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World Vision is advancing just cities for children

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World Vision is advancing just cities for children

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As the world races into its first urban century, NGOs are confronted by the shifting and expanding dimensions of poverty and inequity across the rural-urban continuum. In response, World Vision is trialling context-specific programs to tackle the complex issues facing children in urban environments.

The programming interventions of Global Compact Cities Programme strategic partner, World Vision International, indicates that hundreds of millions of children in the world's cities are living in conditions that threaten their health and wellbeing. The international NGO is tackling the growing challenge of poverty alleviation and aid provision in complex urban environments. To trial new programming models, pilots were established in Indonesia, India, Cambodia, South Africa, Lebanon and Bolivia, working on context-specific issues including land rights, economic development, governance and policy reform, protection (child labour and trafficking) and child participation.

The meta-evaluation of the urban pilots is informing new strategies. This evaluation has concluded that a formal (top-down) city-wide process coordinated through (bottom-up) community led implementation and advocacy with various partners is the appropriate development approach, particularly in complex urban settings. This article presents findings from pilot projects rolled out in six cities across the world that are aimed at addressing poverty and the effective provision of aid in complex urban areas.

More than one billion children – almost half of the world's children – live in cities, however millions of these children live in slum conditions (UNICEF 2012). Many children lack access to clean water and clean toilets. In crowded areas and homes, they are vulnerable to infectious diseases. In overcrowded schools, children suffer from poor-quality education. There are no playgrounds for children in slums and the public space that is available is contaminated by garbage and dangerous waste.

Children living in slums are highly vulnerable to trafficking, child labour, violence, road accidents and living on the streets. Access to basic services becomes a major issue because their families are often not registered with city authorities. This inaccessibility is

hugely exacerbated by the urbanization megatrend, with the UN predicting the global slum population to increase from one-sixth (2012) to one-third of humanity within 30 years (UN-Habitat 2012).

Children living in informal settlements are the first victims of urban poverty and are particularly vulnerable to all kinds of exploitation including long hours and/or unpaid or low-waged work in harmful working environments. They are also exploited for drugs, sexual violence and prostitution. Families unable to support children may abandon them, contributing to the increasing number of street children.

The multifaceted issues facing urban children need to be addressed through a holistic and integrated program intervention that engages the duty bearers, family, community, the private sector, civil society and the state. The 'urbanization of poverty', however, has presented NGOs with a largely unexplored terrain. As the world races into its first urban century, NGOs are confronted by the shifting and expanding dimensions of poverty and inequity across the rural-urban continuum.

World Vision's Urban Programs Initiative

The megatrend of urbanization demands the design of development models to guide responses to the unique challenges presented by cities. Recognizing an organizational need to understand, respond and adapt to the changing face of poverty, World Vision launched its Urban Programs Initiative five years ago and has established an urban unit (Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming) to explore and understand the changes impacting the aid and development landscape. This strategic initiative aimed to design and inform development theory frameworks and methodologies specific to the urban context.

World Vision International launched a five-year operational global research programme applying an action

research approach across World Vision implementing offices. Six field offices were identified to launch urban pilot projects as part of this initiative. Seven pilots were established in:

- *Cambodia*: promoting community awareness about land tenure security and Cambodian housing rights and engaging city authorities in a dialogue to advocate for pro-poor policies.
- *Siliguri, India*: promoting sustained civic engagement by establishing a citywide network model to address and reduce the incidence of child labour and child trafficking.
- *Kanpur, India*: working to reduce the incidence of child labour through supporting rehabilitation, non-formal education, provision of vocational training opportunities, capacity-building and advocacy.
- *Lebanon*: providing opportunities for children and youth to proactively engage in building positive relationships amongst historically divided groups using art and sport and allowing youth to claim public space to contribute to safe and peaceful communities.
- *Bolivia*: promoting the active participation of children and youth in local governance processes in La Paz and engaging in city planning processes to bring a youthful lens to the city's constitution.

- *Orlando East, South Africa*: working to create opportunities for local economic development through networking, advocacy and community partnership mechanisms.
- *Surabaya, Indonesia*: contributing to the development of pro-child policies within city government processes through the promotion of Child Friendly Cities.

A meta-review of pilot projects, built on monitoring and evaluation activities within individual urban case studies, examined common urban programming themes across all contexts, as well as unique issues pertinent to each of the six pilot cities. The framework was designed to prompt researchers to explore and analyse the intersection of the urban context, the enabling environment and World Vision's organizational context.

Lessons learned from the meta-review

Defining slums and contexts

Slums in many cities are no longer just marginalized neighbourhoods housing a relatively small number of struggling urban poor. They are often home to a range of diverse socio-economic groups. Defining the urban poor in this diverse concentration of people presents a challenge to any programming methodology and needs to be given careful consideration.



Non-formal education centres are an essential stepping stone for child labourers in Siliguri, India. Image: World Vision International.

Kanpur Pilot Project, India

Project goal:

To reduce hazardous forms of child labour in Ward 2 of Kanpur City.

Project outcomes:

- rehabilitation and reduced vulnerability for poor urban children in slums
- provision of educational opportunities (formal and informal) for children
- vocational training for youth and women.

This project is based around four core approaches:

1. Rehabilitation of child labourers

The project has established transit schools for child labourers to help them enter the formal education system. Child rag pickers have specific challenges, and the provision of such facilities has provided informal education and general rehabilitation.

2. Networking and advocacy

The project has set out to partner with the Department of Education, the District Level Task Force on Child Labour (headed by the District Authority) and other NGOs operating in Kanpur. Further advocacy strategies include capacity building for youth to become agents of change, encouraging religious leaders to influence community opinion, and conducting a positive deviance study to identify change agents within the community.

3. Community mobilization

This includes school enrolment campaigns in collaboration with the Schools and Education Department, mobilizing religious leaders to encourage their communities to send their children to school, and the formation of self-help groups, youth associations, and children's clubs.

4. Livelihood development

This includes a market analysis and skills assessment study, linking self-help groups to banks and a micro-finance NGO, capacity building for these self-help groups around livelihood development, and vocational training for youth (through partner NGO collaboration) in areas such as basic computer skills, beautician courses and tailoring.

Siliguri Pilot Project, India

Project goal:

Sustained civic engagement to reduce the incidence of child labour and child trafficking.

Project outcomes:

- stakeholders in the target area empowered to prevent, protect and restore children at risk of child labour and child trafficking
- stakeholders effectively monitor and manage the vigilance mechanisms on child trafficking
- stakeholders share and adopt good practices and processes for combating cross-border child trafficking.

The project is based around three core approaches:

1. Community mobilization

The project aimed to establish and maintain local vigilance committees and child protection units. These units included school teachers, social workers and local leaders. Their aim was to strengthen social protection, monitoring and reporting mechanisms to reduce incidences of child labour and trafficking. Other community-based activities included supporting local child wellbeing groups and youth clubs to create positive peer environments for children and youth.

2. Rehabilitation of child labourers

Non-formal education centres have been set up in the six communities. This service offers homework or extra lesson clubs targeting children from slum areas who remain outside the formal education system. Volunteers provide basic education and life-skills training while World Vision provides uniforms and basic stationery to support the integration of children back into the formal system.

3. Networking and advocacy

The project is actively involved in the Siliguri Anti Trafficking Network (ATN), which consists of seven local and national NGO partners, and works closely with government authorities. The project provides training to the West Bengal Police and Border Security Force who guard the Indo-Bangladesh border, and Sashastra Seema Bal who guard the Indo-Nepal border. World Vision enables access to key government actors and critical resources required.

Diverse urban communities

Urban areas tend to be more diverse and heterogeneous than rural areas. Urban neighbourhoods can often consist of residents from different cultures, belief systems and languages motivated by economic opportunities to move to the city. Often separated from their own kinship ties, cultural groups and land, they lack the relationships that are fundamental for maintaining strongly networked communities. The trust and solidarity that usually exists between community members in rural settings is missing at times in urban contexts.

Urban mobility and fluidity of the city environment

One of the most significant features of the urban setting is the population's mobility. Slums, or neighbourhoods housing the urban poor, are often perceived by residents as temporary dwelling situations. This may make it difficult to track and measure impacts on participants over a specific period of time.

Vulnerable children in urban areas, such as street children, are also particularly mobile. As such, the design of urban programs may need to include indicators that measure impact at a collective or higher level rather than the individual level. For instance, alternative indicators might encompass attempting to measure a program's impact through its influence on a more equitable and 'pro-poor' government policy, success with including children and youth in municipal planning processes or the strengthening of coalitions and partnerships with civil society organizations.

Lack of correct data to inform program interventions

The accuracy and quality of data about urban poor and slums is often unreliable and patchy. The channels and sources of data collection are government bodies, which collect data periodically (usually through a census every 10 years). In light of the issues of urban mobility and unregistered migrants, the poor are mostly not included in the formal reports and figures. The limitations of available data make it difficult to identify those who are in need of support. Evidence shows that it is these unregistered migrants who become 'slum casualties'. NGOs need to consider strategies that would often require some additional primary data collection during the assessment phase to inform urban program design.

The need for partnerships

The pilot reviews demonstrated the need for World Vision to establish strong partnerships in urban contexts to have impact and create sustained change. The partnering approach provides the potential for significant opportunities in combining resources, knowledge and expertise of various existing agencies. Effective coordination and time are required to navigate the web of urban actors and to forge strategic partnerships. Mobilizing social capital, volunteerism, human resources, finances from local corporations and municipal governments have greater potential in urban areas and require project staff to develop the skills that can activate these resources. This is similar to the wider discourse and dialogue about the changing role of NGOs in complex environments. Strategic partnerships must be formed in a given city to be effective in dealing with complex issues and establish systems for sustained change involving government and other stakeholders.

Cities for children

The lessons from the pilots have informed a 'Cities for Children' framework to advance World Vision's goal of contributing to the wellbeing of children in complex urban environments. The framework consists of four inter-related domains of change that are essential to bring sustained change: Healthy Cities, Prosperous Cities, Safer Cities and Resilient Cities. Underpinning these domains is the core goal to advance Just Cities for children.

Currently in development, each of the four domains outlines essential goals, evidence-based strategies and tools and indicators that can be implemented in diverse urban contexts. The domains are informed by and aligned with tested cities, frameworks designed by various multilateral agencies, including UN-Habitat, WHO, UNISDR, World Bank and UNICEF.

World Vision International has been a strategic partner of the Global Compact Cities Programme since 2012. This article draws on a collaborative research project undertaken from 2013 to 2014 by World Vision's Global Center of Expertise for Urban Programming, the Global Compact Cities Programme and RMIT University.