allows them to support their children adequately. Many children must supplement the family income by working, usually in the street.

112 families of street vendors or collectors of recyclable materials were identified who had children under 8 years old, approximately 200 children. The collectors of recyclable materials are in a state of destitution, with 43% earning less than 100 BRL (40 EUR) per month to support families consisting of 4 to 6 people, on average. When added to others who earn less than the minimum wage per month (between 41 and 160 EUR), this goes up to 95% of the collectors who were interviewed. The street vendors have a slightly higher income, but even so, 68% earn less than the monthly minimum wage. Many families of street vendors, including small children, also collect trash as a way of supplementing household income.

Of those who work in the street, 27% said they brought their children into the street with them and of these, 64% spend more than 6 or 8 hours in the street. Bringing these children with them may have various explanations and implications. Are they instruments for raising awareness of the population in urban centers? Is it a way of increasing family income? Is it a safety measure, considering that

there is no safe place to leave them in a community exposed to 'urban guerrilla warfare?'[6] Is it something that deadens sensitivity and a common pattern of repetition among generations of families who have experienced this reality? For these children, how much time is left over for study or recreation? The picture gets filled in when it is observed that of those who do not go into the streets, 42% are unprotected (with younger siblings, alone or in the streets of the community), being exposed to all of the dangers of the community where they live.

Another significant factor is the unhealthiness of the households and of the community itself, where children live in the midst of trash and exposed sewage. Part of this situation is due to the Government's failure to establish a policy of basic sanitation, and part is due to a culture within the community of not protecting the environment. Among the trash collectors it is a common practice to make their homes an extension of the street – or rather, of their work – by storing many objects, toys and other things they find in the streets. The houses end up surrounded by trash which has been gathered to be sold, and objects to be repaired. Thus trash is not confined to their work in the streets but is brought into the household, making dwellings less healthy and exposing small children to a greater likelihood of health problems.

New life projects, new realities.
On the basis of this evidence and stimulated by the work we have done, the community, through its leaders and the staff of *Terra dos Homens*, discussed the development of a project to promote comprehensive care that is free of violence for small children and their families who work in the streets.

At the intra-family level, the aim is to develop an effective method for reversing the situation of street life and exposure of small children, promoting their families' quality of life and autonomy through family care. The public policies that address working with families with a greater degree of complexity should provide for a systematic effort to establish relationships of trust for an average period of five years. This effort should foster family unity for the protection of family members – who should be free from violence as a result of communication – integrating children with school and learning and the capacity to maintain positive ties with the community.

The care provided for a sample of families who are subject to the most severe violation of rights will focus on social protection with an increase in family income from better employment opportunities; on healthy housing conditions; on knowledge acquired through formal and informal education, not only of the children but also of their parents; and on strengthening of emotional bonds among family members. Therefore,

work will be done on living conditions, the capacity for protection in an intra-family environment, the economic sustainability of the family group and its interaction with community services.

In the community setting, another important element to be developed is the skill set of residents in caring for their small children. Adolescents, young people and mothers in Mangueirinha will collaborate with various workshops (in creativity, theater and *capoeira*). These workshops

> At the intra-family level, the aim is to develop an effective method for reversing the situation of street life and exposure of small children, promoting their families' quality of life and autonomy through family care.

are a means and an end in themselves, since at the same time that they encourage the community to care for its children, they empower the actors who facilitate the process by discovering or improving their skills, through care and activities undertaken with the children. Workshops in reading and theater, for example, will be traveling events, and will be scheduled as a matter of priority in the public spaces of the community itself, focusing on the three streets where we identified the target population of the survey. There we hope to reach all of

the street dwellers and discover and train potential 'caregivers' within the community.

With this subject-population it is planned to increase income generating activities identifying local leaders, with a view towards training working groups organized into associations. It is intended to offer courses in entrepreneurship and cooperativism, encouraging self-organization and taking advantage of the potential of existing working situations already identified such as a cooperative of trash collectors, seamstresses, kitchen workers or local craftsmen, so as to expand the supply of services and generate income among community residents themselves.

The mobilization of residents participating in the Project should give rise to a desire in the community to take better care of the physical environment, seeking better ways to dispose of the trash produced and appealing to the competent authorities to provide appropriate sewage and basic sanitation facilities. These actions, which we have already undertaken, in the medium term should raise the level of health of the residents, especially the small children who have less immunity to disease.

All of these efforts must be conceived in terms of sustainability, and to do this it is necessary to bring about changes in municipal public policies for the improvement of the life of these families and, consequently, the lives of the children. Direct interaction

with the municipal government of Duque de Caxias is essential so that the municipality can fulfill its role and its political responsibility in Mangueirinha. The close relationship that we have with the *Secretaria de Assistência Social* [Secretariat of Social Welfare] will be intensified so that the Resource Centers that work with families can complement the work performed by *Terra dos Homens.* In addition, the Department of Education, which is already our partner, will be called upon to create da ycare centers, and to improve the quality of the instruction offered in the schools. Another focus should be on strengthening the community through the use of multiplying agents, so that it will become aware of its own demands and mobilize to solve its own problems. This action will have a greater and more long-lasting impact, in as much as a strong community produces its own internally generated solutions.

Conclusion

After all this effort to understand the dynamic of families with small children that survive by working in the street, we see that there are a number of possible responses. These ought to be mapped out and embarked upon by the population of Mangueirinha itself, and in particular by those families who themselves have small children with a history of street life. We walk side by side with this population to identify and build together other possibilities for life that respect the

right to education, protection and quality of life. *'Caring for the Caregiver'* cares for these families, developing their potential, discovering leaders so that they and their community can reorganize and take care of themselves, of their children and of their future.

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Notes
1 Data from the Disque 100 [Dial 100]. Number for reports of violations of the rights of children and adolescents of the National Secretariat of Human Rights of the Presidency of the Republic (Secretaria Nacional de Direitos Humanos da Presidência da República).
2 In a survey conducted in 2007, the Foundation Institute of Economic Research (FIPE – Fundação Instituto de Pesquisa Econômica) found 1,842 street children in the municipality of São Paulo alone.
3 The Centenary Complex is made up of 4 interconnected communities encompassing a total of 25 thousand residents. The communities occupy a single hill divided among the Communities of Sapo, Mangueira, Corte Oito and Santuário.
4 The concept of educational exclusion is to be understood in its broadest sense, taking into account not only the child without access to school, but also the exclusion that takes places within the school system, which involves being held back, flunking, truancy and illiteracy.
5 In the TANAKA project, teaching has to do with a qualitative technique, non-directive, which aims to guide the discussion of a group of people. With this technique the most important thing is the interaction that is established among the participants. The discussion facilitator is supposed to establish and facilitate the discussion and not to conduct a group interview.
6 This is a metaphor for the battles waged between drug dealers and the police within the communities.

Restoring a sense of normalcy after urban emergencies

Based on an interview with Mary Moran, senior programme specialist
in early childhood development, ChildFund International

As the world rapidly urbanises, a greater proportion of humanitarian emergencies will take place in urban areas. For search-and-rescue operations, the ability to meet the challenges posed by urban settings is greatly helped by the existence of detailed maps of infrastructure and how buildings are constructed. But when it comes to post-emergency responses involving young children, what are the implications of disasters happening in urban areas? (childfund.org)

According to Mary Moran, many of the challenges commonly experienced in post-emergency work in urban contexts are similar to those in camps for Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) after rural disasters: overcrowded conditions, with consequent risks of aggression and spread of disease; a lack of space or opportunity to grow or forage for food.

While Moran stresses that the differences between any two urban situations far outweigh any general similarities, ChildFund's recent work in the slums of Nairobi illustrates some of the challenges of responding to young children's needs when a city is in turmoil – in this case as political violence stirred up by the disputed election of 2007 was followed by drought and food insecurity, leading to widespread internal displacement.

ChildFund works in emergency contexts primarily by setting up Child Centred Spaces (CCS; also known by other agencies as Child Friendly Spaces or Safe Spaces). The first challenge is finding a physical location for such spaces. In urban contexts the choice of buildings may be wider than in villages – abandoned schools are a common location – but the issue of access may

be more challenging. Moran says: "One of the primary considerations in choosing a location for a Child Centred Space is that children should be able to reach it by routes that are neither dangerous nor perceived by them as frightening, as for example busy roads could be."

Next the existence of the spaces must be made known to the people who could benefit. Many people had headed to Nairobi from the countryside, fleeing first violence then drought, and with nowhere to go were drifting and sleeping rough. Finding them required "the same kinds of technique you would use to locate marginalised children, street children or trafficked children: walking the streets, approaching people, letting them know you're there. You need to find out who are the informal leaders of particular sub-communities – there are always some – and work at creating some kind of stable understanding that you're there to help".

A place to be children again
The violence and aggression that can often result from overcrowding and helplessness, in urban disaster areas or IDP camps, was something that

particularly needed to be addressed in the turmoil of Kenya's inter-tribal post-election violence. "Children were witnessing a lot of violence," says Mary Moran. "They need a space and a way to work through their confusion and distress, by playing or talking or art or drama. They need a place to exist in their lives where there is predictability, normalcy, routine – where they can play; where they can simply be children again."

"This is especially true for the youngest children: for infants and toddlers. People think they are too young to pick up on what's happening, but they're not. They might not be able to assess their physical safety, but they are acutely attuned to psychological safety; they sense when their caregivers are emotionally distracted and distressed, and it upsets their innate belief that these familiar adults have the power to control events, to keep them safe."

"That's why Child Centred Spaces should also reach out to caregivers with advice on parenting. It's normal in emergency situations for parents to be too stressed to respond with their usual sensitivity; sometimes they even feel frustrated by the clinginess of their children. They may feel guilty at their inability to protect their children, or they may be worried if their children respond to the stressful situation by developmentally regressing, in terms of feeding or speaking or toilet training. Talking to caregivers about these feelings, encouraging them to

support each other, and giving space and encouragement to them to interact and engage with their young children, can be a vital part of the service a Child Centred Space can provide."

Encouraging mutual support can be even more necessary in urban emergencies because the sense of community is often weaker than in rural areas, where everyone knows each other. In Nairobi the situation was greatly complicated by post-election violence creating suspicions between people who had coexisted peacefully

> It's normal in emergency situations for parents to be too stressed to respond with their usual sensitivity; sometimes they even feel frustrated by the clinginess of their children.

for years, but were suddenly conscious of belonging to different tribes. It can be impractical to run Child Centred Spaces for children from warring groups: they need first to come to terms with what they are experiencing in relatively homogeneous environments, before trying to socially reintegrate them.

This involved some Child Centred Spaces catering to different groups on different days, or at different times. "As always in any emergency situation," says Mary Moran, "you have to go to the leaders and people of the local communities and find out what they want, and be guided by that. There is

"In emergency situations, children need a place to exist in their lives where there is predictability, normalcy, routine - where they can play; where they simply can be children again." - Mary Moran

Photo: Courtesy ChildFund International

no point providing a service you think they should want if they aren't actually going to use it – you have to start from where people are, not from where you'd like them to be."

Putting plans in place
As the political violence was followed by drought and food insecurity, with a further wave of displaced families descending on Nairobi, attendance at Child Centred Spaces could at least be driven by their use as centres for distributing food relief. Child Centred

Spaces typically also serve multiple other purposes in post-emergency contexts: providing basic or emergency healthcare, advice on nutrition or hygiene, or places where community discussions can take place during times not set for children.

Child Centred Spaces have proved their worth: in an evaluation of ChildFund's programme in northern Uganda, more than twice as many children in an IDP camp with a Child Centred Space said they felt "safe always" compared to children in a

nearby camp which did not have such a space. Children who'd experienced the Child Centred Spaces were observed to be exhibiting less unhappiness, disobedience and fighting, more sharing and helping behaviours, and a greater propensity to wash their hands after using the latrine.

But, as with all aspects of post-emergency response, setting up a Child Centred Space is much easier if plans are already in place before they are required. The different survival rates in the Asian tsunami of 2004 between villages in which children knew the warning signs and knew what to do and villages in which they did not, is testament to the importance of community-based disaster risk reduction (DRR) planning.

All of ChildFund's programming involves DRR planning, with as wide a range of community representatives as possible – including children – asked to map risks and consider responses. What disasters are most likely, and in the event of disaster, where would they go? What risks could follow a disaster, and what training is needed? Moran says that "this is becoming more challenging due to changing climates, with it becoming harder all over the world to predict the timing and likely extent of rains and droughts. In urban areas this is a problem too, especially with informal settlements built on steep hills which are vulnerable to mudslides during monsoons".

According to Moran, one of the greatest challenges in DRR work is

overcoming cultural barriers to taking seriously the views of children. As the impact of Child Centred Spaces shows the importance of restoring a sense of normalcy to children's lives in post-emergency contexts, it becomes ever more significant to understand from children what normalcy means to them, the ways in which disaster might threaten that sense of normalcy, and what could be done to bring it back.

News from the Foundation

Continuing our work for Roma inclusion

As a founding member of the European Forum of Foundations for Roma Inclusion, the Bernard van Leer Foundation is working closely with the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland to help initiate an early childhood development project for a group of Romanian Roma families residing in South Belfast. The project aims to make a tangible difference to the living conditions, developmental opportunities and school readiness of Roma children by supporting their families' access to a range of programmes that will be coordinated by the Roma Education Resource Centre in Belfast.

The Foundation is also collaborating with REF (Roma Education Fund) and ISSA (International Step by Step Association) on the early childhood component of an EU-funded 2 million euro pilot project which will support more than 4000 Roma children and their families in 12 cities of Slovakia, Romania, Macedonia and Hungary. Our involvement will help strengthen competences in ECD for staff involved in the project, and develop new resources including a learning resource pack to be used by parents with their young children.

Butterfly Works receives corporate fund grant

Amsterdam-based social design agency Butterfly Works has received the first grant from the Foundation's corporate fund, an initiative to encourage corporations to get involved in funding projects for young children by matching their financial contributions. Their project, Miffy Inspires, based on the character created by Dick Bruna, will be implemented in Venezuela to raise awareness of early childhood development among target groups including government agencies, NGOs, parents and the general public.

The Foundation has committed 24,000 euro to the project, which will involve Venezuelan designers in creating a 'picture language' to translate Bruna's distinctive style into materials that will resonate with local populations and help to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Draft country goals shared on website

Work continues at the Foundation to finalise our country-specific goals, and we are sharing and inviting feedback on draft versions of the goals as they are developed. Currently draft goals for the Netherlands, Israel, Peru and Uganda are available through our website.[1]

We invite you to browse them and we welcome your comments through the e-mail addresses that are provided on each country page.

Early Childhood in Focus: Culture and Learning

The sixth edition of our popular Early Childhood in Focus series, published in collaboration with the Open University, is now available on our website.

EARLY CHILDHOOD IN FOCUS 6

Culture and Learning

Culture and Learning asks whether learning is a cultural process that varies between societies or a natural process that is the same for all children, and addresses the policy questions surrounding the position of cultural diversity in early childhood programmes.

Note
1 http://bernardvanleer.org/English/Home/Our-programmes/Geographical-scope.html

Child Friendly Cities
The Child Friendly Cities Initiative aims to guide cities and other systems of local governance in the inclusion of children's rights as a key component of their goals, policies, programmes and structures.

It was launched in 1996 to act on the resolution passed during the second United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) to make cities liveable places for all.

www.childfriendlycities.org/

Growing Up In Cities
Growing Up in Cities is a global effort to help address the issues affecting urban children and youth.

This initiative enables municipal governments and child advocates to implement the participation principles of the Habitat Agenda, Agenda 21, and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

www.unesco.org/most/guic/guicmain.htm

International Institute for Environment and Development, Human Settlements
Human Settlements works to reduce poverty and improve health and housing conditions in the urban centres of Latin America, Asia and Africa. It seeks to combine this with promoting good governance and more ecologically sustainable patterns of urban development.

www.iied.org/human-settlements/

Poverty and Exclusion among Urban Children
Innocenti Digest, 10
Innocenti Research Centre, 2002
The cities of the world are often regarded as hubs of wealth and priviledge, but they are also home to hundreds of millions of children for whom poverty and exclusion are a daily reality.

www.unicef-irc.org/publications/342

Children's Right to the City
CRIN Review, 22
CRIN, 2008

This edition of the CRIN Review explores the impact of urbanisation, city size, and growth on children's rights. Cities can be hubs of risk for children, where sprawling slums with inadequate services swallow up green play spaces. They can, however, also be forces for good with many parents seeing them as places that will give their children improved opportunities and life chances.

http://www.crin.org/resources/infodetail.asp?id=18421

Climate change and urban children
Sheridan Barlett
Human Settlements Discussion Paper Series, IIED, 2008
This paper discusses the probable impacts for children of different ages of the increasing risk of storms, flooding, landslides, heat waves, drought and water supply constraints that climate change is likely to bring to most urban centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America. It also explores the implications for adaptation, focusing on preparedness as well as responses to extreme events and to changes in weather patterns.

www.iied.org/pubs/pdfs/10556IIED.pdf

Children, Youth and Environments
University of Colorado
CYE Journal is a leading on-line publication for the latest news on children, youth and their physical environments. Endorsed by UN-Habitat, the Journal is a one-stop online resource, which supports the sharing of knowledge across disciplinary and national boundaries.

http://www.colorado.edu/journals/cye

Bernard van Leer Foundation

Investing in the development of young children

The Bernard van Leer Foundation funds and shares knowledge about work in early childhood development. The Foundation was established in 1949 and is based in the Netherlands. Our income is derived from the sale of Royal Packaging Industries Van Leer N.V., bequeathed to the Foundation by Dutch industrialist and philanthropist Bernard van Leer (1883 to 1958).

Our mission is to improve opportunities for children up to age 8 who are growing up in socially and economically difficult circumstances. We see this both as a valuable end in itself and as a long-term means to promoting more cohesive, considerate and creative societies with equal opportunities and rights for all.

We work primarily by supporting programmes implemented by local partners. These include public, private and community-based organisations.

Working through partnerships is intended to build local capacity, promote innovation and flexibility, and help to ensure that the work we fund is culturally and contextually appropriate.

We also aim to leverage our impact by working with influential allies to advocate for young children. Our free publications share lessons we have learned from our own grantmaking activities and feature agenda-setting contributions from outside experts. Through our publications and advocacy, we aim to inform and influence policy and practice not only in the countries where we operate but globally.

In our current strategic plan, we are pursuing three programme goals: reducing violence in young children's lives, taking quality early education to scale, and improving young children's physical environments. We are pursuing

these goals in eight countries – Peru, India, the Netherlands, Israel, Uganda, Turkey, Brazil and Tanzania – as well as undertaking a regional approach within the European Union.

In addition, until 2012 we will continue to work in the Caribbean, South Africa and Mexico on strengthening the care environment, transitions from home to school and respect for diversity.

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