“We are not safe.....” Children’s experiences and voices in urban poor settings: What this means for Save the Children

Short paper developed by the Child Protection Initiative for the Save the Children Delhi meeting on urbanization

We are not safe, there is no protection, and we are not confident to walk freely on the streets because we are terrified of harassment. (adolescent girl, South Africa)

Introduction:
One billion children live in urban areas. Increasing urbanisation has significant implications for the realisation of children’s rights to survival, protection, development and participation, especially in Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean. Save the Children will have an increased focus on urbanisation and deprivation in the next strategic period 2016-2020, and urbanisation was identified as one of the key trends in Save the Children’s Child Protection Ambition 2030 paper. The Child Protection Initiative would like to ensure that the increased urban attention reflects children’s views and experiences, and supports their meaningful participation in urban governance so that children’s realities can be better addressed to create inclusive, safe, child friendly cities.

This brief paper draws upon evidence from recent research and literature to highlight the importance of listening to girls’ and boys’ voices and to ensure increased support for meaningful participation of children and young people in urban planning and other decision making processes concerning their lives in urban contexts. In efforts to address priority concerns affecting children and families in urban settings, to reduce vulnerability and to increase resilience, it is imperative that children’s voices are heard and acted upon, and that inclusive participatory governance processes and mechanisms are strengthened. A failure to listen to children’s voices, especially the voices of the most deprived girls and boys will result in the continuation of protection risks and rights violations, and will contribute to a failure to develop effective, responsive and accountable programming. In contrast, listening to and acting upon children’s voices will help to achieve Save the Children’s breakthroughs including the CPI 2030 breakthrough that “violence against children is no longer tolerated”.

Children and young people should not only be encouraged to identify the problems and solutions in their local neighbourhoods, they should also, together with adults, be part of the action for change. A constructive involvement of young people will strengthen their feelings of responsibility towards their neighbourhoods and help make these safer and more pleasant places to live in.

(p2, Save the Children, 2007)

The paper presents:
- The reality of living in cities from girls’ and boys’ perspectives
- A summary of key asks identified by children and young people
- Key reasons why it is crucial to involve children and young people in urban planning
- Good practice examples of children’s participation in urban contexts contributing to positive changes for children
- Conclusions and key recommendations: What Save the Children should do

The reality of living in cities from girls’ and boy’s perspectives:

Children’s reality of life in urban settings varies according to childhood diversity based on age, gender, disability, ethnicity, family income, socio-cultural context, and other factors, including external factors such as climate change, disaster, conflict and/or displacement. Yet for girls and boys...
living in urban poor settings in diverse socio-cultural contexts their reality is often characterized by: poverty, inequality and discrimination; challenges in accessing education; poor health, nutrition and sanitation; protection risks (lack of family care and attention, child labour and exploitation, physical and sexual violence, gang violence, and police harassment); negative impacts of drugs, alcohol and gambling; unsafe play; and pollution. Increasing access to modern technology has both positive and negative impacts for children.

Save the Children (November 2012) “Voices from Urban Africa: The impact of urban growth on children” report presents findings from participatory research appraisals involving children and adults from Malawi, South Africa, Mali, Ethiopia, Tanzania and Zambia. The research methodology allowed Save the Children to explore the perceptions of poor urban children and community members about what it is like to be a child in an urban setting in Africa, so that Save the Children can more effectively respond to children’s needs. Priority needs identified included: child protection (especially for unaccompanied children) including risks of physical abuse, sexual violence, labour exploitation, and exposure to drugs and alcohol in public and private settings; health and nutrition particularly due to a lack of water and sanitation facilities and barriers faced by poor families in accessing health services; livelihood challenges faced by adults and youth, which increase reliance on child work to survive in the cash economy; and education challenges as poor families face barriers in sending children to school due to costs of reach school, disabilities, lack of food, bullying and sexual harassment by teachers and students, and motivations of parents to send the child to earn a living.

Poverty, inequality and discrimination:
While some children living in cities and towns may be better off than their rural counterparts, due to higher standards of health, protection, education and sanitation, it is increasingly recognised that urban advances are uneven, and significant numbers of children in marginalized urban settings confront daily challenges and deprivations of their rights. Disparities between rich and poor children are widening, especially in urban areas. Discrimination and inequalities negatively impact upon children’s daily lives affecting their study, play, work, health, nutrition, sanitation, protection, and their participation.

Some people look down on us because we are poor, some are children with HIV, homeless children or children who beg.... In the community people do not give children rights to express themselves because children are young, they have low education, less experience, and adults do not respect children’s views.
(8-12 year old boys and girls, urban poor area of Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

We don’t have respect. As we are without home, food, and education we won’t have respect. (Girl, Migrant worker family, Bangalore, India)

Participatory research and consultations involving children and young people have revealed a number of factors contributing to inequality and deprivation of urban poor children including: poverty, food insecurity, debt, disasters, climate change, conflict, migration, displacement, disability, and parent/caregivers’ job insecurity. Such factors place stresses on families’ capacity to care for their children. A significant proportion of urban population growth is occurring in the most unplanned and deprived areas. These factors combine to push essential services beyond the reach of children and families living in poor urban neighbourhoods. Living in overcrowded, makeshift and often transitory housing – and even worse, being pushed onto pavements and streets – means children are often caught in a poverty trap from which it is difficult to escape. Difficulties are further compounded by discrimination (based on ethnicity, religion, citizenship, gender, income, disabilities, age, and other factors), lack of official papers, the costs of living in urban areas (rent, food, transport to access services), and family member’s drug or alcohol.
use or gambling.\textsuperscript{17} Social norms towards children, including acceptance of different forms of violence against children increase protection risks and deprivation faced by girls and boys in urban contexts.\textsuperscript{18}

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\textbf{Children's views on root causes contributing to violations of their rights, Myanmar}\textsuperscript{19} \\
- Poverty and migration for work, parent's unemployment \\
- Discrimination due to poverty, disability and other factors \\
- Inaccessible health or education services (in some places) and costs of government health and education services (including 'hidden costs'/ corruption) \\
- Family separation and breakdown \\
- Violence in families, schools, work place \\
- Drug, alcohol use or gambling by family members \\
- Large families – lots of children \\
- Parents illiteracy/ lack of education and/or not appreciating value of education \\
- Lack of information or knowledge on child rights, health, and nutrition \\
- Traditional attitudes towards children – lack of value for children’s participation \\
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\end{tabular}
\caption{Children's views on root causes contributing to violations of their rights, Myanmar}
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\textbf{Challenges in accessing education:}
Children living in urban poor areas describe challenges in accessing education, due to family pressures to work to earn a living; as well as due to barriers concerning costs associated with schools (transport, uniform, corruption), in addition to bullying, emotional and sexual violence in schools.\textsuperscript{20} Some girls also miss school due to insufficient gender segregated sanitation in schools.\textsuperscript{21} Furthermore, discrimination based on disability, family poverty, HIV, and other factors contributes to school exclusion.\textsuperscript{22}

\textit{Healthy children complete schooling but sick ones don't. Poor, disabled and infectious children can’t study up to completion. (8-12 year old boys, urban poor area, Myanmar)\textsuperscript{23}}

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’. (girl, Ethiopia)\textsuperscript{24}

\textit{On a monthly basis I miss three to four days [of school]... and this affects my performance. Things are even tougher when I menstruate during the examination times as I miss some examinations. (Adolescent girl, Malawi)\textsuperscript{25}}

\textbf{Poor health, nutrition and sanitation:}
Families with limited income in urban areas face challenges in accessing health services (due to the associated costs and discrimination), as well as challenges in buying and eating nutritious meals. Lack of access to nutritious food is compounded by insecure employment opportunities for parents, lack of land where food can be grown (compared to rural villages), the costs of food items, and by family members’ gambling or drug habits.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{When my father cannot find a job to do, he fails to buy food and we stay hungry at home. (Girl, Malawi)\textsuperscript{27}}

\textit{Few families can eat nutritious food as families have no jobs, no money and no health knowledge.... Some nurses don’t treat poor patients well saying these patients are disgusting or filthy... Parents who gamble can’t feed their children nutritious food due to poverty. Also they don’t prepare meals at regular times as they are busy gambling. (Girls, urban poor area, Myanmar)\textsuperscript{28}}
Children living in urban slums and peri-urban areas also describe **challenges in accessing safe drinking water and sanitation services which puts children at increased risk of illness, under-nutrition and death**. Girls face particular challenges in accessing toilets and sanitation in public places.

**My friend never used to take a bath as there is no place....he got a skin infection**
*(Homeless boy, Bangalore, India)*

**Some of us have to get up by 4 to 4.30 AM to fill water which otherwise becomes difficult after rush comes.** *(Boy, Migrant worker, Chennai, India)*

Furthermore, in many parts of the world, girls and boys aged 7-17 years often have household responsibilities to collect water which can increase risks due to carrying heavy loads, sexual harassment, and other forms of violence faced while travelling to and waiting at water sources.

**Protection risks associated with children’s access to and use of WASH facilities in urban slums, Sierra Leone:**
A participatory study concerning risks associated with children’s access and use of WASH facilities was undertaken in 15 slum communities in Sierra Leone. Both qualitative and quantitative data including interviews, focus group discussions, score cards and observations were used with children and adults. The study revealed that children are extensively used to fetch water and to dispose garbage in all the communities sampled. Tensions are common at water points and often lead to physical and emotional violence against children. Long queues at these water points have also led girls to offer sexual favours in return for easy access to water. Risks associated with crossing busy roads were also identified. Furthermore, many school authorities use water fetching as a means of punishment of children which increases the risks they face.

**Increased protection risks:**
Consultations and research with marginalized children and young people in urban settings have repeatedly highlighted increased protection risks faced by girls and boys, including physical and emotional violence, lack of family care and attention, sexual harassment and abuse, economic and sexual exploitation, police violence and coming into conflict with the law, trafficking, injuries and road accidents.

**Learning about children in urban slums, Mombasa, Kenya:**
In 2012 a rapid ethnographic study was carried out in two urban slums in Mombasa by the Interagency Learning Initiative on Community-Based Child Protection Mechanisms and Child Protection Systems. Kenyan researchers lived in the communities and collected data from a wide range of different people using tools such as: participant observation; individual interviews; group discussions that identified the main kinds of harm children suffer and the main pathways of response; group discussions of preventive factors; and body mapping with children (age 5–12 years).

In addition to poverty and health problems, the top rated harms to children were: children out of school (28.7%), followed by sexual abuse and exploitation (20.1%), drug and alcohol abuse (16.2%), and early pregnancy (7.8%). Other items identified as the most serious harm to children were child beating (3.9%), heavy work (3.6%), peers influencing bad behavior (3.3%), karata (a gambling card game, 3.0%), parental neglect (3.0%), and orphans (1.8%). Sexual abuse and exploitation of children was reportedly rampant in both slums, and the perpetrators frequently included people in positions of power and authority, such as teachers and elders. Early pregnancy was widespread; significant numbers of girls reportedly became pregnant in their early teens. Contributing factors were children regularly watching their parents have sex and then imitating them, parental neglect, and alcohol and drug use.
Lack of family care and attention:
Girls and boys living in urban poor communities in diverse contexts have emphasized the lack of family care and attention which affects their well-being and rights. As a result of poverty and daily struggles for their livelihood, many children lack sufficient care and attention from their parents or caregivers. Due to economic challenges many children are expected to work, and some parents migrate for work leaving their children in the care of relatives, neighbours, religious leaders, employers or institutional caregivers.

Some families moved away due to work or inability to pay rent. Families moved to another place of convenience and children were taken along with them. However, sometimes children were left behind with grandparents, relatives or neighbours or at orphanages. (13-17 year old boys, urban poor area, Myanmar)

Child labour and exploitation:
Some children and young people chose to work to contribute to their families’ survival and to learn some vocational skills; other children feel forced to work. Working children face risks of labour exploitation, harm and injury, in addition to sexual harassment and abuse. However, some children are fearful to speak up against exploitation or abuse as they do not want to risk losing their income.

Some girls are not educated because parents send them to work to earn money…. Some girls are cleaning dishes, collecting rubbish and working in karaoke, some are prostitutes. Some parents take the money to spend on gambling. (8 - 12 year old girls, urban poor area, Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

There are children who have to work at tea shops, grocery stores and chicken slaughter houses. Children have to work longer hours with less pay. Children are made to work, sworn at and beaten. However, if threatened during work hours, children do not dare not to tell. (8-12 year old boys, urban poor area, Myanmar)

In many urban contexts due to poverty, migration and/or displacement some children are forced to, or choose to beg to earn a living. In Laos there is increased begging of children when their parents migrate for seasonal work. Furthermore, there are increasing numbers of internally displaced children begging in towns in Iraq and Yemen.

Scolding and physical abuse:
In diverse socio-cultural settings children face scolding and physical abuse in their homes, alternative care settings, schools, and workplace. Children with disabilities face increased risks of physical abuse, emotional abuse and other forms of violence. Furthermore, in many parts of the world street connected children face verbal and physical abuse from members of the general public and from the police.

I don’t feel safe to walk to school because of violence in this area, especially from people who are drunk. I also fear to be beaten by the teacher when I am at school. (Boy, Zambia)

He (father) rarely used to go for work and would always take earnings off my mother. He would spend it on alcohol and trouble me and my mother…… Once he tried to tie a knot around my neck with my mother’s saree (dress) because I didn’t listen to him. That’s when I ran away from home. (homeless, boy, Bangalore, India)
Sexual harassment and abuse:
Children, particularly girls, face sexual harassment and abuse within private and public settings including their own homes, in crowded urban slums, on the way to school or work, within the workplace, within schools, in parks and market places. Domestic workers, children living in institutions, especially children with disabilities, and street connected children are particularly prone to sexual abuse and exploitation.

There are children working as domestic servants. They face sexual abuse, forced labour, wage exploitation and violence. (8-12 year old boys, urban poor area, Myanmar)

The police come and ask us to have sex with them for free and if we complain and ask them to use a condom they beat us (girls living in urban poor area of Chennai, India)

Street connected children and Police harassment:
Consultations and studies with street connected children in different parts of the world have highlighted common experiences of police violence, unfair arrests and mistreatment by the police. In Save the Children’s Kenyan study with street connected children, children’s greatest fear was being arrested by the police and municipal authorities, who conduct regular violent round-ups of children, and whose whips and beatings, have caused some children to be hospitalised.

The policemen take money from us. If you do not have money they beat you so much. (13 year old boy living on the streets, Lira, Uganda)

Disasters, conflict change and other emergencies are contributing to the number of street connected children, as well as migration of families with children to urban settings.

Save the Children (October 2012) A Generation Out of Place: The Chronic Urban Emergency in Rift Valley Kenya: The Rift Valley in Kenya was a hot spot of the 2007/2008 Post Election Violence (PEV), causing an increase in child protection concerns related to violence, displacement, and family separation. Government departments and other organisations working with children in the province requested a study to confirm and better understand the perceived increase in children joining the streets that they witnessed following these events. With funding from UNICEF, Save the Children conducted a study in five Rift Valley towns. Surveys, interviews, focus group discussions and case studies involving 2,696 children (76% boys, 24% girls), their parents and other duty bearers.

The study found a strong link between emergencies in the region and children joining the streets. Almost half of the children interviewed had been affected in some way by an emergency (Post Election Violence, tribal clashes, drought or flooding). The study found that food insecurity was the predominant push factor for children joining the streets (59%), affecting even those who were not impacted directly by the Post Election Violence or drought. Other major reasons for joining the streets were domestic abuse (23%) and the inability to go to school due to the high cost of education (21%). Furthermore, internally displaced children made up 37% of the total population of children connected to the streets, rising to as high as 61% in one of the towns. Internally displaced children identified a number of factors related to the Post Election Violence that led them to join the streets, including: displacement and family separation; death or injury of a family member; humanitarian withdrawal; loss of livelihoods; and particularly food insecurity.

The majority of children connected to the streets are denied education with under half (44%) of all children interviewed being currently in formal education. While primary education is nominally free, related costs (e.g. uniforms, books, lunch, etc.) create significant barriers. Across districts, children
connected to the streets are exposed to abuse and sexual exploitation at an early age. Girls connected to the streets are especially vulnerable to abuse and frequently engage in transactional sex or prostitution, both as protection and livelihood strategies. They have little access to health care, family planning, or contraception. Other protection concerns for both boys and girls connected to the streets include: economic exploitation, violent police round-ups, drug abuse, criminalization, lack of identity documents, limited access to services, and physical violence by the general public or other children and adults connected to the streets, sometimes leading to death.

**Negative impacts of drugs, alcohol and gambling:**
Children in diverse contexts (e.g. Cambodia, Ethiopia, India, Kenya, Myanmar, South Africa) have expressed concerns regarding family member’s involvement in gambling and/or regular use of drugs or alcohol which reduces the family income that is available to support children’s health care, education, nutrition and other basic needs, and increases risks of economic and sexual exploitation of children. Adolescent boys in urban areas in diverse contexts have also described their own exposure to and engagement in drug or alcohol use, gambling, and access to pornographic materials.

Some parents have wasted the money gambling, they do not bring their children to the health centre... The doctors give treatment only with payment. (13-17 year old boys, urban poor area of Phnom Penh, Cambodia)

Most boys in the community drink alcohol and use addictive drugs like chat and when these boys run out of money to buy the drugs, they steal small items from their home to sell in the market.” (Adolescent boy, Ethiopia)

Most of the boys eat Goa (tobacco), smoke and drink. (girl, migrant worker, Mumbai, India)

Despite increasing patterns of rural to urban migration of youth for work, in many urban cities there is insufficient skill training for youth which contributes to rising youth unemployment and inequality which is increasing frustrations due to the social divides. Such frustration can lead to increased violence, crime and drug use.

**Gang violence:**
Gang violence is a significant concern facing children in some urban communities, particularly in Central and Latin America. Gang violence contributes to morbidity, risky and criminal behaviours and harm. Gang violence is also contributing to “children on the move” as children and young people flee gang violence. For example between October 2013 and July 2014 52,000 unaccompanied children were apprehended at the US border, and it was reported that a recent spike of gang and drug-related violence in Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras has increased the flow of migrants from those countries.

A child using a firearm makes me so angry and insecure. (9 year old boy, Brazil)

**Unsafe play and road injuries:**
Unsafe play for children living in urban poor areas has also been emphasised in various studies and consultations with children. Children may play in unsafe areas such as garbage sites, or in busy roads where risks of injury and harm are higher. Furthermore, some “designated” play areas are rife with drug deals and sexual harassment of children.
Pollution:
In consultations concerning the way businesses affect children, girls and boys from urban areas in diverse country contexts have emphasised the harmful effects of pollution on the environment negatively affecting the quality of air, water, and subsequently children’s health.66

Modern technologies and sexual transactions:
In many parts of the world, particularly in urban areas, access to mobile phones and internet has positive and negative outcomes. While increasing children and young people’s access to information and communication with their family and peers which can enhance their protection and realisation of their rights; it is also increasing risks of children and young people’s exposure to pornography and risks of sexual exploitation and sexual transactions. In some urban contexts particularly in Africa, risks of early sexual behaviour and transactional sex are contributing to risks of early pregnancy.67

Men should be an answer to financial problems – some men even help whole families to get out of poverty. (adolescent girl, Freetown)68

A summary of key asks identified by children in urban settings:69
- Increase space for children and young people to participate in decision making and governance processes concerning them, including urban planning and disaster risk reduction.
- Raise awareness among parents, caregivers, teachers, police, employers, general public, and media to prevent and address all forms of violence including: physical abuse, sexual violence, labour exploitation, and exposure to drugs and alcohol in public and private settings.
- Stop police harassment and strengthen implementation of laws to punish adults who abuse or exploit children.
- Ensure livelihood and skill training opportunities for youth and parents in urban settings and in rural villages (to prevent migration).
- Increase government investments in and access to education, health, clean drinking water and sanitation services. Prevent and address corruption and discrimination.
- Government to provide safe and proper housing to all families in places that are accessible to public services (education, health, livelihoods etc)
- Provide safe play areas
- Establish de-addiction centres for family members and peers who want to stop gambling, drinking or drug-using.
- Support children and families in obtaining official documents (e.g. birth registration papers)
- Increase information sharing about child rights and public services

Key reasons why it is crucial to involve children and young people in urban planning
In many countries urban planning, management and governance systems remain under-developed and have contributed to urban problems, rather than enabling processes which can create more inclusive and safer cities with adequate services for children and families.70 To address the complexities of urbanization and the diversity of local needs there is increasing recognition among government, UN, civil society, private and academic organizations that improvements are needed in urban planning and budgeting, strengthening participatory governance processes which involve the urban poor as active citizens.71
Urban governance, or the process and bodies through which decisions affecting local communities are made, represents perhaps the single most critical factor affecting the quality of life of these communities and their residents. (p. 20, Save the Children, November 2012)

This section of the reports outlines key reasons why it is crucial to involve children and young people in urban planning as it:
- leads to more relevant programmes and Child Friendly Cities;
- increases child protection and survival;
- enhance child development;
- creates a new generation of active citizens;
- reduces vulnerability and increases resilient children, families and communities;
- is more cost effective.

Leads to more relevant programmes and Child Friendly Cities:
Children’s participation in urban programming and in urban planning governance processes would enable their concerns and priorities to be heard, which would result in more relevant programmes. Children’s participation in urban governance will help create child friendly cities which are safe for boys and girls to grow up in.

Good local governance can help overcome the disparities that bar access by the urban poor to resources, services and infrastructure: secure land tenure and decent housing, safe water and sanitation, quality education, adequate health care and nutrition, affordable transport. Good local governance can make the difference between a city friendly to children and one that is indifferent to their needs and rights. Municipal governments have the advantage of being close to their constituents; they could make the most of this situation by forming alliances with civil society groups, the media, private sector, community organisations and others, with the aim of improving the conditions in which poor urban families live. (p3 UNICEF, 2012)

Increases child protection and survival:
Children’s participation is a means of securing children’s rights to protection, survival, development and participation. When girls and boys voices and priorities are heard and taken seriously it should enhance their protection as children are requesting for increased awareness on child protection, better implementation of laws to protect children, and improved family support services, including employment opportunities for their parents and caregivers. Children's representatives who have been given space in municipal governance are advocating for increased investments in services for children and families (such as child protection, education and vocational skill training, family support services, child and maternal health, play, water and sanitation, etc).

When children's voices are not heard or are ignored it contributes to their vulnerability and increases risks of mistreatment, abuse, violence, and exploitation. Social norms which condone violence against children need to be transformed, so that girls and boys are encouraged to speak up about abuse (sexual, physical and emotional), and perpetrators’ are held accountable. Support for children’s participation and child led organisations enhance children’s self-protection enabling them to protect themselves and their peers.

“ Violence against children should be strictly condemned because a violence free childhood is the right of every child” (16 year old girl, Zimbabwe)

Enhances child development:
There is a growing body of evidence that children’s participation contributes to children’s personal development increasing their confidence, communication and negotiation skills and their protection.
**Creates a new generation of active citizens:**

Children’s participation promotes **civic engagement, tolerance and respect** for others. Encouraging children and young peoples’ participation and contribution to municipal decision-making processes will not only **ensure cities are more inclusive and better able to provide services for girls and boys**, they will also help **foster a new generation of active citizens** and future municipal leaders.\(^{77}\)

Children and young people have **civil rights to expression, information, participation in decisions that affect them, peaceful assembly and association**.\(^{78}\) While considering children’s evolving capacity and their best interests, **article 12 of the UNCRC is a key principle** articulating that girls and boys have rights to express their views in all decisions concerning them. It is crucial that **children and young people are recognized and engaged as active citizens in urban planning and budgeting processes** as they are experts in their own lives, and their participation will help **to address child rights violations and significant gaps** in child friendly urban planning and budgeting processes.

**Reduces vulnerability and increases resilient children, families and communities:**

Children’s participation in disaster risk reduction, climate change, and emergency preparedness helps to identify and reduce risks affecting girls and boys, reducing vulnerability and enhancing resilience. When **integrated efforts are made to support children’s participation in DRR in urban contexts it contributes to more resilient children, families and communities.** There is growing evidence concerning the importance of children and young people’s participation in climate change adaptation and DRR efforts.\(^{79}\)

**Is more cost effective:**

It is more **cost-effective** to design urban spaces and services together with children and young people, rather than to change the infrastructure once it has been put into place.\(^{80}\)

**Good practice examples of children’s participation in urban contexts contributing to positive changes for children**

This section of the report provides good practice examples from Save the Children’s (and other child focused agencies’) child protection and child rights governance work illustrating different types of children’s participation initiatives which contribute to positive changes for children and young people. The types of initiatives include:

- Children’s participation in municipal planning and budgeting
- Child Friendly Cities which are safer for children
- Supporting the role of child led organisations and movements in preventing migration and in promoting child protection in cities
- Children’s participation in urban based community based child protection mechanisms
- Supporting child led media to bring about attitude change
- Participatory research with and by children and young people on issues that affect them
- Children’s participation in Child Rights Impact Assessments
- Children’s forums to influence national, regional and global policy developments

**Children’s participation in municipal planning and budgeting:**

There are increasing efforts through Save the Children’s Child Rights Governance programme to support children’s participation in municipal planning and budgeting. These initiatives are resulting in increased investments in children’s services, empowerment of children as active citizens, and better protection of children.\(^{81}\)
Children’s participation in municipal planning and budgeting, Latin America:

Children have been participating in participatory budgeting in municipalities in Brazil since the late 1990s. Children’s councils with elected children’s representatives are able to determine how a proportion of the municipal budget is spent on addressing children’s priorities, and its child councillors are also involved in other aspects of government. Each year more than 6,000 children have taken part in discussions and assemblies to elect their child councillors and discuss their own priorities. The elected children learn how to represent their peers within democratic structures, to prioritize based on available resources, and then to develop projects within the complex and often slow political and bureaucratic process of city governance. This process has extended to children the concept of participatory budgeting that is now widely used in Brazil for increasing citizen involvement in urban governance, and has encouraged similar innovations in other cities in and beyond Latin America.

In Nicaragua for example where Save the Children has also been supporting children’s participation in municipal planning and budgeting, the annual average of municipal investment in children increased 70 per cent over a four-year period. As a result of children’s participation in municipal planning and budgeting: security has been improved in parks and playgrounds; schools have been repaired; playgrounds have been constructed; and increased numbers of poor children have birth registration which increases their access to basic services thus reducing their marginalisation.

Child Friendly Cities which are safer for children:
Child Friendly City approaches which have been promoted by UNICEF support integrated multi-sectoral approaches to ensure increased realization of children’s rights in cities, encompassing a strong focus on meaningful participation of children and young people in planning and decision making processes. Similar efforts to develop “Safer Cities” are also being supported by UN-Habitat and other agencies.

Nine Building Blocks for a Child-Friendly City

The global ‘Child-Friendly Cities Initiative’ has defined nine interconnected and mutually supportive building blocks for child friendly cities. The steps follow a logical flow, although experience shows that cities may start the process at different points or by combining different entry-points. Municipal governments that engage in building a child-friendly city contribute to the wider national and global process of implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Children’s participation is the first step and cuts across the whole process.

The steps in the process are:
1. **Fostering children’s participation**: Encouraging children’s participation in decision-making processes and listening to their views to ensure that they are reflected in action affecting them.
2. **Establishing a municipal child-friendly legal framework**: Ensuring that municipal regulatory frameworks, including bylaws, policies and procedures, consistently promote and protect children’s rights.
3. **Framing a citywide children’s strategy**: Developing a comprehensive and integrated strategy or plan of action for implementing children’s rights in the city.
4. **Institutionalising a children’s rights municipal coordinating mechanism**: Establishing institutional mechanisms that coordinate various levels of local governance to ensure that priority consideration is granted to young people.
5. **Developing local children’s budgets**: Allocating adequate resources to ensure full implementation of activities planned in the citywide strategy for children.
6. **Developing regular data on the city’s children and monitoring progress of the children’s strategy**: Supporting planning and promotion activities with evidence-based documentation on the state of the city’s children, and monitoring progress toward full implementation of their rights.
7. **Carrying out child impact assessment and evaluation**: Systematically assessing the impact of law, policy and practice on children’s lives, in advance, during and after implementation.
8. **Making children’s rights known**: Raising awareness on child rights among young people and adults.

Supporting the role of child led organisations and movements in preventing migration and in promoting child protection in cities:
Save the Children has supported the development of child led organisations and movements which increase girls and boys collective power to better protect themselves, and to influence practice and policy developments concerning them. Through their own organisations and initiatives children and young people have space to express their views, to analyse and plan action on issues concerning them.

Preventing and Responding to the unsafe migration and trafficking of children and their participation in harmful work, Ethiopia:
The internal migration and trafficking, especially of children aged 10 to 18 years, is a widespread social and demographic phenomenon in Ethiopia. Lack of basic services, including access to school, household poverty, lack of local job opportunities contribute to rural to urban migration. Boys aged between 7-10 years living in rural areas in the south of Ethiopia, are highly vulnerable to trafficking for labour purposes. Large numbers of boys migrate or are trafficked to Addis Ababa to work in the traditional weaving industry. These weaver children are usually invisible in their communities, working for long hours with little or no pay, and deprived of their rights to play and/or go to school. The children are exposed to health hazards due to their exposure to cotton dust and can suffer skeletal deformities as they are forced to work in a bent position for long hours.

Save the Children has been working with a local CSO partner - Mission for Community Development Program (MCDP) – to prevent migration and trafficking by working in and with the source communities as well as implementing a response to the protection of children from harmful work in the weaving industry. Furthermore, MCDP is working in partnership with the African Movement of Working Children and Youth (AMWCY) to enable working children’s participation and association which increases children’s individual and collective power to defend their rights. Project activities in Addis Ababa support the reunification and reintegration of child migrants and trafficked children using the Best Interest Determination, as well as working to improve the working conditions of children involved in the weaving industry and supporting their access to school and vocational skills training. Community based child protection mechanisms are also established to increase identification, prevention, monitoring and response to protection concerns raised by children.

Across the region the African Movement of Working Children is also pro-actively involved in sensitisation and advocacy initiatives to prevent unsafe migration from rural to urban locations. The AMWCY is working in 27 African countries and encompasses 3915 grassroots groups of working children and youth which are federated into 362 associations. The majority of the members are children under 18 years, and 57% of the members are girls. The organised working children and youth are undertaking a wide range of initiatives to enhance their protection and realisation of their rights. Examples of their initiatives include: awareness raising to prevent rural migration; identification of safe migration routes; encouraging children and youth to maintain regular contact with people from their original location; providing AMCWY membership cards; collectively negotiating with employers; and participating in broader policy and practice developments concerning them.

Children’s participation in urban based community based child protection mechanisms:
Save the Children’s Child Protection programme has good practice experiences in supporting children’s participation in community based child protection mechanisms in a range of settings including urban, peri-urban, rural villages and camp settings. Furthermore, there is increasing recognition of the need to integrate programming across the full spectrum (of humanitarian and...
development programming) so that the protection concerns and interests IDPs and refugee children, as well as host children can be better identified and responded to.

**Community Based Child Protection Mechanisms reaching out to refugee and host communities in Lebanon:**

Save the Children Lebanon is piloting a new approach to community based child protection in Beirut/ Mount Lebanon and Tripoli through child protection networks which actively engage community members both from Lebanese families, and from refugee families who are resident in the same urban community. Save the Children Lebanon (SCL) maintains an inclusive approach to protection and education with the aim of responding to vulnerabilities of all children whilst promoting social cohesion in a highly tense community environment due to large number of refugees and changing community dynamics.

Child Protection Network members are raising awareness on child protection (including issues of child labour, education, early marriage), strengthening community identification and referral systems (through community based referral pathways, as well as through links with existing national and emergency specific case management systems), and are implementing community action plans. Members of the Municipality (Lebanese) and the Popular Palestinian Committee have been consulted to encourage an inclusive approach; and collaboration with staff from government run Social Development Centres are also enhancing government responsibilities to prevent and protect children from all forms of violence. Children, their parents and community members have also been involved in the design and creation of the child protection network for their community. However, increased efforts are needed to support meaningful and safe participation of children in the community based child protection networks, especially to enhance prevention of violence and family separation.

**Supporting child led media to bring about attitude change:**

Save the Children has a lot of good practice experience in supporting child led media initiatives in different parts of the world including radio, film, wall newspapers, magazines, and photovoice. Child led media initiatives are effective in sharing information, raising awareness, and changing attitudes among children, adolescents, and adults. For example, child journalists have helped to change attitudes concerning children’s capacity, the value of listening to children’s suggestions, and the importance of protecting children from different forms of violence.

**Children’s media group “Ichchey” film on children and urbanization in Bangladesh:**

Members of a children’s media group in Bangladesh developed a powerful short documentary film on urbanization and its impact on children in Dhaka which they are using to advocate for increased attention to their needs and rights. The film depicts the challenges faced by girls and boys affected by poverty in Dhaka including: protection concerns as they face police violence and corruption, insecurity due to drug use and trading, abuse and violence from members of the general public, and child labour. Poor children are not recognised as citizens and they face challenges in accessing basic services (education, health, protection, water) to which they are entitled. Children also face hunger and discrimination on a regular basis. Their film has also been widely disseminated through youtube: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc26XmazwXw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kc26XmazwXw).

**Communication for Development (C4D)** is also being used as a tool by UN Habitat, Women in Cities International and Plan International to promote the rights of girls in the city. Programmes based on C4D take into account the fact that, as experts in their own safety and use of the city, girls are best positioned to identify the issues and priorities that affect them today and in the future, in order to make cities safer and more inclusive.

**Participatory research with and by children and young people on issues that affect them:**

Save the Children has good practice experiences in supporting participatory research with and by children in urban settings. Participatory research contributes to an evidence base to inform action
and advocacy initiatives involving children and young people which can increase their protection and other rights.

**Peer research with adolescent girls in Sierra Leone on mobile phone acquisition and use:** A recent peer research study among adolescent girls by Save the Children in Sierra Leone concerning mobile phone acquisition and use exposed how adolescent girls in Freetown are targeting wealthier older men as sexual partners, so that they will provide them with material goods, including mobile phones. Furthermore, some young girls are engaging in multiple forms of sexual relationships, concurrently, in order to access cash to purchase mobile phones – an item which is identified as essential for modern living. Adolescent girls use the phones to contact their boyfriends and some girls are also sharing pornographic photos via the mobile phones. The research findings are being used to inform child protection prevention and response strategies.

**Children’s participation in Child Rights Impact Assessments:**
When State governments have ratified the UNCRC, one of the principal obligations on the state is to ensure that children’s best interests are always at the centre of decision-making processes. Adequate systems must be in place to ensure that whenever a decision is being made that might have an impact on children and the enjoyment of their rights, it is checked and tested. In recent years Save the Children has good practice in encouraging Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) which seeks children’s views and inputs. The findings from CRIAs are used to inform and influence Government policy and practice developments, including relevant emergency preparedness, resettlement, or reconstruction processes in urban settings.

**Child Rights Impact Assessment in urban poor relocation program, Philippines:**
In the Philippines, Save the Children commissioned a Child Rights Impact Assessment (CRIA) study to determine the impact of resettlement on children living in informal settlements along Metro Manila waterways. Following the massive destruction wrought by tropical storm Ketsana and flooding due to extreme monsoon rains, the National Government allocated a significant five year budget (from 2012-2016) for the construction of in-city high-density housing projects for informal settlers. The Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) also supported relocation of informal settlers in off-city resettlement projects. The study looked into the changes and risks perceived by children in informal settlements targeted for demolition, and the actual situation of children in resettlement sites. It took a holistic and integrated view of children’s rights and well-being, with a focus on children’s rights to health, education, protection, play, discrimination, and participation. Among the major issues identified were the following: (1) absence of venues for children to participate in the resettlement process; (2) difficulty of children to express their concerns within their own family; (3) ill-equipped resettlement sites, specifically the inadequate supply of electricity and water as well as distance from schools, markets, and health facilities; and (4) lack of economic opportunities for parents in the relocation areas.

The study findings are being used by Save the Children to advocate with the government to increase budget allocations for housing, education, health, protection services and livelihood programmes. The study also emphasises the importance of awareness raising, capacity building and advocacy initiatives among government and civil society actors, as well as with parents and community members concerning the importance of involving children in the resettlement program.

**Children’s forums to influence national, regional and global policy developments:**
Save the Children and other child focused agencies have experience in supporting Children's Forums at local, national, regional and global levels to enable girls and boys to influence policy and practice developments concerning them. In 2014 during the UN Habitat's World Urban Forum, a Children’s Assembly was organised by World Vision in partnership with UN-Habitat.
In partnership with UN-Habitat, World Vision has launched a global advocacy movement to capture the voices of children living in slums of different cities. This movement will ensure that children are represented in all global processes and influencing key decision makers in their cities. In April 2014, World Vision successfully launched the first Children’s Assembly, in partnership with UN-Habitat, on the opening day of the World Urban Forum 7 held in Medellin, Colombia. Themed Cities for Children, the event gathered over 200 children from diverse neighbourhoods of Colombia and child representatives from Bolivia, El Salvador and Honduras to play a role in shaping the cities of the future amongst global leaders and decision makers. The first Children’s Assembly aimed to change the perception of children’s role in shaping cities, which has traditionally been non-existent, and to raise awareness of the importance of their inclusion and contribution in designing safe, resilient, prosperous and healthy cities for the 21st century.

Conclusions and key recommendations: What Save the Children should do

Listening to children’s voices can inform local decision-makers about the world in which they live and how they see it, thereby offering a more nuanced understanding of “childhood” and how specific social, cultural and economic realities condition children’s lives. Their scale and proximity makes cities and communities the most relevant place for genuine participation by children.

(p3 UNICEF, 2012)

Conclusions: In Save the Children’s urbanisation work – as a matter of credibility, of principle, and as a means of making programmes more effective and accountable it is crucial that the organization makes more systematic efforts to support children and young people’s participation in urban planning and other relevant decision making processes. Supporting children’s participation in urban planning will help the organisation to achieve our Theory of Change as it supports efforts to be the voice ensuring children’s voices are heard (particularly those children are most deprived living in urban poverty); to build partnership and to be an innovator ensuring space and value for children’s role as active citizens in urban governance processes together with other key stakeholders, which will enable us to achieve results at scale. Children’s participation is also critical approach to achieving our breakthroughs, including the CPI 2030 breakthrough “Violence against children is no longer tolerated”.

Children’s participation should not be seen in isolation, but should be supported as part of more integrated efforts to empower and engage families and communities. Children are participating and contributing in numerous ways in their daily lives, in their families, schools, and communities, and they are the experts when it comes to understanding their own lives, difficulties, and aspirations. Children and young people are a huge untapped resource of creativity, competency, energy and agency and can make a real contribution to the development of their towns, cities and broader society. Thus, it is crucial that Save the Children makes increasing strategic and practical efforts with government, UN, business, academic, civil society, child and youth organisations, and community members to pro-actively engage with girls and boys as active citizens so that their voices are heard and acted upon in governance processes affecting them.

Furthermore, to ensure quality participation processes, nine basic requirements for meaningful participation should be applied when planning and monitoring participation, namely that participation is: 1. Transparent and informative; 2. Voluntary; 3. Respectful; 4. Relevant; 5. Child-friendly; 6. Inclusive; 7. Supported by training; 8. Safe and sensitive to risk; and 9. Accountable.
Key recommendations - Save the Children should:

1. **Ensure an explicit focus on children’s participation in its next global strategy** including attention to: i) plans and budgets for children’s participation in urban programming; ii) applying Save the Children’s global child participation indicator\(^{102}\) to monitor and report on children’s participation; and iii) plans and budgets for capacity building on children’s participation for key staff and partners who are involved in Urban Strategy Initiatives.

2. **Increase strategic collaboration** with other child focused agencies including UNICEF, UN-Habitat, Plan International, World Vision, and other relevant agencies to promote and support the development, implementation and monitoring of Child Friendly Cities. The concept and practice of Child Friendly Cities should be a key feature of Save the Children’s urban strategy and should be used as benchmark for any future urban learning initiative describing what programs are doing to make cities friendlier, healthier and safer – places where violence against children is no longer tolerated.

3. **Develop a signature program on children’s participation in urban settings to ensure that violence against children is no longer tolerated.** The signature program should support innovative and sustainable efforts to strengthen children’s self-protection, children’s participation in urban community based child protection mechanisms, and children’s participation in broader efforts to strengthen national child protection systems - with a particular focus on reaching and engaging the most deprived girls and boys.

4. **Ensure that global, regional and country programmes increase support** (budgets and capacity building support) **for child led action and advocacy initiatives** in urban settings, including support for child led organisations, child led research and media initiatives.

5. **Ensure that Save the Children country offices collect disaggregated data from girls and boys in urban and rural settings** when undertaking Child Rights Situation Analysis, and use this analysis at country, regional and global levels to identify and respond to emerging issues (such as the need for multi-sector efforts to prevent and address risks associated with family members’ and peers’ use of drugs, alcohol or gambling habits).

6. **Increase integrated efforts** to work across the full spectrum of humanitarian and development work, ensuring children and young people’s participation in disaster risk reduction (DRR), climate change and emergency preparedness, and reconstruction processes, as part of urban planning processes.

7. **Develop cross thematic programs for reaching the most deprived urban children, informed and designed through the active participation of girls and boys** (with particular efforts to include: street connected children, IDPs and refugee children, children with disabilities, child domestic workers, children affected by HIV etc).

8. **Involve children and young people in child-led monitoring and evaluation of urban interventions** to strengthen our evidence base and to document innovations and lessons learned through children’s eyes.
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102% of Save the Children supported projects including child participation and complying with Save the Children’s practice standards voluntary, safe and inclusive