Voices from urban Africa
The impact of urban growth on children

Executive summary

About 200 million children live in Africa's urban areas. The majority of Africa's children are predicted to live in urban areas by 2032. Urban poverty – and its impact on children – is often overlooked and misunderstood. Africa, though it is the least urbanized continent today, is currently experiencing the highest urban growth rates in the world. Inequality is rife in urban Africa.

Africa's youth population (aged 15 to 24) has been increasing faster than in other parts of the world. According to the World Bank, this is 200 million people, making up 20 percent of the population in Africa, 40 percent of the workforce and 60 percent of the unemployed on the continent.

Over the next 40 years, 75 percent of urban population growth in Africa will take place in secondary cities (cities with 100,000 or more population). **Currently 60 percent of Africa's urban population lives in slum conditions.**

Coupled with this growing urban population, the development community's reliance on development indicators that compare urban and rural areas within a country, without disaggregating data further within urban settings for rich and poor, means that children and adults living in urban areas appear to be better off than those living in rural areas. Citywide statistics and the 'urban advantage' allow the wealth of some urban individuals to obscure the hardships faced by those living in urban poverty, and the vast inequalities within urban communities.

In recognition of these facts, Save the Children carried out participatory research of urban areas where Save the Children currently programs and has relationships with local government and civil society partners. The following urban neighborhoods in seven African secondary cities were selected, based on a high degree of known poverty:

1 **Malawi** Blantyre, Ndirande Township
2 **South Africa** Johannesburg, Gauteng Province, Turffontein Neighborhood
3 **Mali** Sikasso, Mamassoni Neighborhood
4 **Ethiopia** Adama, Neighborhoods 6, 7, 10 and 12
5 **Ethiopia** Hawassa, Misrak Sub-city, Teso and Wukro Neighborhoods
6 **Tanzania** Shinyanga, Ngokolo Ward
7 **Zambia** Kalulushi, Chibuluma Township

While much of the existing research on urban growth and the well-being of urban children has a quantitative, statistical focus, Save the Children's research aims to highlight the perceptions and experience of those children living in urban poverty within these African cities. The needs of urban children will only increase as urban growth is likely to coincide with increasing inequality. It is our intent that this report support governments, donors, the private sector and other development partners to develop a strategy for future investment in urban areas – where the majority of Africa's children will live in the near future.

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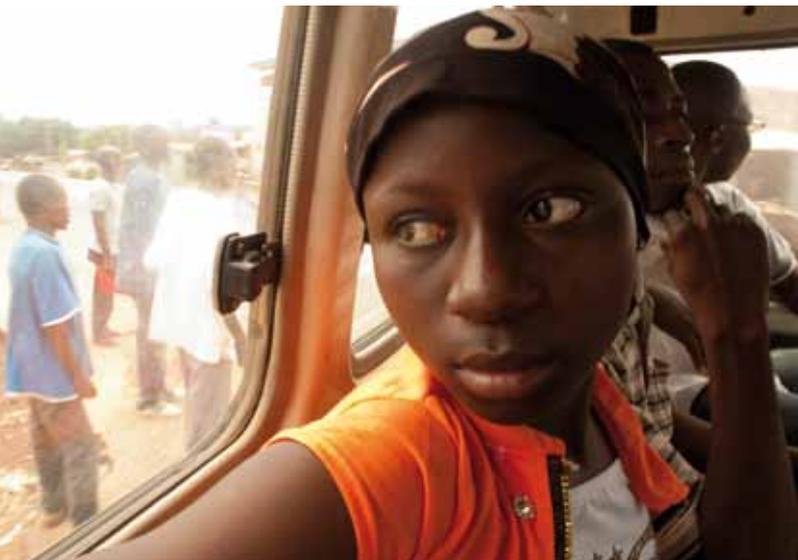
Report findings Priority needs and recommendations

Community members and key informants repeatedly stressed the importance of working across sectors to create integrated and holistic program responses. Poverty is crosscutting. To help children survive and thrive, we must work in cross-sectoral partnerships to support the child.

Priority need	Potential response
Child protection	
• Children, particularly unaccompanied children, are exposed to risks and dangerous or age-inappropriate situations in public and often private settings.	• Provide supervised safe spaces where children can play and learn. • Enhance the capacity of all those who work with and for children to prevent child sexual abuse and other forms of child abuse. • Develop or strengthen community-based child protection mechanisms linked to and complementing national systems.
Health and nutrition	
• Lack of water and sanitation facilities creates both public health and safety hazards and drains significant time and resources from poor families to meet basic needs. • Poor families face many barriers to access health services, from cost to travel or waiting time, especially impacting the lives of mothers and babies. Poor nutrition, including satisfying the need for food, disproportionately affects the urban poor.	• Enhance hygiene and sanitation awareness and practices, while facilitating public-private dialogue to identify appropriate water and sanitation solutions. • Train and deploy more community health workers in urban poor settings to give information on family planning, encourage mothers to give birth in a health facility with trained health staff and support them to establish and maintain good breastfeeding and nutrition practices. • Call for the removal of user fees for pregnant women and children under five. • Link programs to livelihoods strategies.
Livelihoods	
• Poor families often must rely on their children to contribute to surviving in the urban cash economy which can expose them to dangerous situations and hazardous work. • Youth lack marketable skills and capital to participate effectively in the urban economy.	• Provide options for school-to-work transition for youth through improved access to jobs, internships and tailored job skills training, targeted at vulnerable youth. • Link youth training to the provision of grants and loans and other financial services, including effective and innovative social cash transfers. • Keep children in school (see below).
Education	
• Due to fragmented family care, poor children who enter school are ill-prepared to learn and progress. • Poor children are not in school or experience many barriers to getting there, such as cost, disabilities, lack of food, bullying and sexual harassment by teachers and students, traditional ideas on gender roles and pressure from families to engage in income-generating activities.	• Equip children with the skills to succeed in school by providing quality control, standards and training to support early childhood care development. • Ensure that children stay in school, both when it is compulsory and through secondary school. • Provide child protection training for all those who work for and with children in the education sector – teachers, administrators, government officials and community-based volunteers. • Schools must be equipped to provide education to children with disabilities and other special educational needs.

In order to gain a holistic understanding of the living situation of children and adults living in urban poverty, the appraisal focused on the thematic areas of **child protection**, **health and nutrition**, **livelihoods** and **education**, as well as crosscutting issues such as **gender** and **governance**.

Some voices of children in the study communities

"The exposure begins when those evil-minded bachelors who rent part of our family's home begin intruding and try to attract us with gifts."

"When my father cannot find a job to do, he fails to buy food and we stay hungry at home."

"There are some children like Emanuel dropped in Standard 4 and Hamis dropped in Standard 5. Emanuel was required to collect and sell scrappers and Hamis to go and keep animals."

"One time I had stopped school for a month because I had no shoes – because my daddy who used to buy me shoes died."

"A teacher told my friend,'if you do not have sex with me, I will give you a poor grade and I will not allow you to attend my session'."

"Whenever I meet my school friends I feel very bad because I can't imagine that I am out of school. Usually I cry and wish my father were here."

"It's hard to focus and succeed in school while worrying about our money situation and our studies. We're afraid they might kick us out of school."

Additional recommendations

Strategic partnerships working on holistic programs are crucial for children's well-being.

More research is needed for better decision making and program design. The development community, national governments, donors, private sector and national and international non-governmental organizations need more information on urban research and its impact on children to better support and address the needs of children.
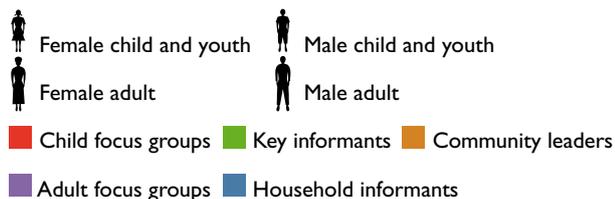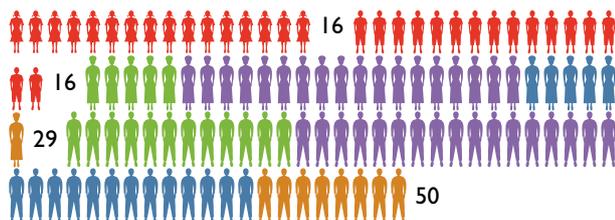
How did we do this report?

This report relied on *participatory rapid appraisal* (PRA), reflecting the **perceptions and experiences of 1,050 informants**.
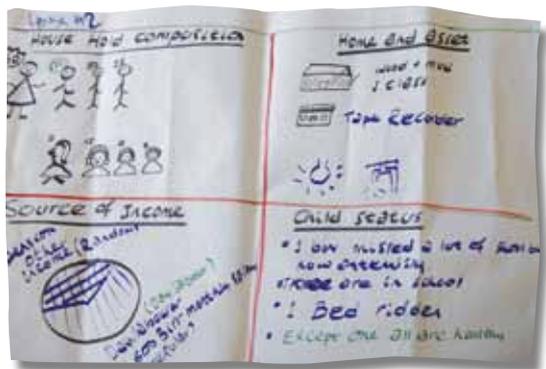
The data is neither quantitative nor objective, but reference to supporting reports and research is given as background. The research included key informants (i.e. community leaders, local government officials), household informants, community leaders, male and female community members, children and adolescents in and out of school. The team used questionnaires, interviews, focus group discussions, PRA tools and observation. Local government approval was received for each area, and informants were selected with the aid of local community-based organizations or local leaders.

Female child and youth	Male child and youth	
Female adult	Male adult	
🟥 Child focus groups	🟩 Key informants	🟧 Community leaders
🟪 Adult focus groups	🟦 Household informants	

Adama, Ethiopia *111 informants*

Conclusion

With the right partnerships, resources and information at the right time, we can achieve real results for children.

We intend that the outcome of this report will be a better understanding among the development community, private sector and governments, of the urban context for children in Africa and that this should be reflected in the post-2015 development agenda, allowing all of us to respond more effectively to the needs of children.

To download and read the entire report, please go to http://www.savethechildren.org/urbanafricareport

Photographs (all Save the Children): Front, Rodrigo Ordonez Inside, Jodi Bieber Back, Anne Stotler (left) Adam Hinton (right)