

Just Cities for Children

Developing an evidence-based framework
through action research and learning



© World Vision International 2014

All rights reserved. Produced by the Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming on behalf of World Vision International.

For further information about this publication or World Vision International publications, or for additional copies of this publication, please contact wvi_publishing@wvi.org.

World Vision International would appreciate receiving details of any use made of this material in training, research or programme design, implementation or evaluation.

Written by Joyati Das, Senior Director, Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming. Senior Editor: Heather Elliott.

Production Management: Katie Klopman Fike, Daniel Mason.

Design: Blue Apple Design. Copyeditor: Audrey Dorsch.

Proofreader: Alan Yoshioka.

Front cover photograph: Slums in Chennai, India.
Anish Premson/World Vision.

Inside photos © World Vision staff.

p. 1 Tiffany Bryant/World Vision

p. 2 World Vision

p. 4 Local youth/World Vision

p. 5 Teresa Lee/World Vision

Introduction

As the world races into its first urban century, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) are confronted with the shifting and expanding dimensions of poverty and inequity. This ‘urbanisation of poverty’ has presented NGOs with largely unexplored territory. While traditionally NGOs have focused their attention on rural areas, mainly because of the assumption that services and facilities are easily accessible to urban residents, it is now evident that many poor residents are being left behind. The urban reality is that proximity to services does not mean access, and the urban poor continue to be excluded because of political, social or economic factors.



Dense neighbourhoods of La Paz city, Bolivia.

Recognising an organisational need to respond and adapt to the megatrend of urbanisation, World Vision designed an operational research initiative in collaboration with six field offices to learn about the unique characteristics and complexities of diverse urban contexts. The lessons of this initiative are helping the agency to develop its capability in understanding and addressing urban poverty and development issues.

This paper presents an overview of the emerging evidence base from the five years of urban action research and learning initiatives, which demonstrate that the urban distinctives of density, diversity and dynamism require adjustments and agile programme management.

A meta-review across the six urban pilot projects is informing World Vision of effective ways to tell the complex story regarding our impact and to determine implications for our current programming and funding models. Responding to the rising needs in urban areas will take institutional and operational adaptations as well as integrated approaches to evolve from the current siloed methods of operating within a city. Such response will require a multi-disciplinary approach to address the unique issues of urban poverty. World Vision is collaborating with several partners, including local communities and governments, to strengthen its organisational efforts to address poverty across the rural–urban continuum. The agency is currently designing strategies to support a better coordinated ‘positive urbanisation process’.

The meta-review is informing a ‘Cities for Children’ framework, consisting of four interrelated sectoral domains that contribute and promote just and inclusive cities where children thrive, especially the most vulnerable. Through this framework, World Vision seeks to further develop workable solutions for successful urban programming, solutions that contribute to greater impact and child well-being in cities.



Overview

As is the case with almost all aid agencies, World Vision has traditionally worked with poor rural communities, focusing on children’s well-being through community-based Area Development Programmes. However, with more than one billion children (almost half the world’s children) now living in cities and urban areas, it is appropriate that the organisation turn its attention to the vulnerable children in cities.

World Vision’s Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming (Urban CoE) was set up in 2010 to provide technical leadership on urban programming and drive an urban-poverty learning agenda within the organisation. In an effort to test the applicability of World Vision’s rural models to urban settings, and to discover emerging urban practices, six World Vision field offices were identified to launch urban pilot projects. These are Cambodia, Indonesia, India, South Africa, Lebanon and Bolivia. This report begins to formalise and share what World Vision has learned about working in urban settings, slums and informal settlements, comparing this emerging knowledge across diverse, dense, dynamic urban contexts to determine implications for programming impact and to generate insights into approaches to urban programming, funding and organisational adaptation.

Research framework

Urban environments are dynamic, with relationships between people constantly shifting and changing. The complexity of urban issues makes it difficult to develop a comprehensive understanding of a situation prior to acting on it. Complex issues are therefore best managed by an ongoing action-research approach that involves all stakeholders in a reflective process to learn their way forward – that is, an approach that is derived from knowing-in-action, often described as ‘thinking on your feet’ rather than knowledge as prior to action.¹

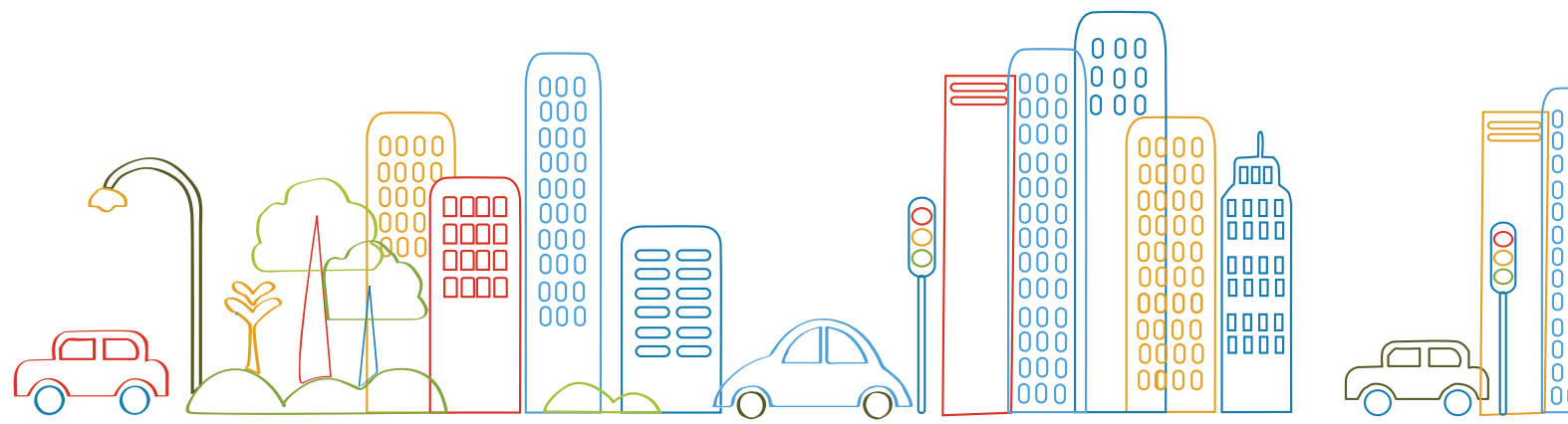


Living with urban vulnerabilities in the slums of Phnom Penh, Cambodia.

Within an action-research approach, the development process can be thought of as an exploration of a problem rather than as the implementation of a predefined solution.² Applying an action-research and

¹ D. Schön (1991) *The Reflective Practitioner* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Ltd). P. Reason & H. Bradbury, Eds. (2001) *Handbook of Action Research: Participative inquiry and practice* (London: Sage Publications).

² L. Boxelaar (2008) ‘Research and Evaluation Framework’. Urban Program Initiatives, World Vision Australia.



learning approach, the Urban CoE's research initiative specifically focused on exploring the uniqueness of the city from social, cultural, environmental, political and economic dimensions and on examining the pertinent development issues within the specific context of a city. This approach aimed to learn from the strengths of internal and external research and from adaptations of existing urban models to define and develop urban approaches and tools for practitioners. It was also designed to draw on learning from past and existing World Vision urban projects and on the work of experienced agencies and academic institutions engaged in urban issues.

This action-research approach was applied within an overarching case-study methodology. The six case studies are bound together by certain unique aspects of urban vulnerabilities and the impacts those vulnerabilities have on the lives of children in urban areas.

Poverty in an urban context comes in different forms and is visible in one or all of the following:

- inadequate income and dependence on informal economy (and thus inadequate consumption of necessities, including food and nutrition for children)
- inadequate, unstable or risky asset base (including education and housing)
- inadequate/poor-quality shelter, making children's lives unsafe and insecure
- inadequate provision of public infrastructure (piped water, sanitation, roads), making children vulnerable to disease
- inadequate provision of basic services (schools, health care, public transport, etc.)
- limited or no safety net if income fails
- inadequate protection of poor people's rights (political rights, rights to health and safety, pollution control, protection from violence, discrimination and exploitation) through lack of law enforcement, contributing to the vulnerability of children in insecure situations
- lack of voice and power within political and bureaucratic systems – exclusion leading to inequity as well as inability to contribute as equal citizens.

Meta-review

As of 2013, all pilot projects have completed the first phase of programme implementation and individual evaluations. These evaluations have highlighted the issues of each city, the needs and the opportunities as well as the current capabilities of World Vision to address these specific urban vulnerabilities. The reviews provide information on how to measure the effectiveness and impact of project and programme activities that are designed to address these emerging issues.

The meta-review of pilot projects builds on monitoring and evaluation activities within individual urban case studies and examines common urban programming themes across all contexts, as well as unique issues pertinent to each of the six pilot cities.



The meta-review is confirming that there are some common features of urban poverty across the six contexts that World Vision is studying. The causes of poverty are complex, but its effects are not complex.

- Poverty makes children and their families vulnerable to disease and abuse and denies them some of their basic human rights, such as an identity and education.



Urban dwellers living in vulnerable locations. Surabaya, Indonesia.

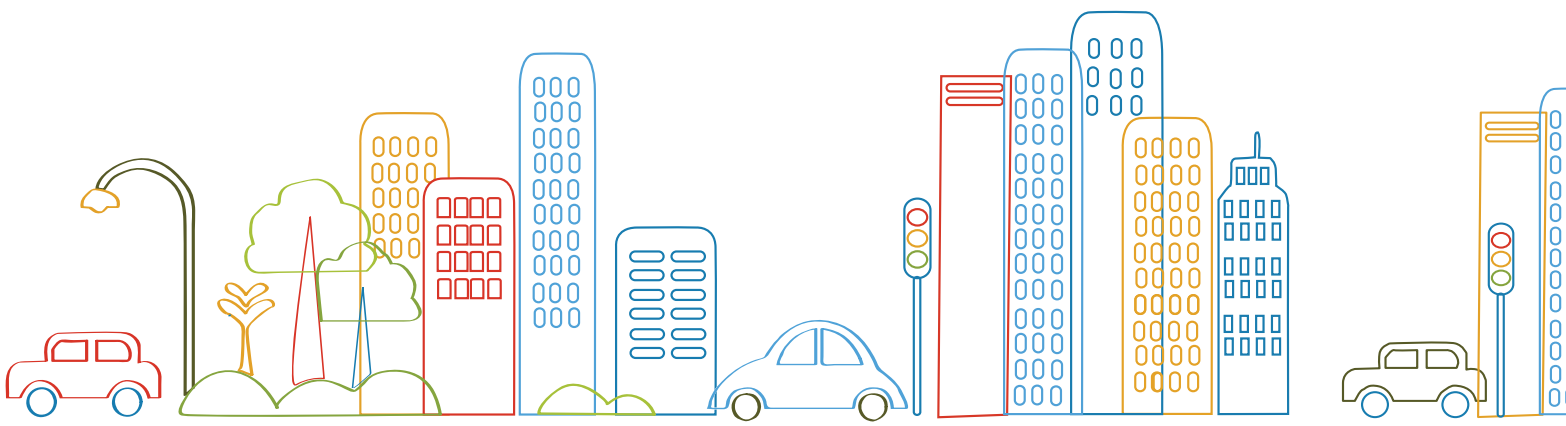
- Poor urban communities often experience greater food insecurity than their rural counterparts, and often their housing conditions are insecure and expensive, with many families sleeping in rotation within overcrowded housing as well as in vulnerable locations, such as at rubbish dumps and close to train lines. These living conditions have an impact on human capital and the notion of hope and development.
- The problem of credible data to support programme assessment and design is common to all pilot projects, as is the issue of governance and coordination within a city, resulting in policy failures and leaving the urban poor often worse off than rural counterparts.

The meta-review is also demonstrating that, while they are common issues (such as security of tenure and housing in informal settlements), it is necessary to consider the political, economic, cultural and historical background of a city to shape context-specific interventions rather than use a *standardised approach* for all urban contexts. A good example is Cambodia, where the issue of security of tenure is further complicated by the historical background as well as an extremely difficult current political environment.

The research and evaluation of the meta-review will assist in identifying and documenting both enablers and barriers within the organisation with regard to effective implementation of urban programmes. In this way it contributes to World Vision's capacity to deliver effective, efficient, relevant and sustainable programmes in urban environments. The framework is designed to prompt the researchers to explore and analyse the intersection of the urban context, the enabling environment and World Vision's organisational context.

Specific areas of investigation include the following:

- staffing and core competencies
- staff capacity



- organisational business processes
- management support
- organisational systems
- scale-up of potential urban approaches in the second phase of action learning.

Findings

In their exploration and analysis, the researchers produced some conclusions about the intersection of the urban context, the enabling environment and World Vision’s organisational context.

Urban context

- All pilot cities were affected by steady economic growth that was driving urbanisation and land values, placing the poor in vulnerable locations of the city. In some unique cases, such as Lebanon, the Syrian conflict has doubled the population of the city of Beirut, which has ramifications for World Vision programmes.



Informal and unsafe housing construction. Orlando East, South Africa.

- The study found a range of issues facing the urban residents as a direct result of their poverty: unemployment, child labour and child trafficking, community instability and conflict, insecurity of tenure and of access to local government. However, pilot-project experience illustrates that trying to tackle multiple issues in a complex, dense and dynamic environment is risky; it leads to staff becoming overwhelmed by expectations and multiple priorities within a programme. Launching a large programme with several sectoral interventions is difficult to manage in an urban environment. An issue-based approach that allows direct collaboration with issue-based communities and local groups worked better in almost all cases. The four issue-based programmes were able to progress fairly quickly in comparison to large multi-sectoral, long-term programmes. The Lebanon pilot project redesigned the programme to focus on the issue most pertinent to its context – education and peace building – whereas the La Paz project struggled to find a niche area of added value and finally was able to demonstrate impact when the focus was narrowed to the youth and public policy programme.



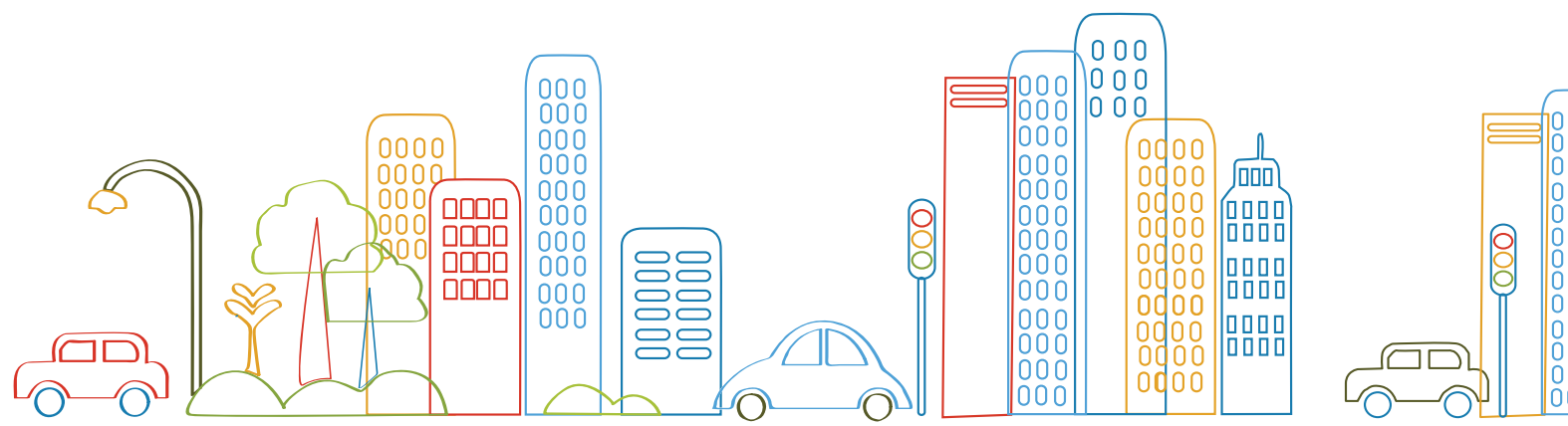
- In each study area, researchers were able to identify some of the causes of the problems, and almost invariably these included insufficient infrastructure, fragile institutions, poor urban residents having limited access to (often inadequate) local private or public services, and/or not having an equal voice. Those who were deemed to ‘illegally occupy’ the city – those whose history had been one of exclusion or oppression – lacked voice and visibility.
- World Vision’s response to this dynamic context was to set up activities that included providing residents with training in new advocacy and vocational skills, focusing on helping children and youth to understand their city across traditional social, political and physical barriers as well as opportunities.

Enabling environment

- Corruption is a major issue at all levels of governments in these cities, and World Vision needs to be extremely sensitive to the political climate. It is important to invest in diverse relationships, given the political mechanisms that operate in a city with frequent changes in governing personnel. It is emerging that the mayor of the city is a driver of change and thus an important stakeholder to connect with and influence, as seen in the cases of La Paz, Bolivia, and Surabaya, Indonesia. A change in the political leadership of a city could have an immediate impact on a programme, as is evident in the Phnom Penh case study.
- One of the key lessons from the six urban case studies was the importance of World Vision having multiple roles – facilitator, partnership broker or enabler – supporting and partnering with other organisations and community groups. Networks of support were developed. Members of those networks were encouraged and helped to increase their own capacity and knowledge. Perhaps World Vision’s most significant achievements in these projects were 1) building trust with each other within the networks and in community organisations and 2) facilitating relationships among residents and between residents and local authorities.
- Partnerships were key to the scale-up and sustainability of the interventions. Government officials in all cities expressed high regard for World Vision’s work, which focused on the three planks of partnering, facilitation and advocacy. However, there is greater need to share the programme approach and outcomes with partners in advance.

Organisational context

- World Vision’s staff who had traditionally worked in rural areas had to adapt to working with urban communities. The target population was, in many cases, geographically scattered and mobile. Staff had to react much faster to dynamic contexts and moving populations compared to those in rural areas. Staff knowledge of the city’s political, historical and economic dimensions was limited because of their lack of urban experience. Some were transferred from rural programmes. There were often



more layers to local government. In addition, there were larger numbers of community organisations and NGOs with individual agendas working within the same areas and with the same groups of people. Staff had to decide how to position World Vision in these complex contexts, including framing a succinct value proposition for World Vision's interventions to communities, civil society and government. They were also expected to be sensitive to conditions under which the urban residents lived and the special circumstances and intensities of urban poverty. They needed to be highly focused and, in some cases, have specialist knowledge on specific urban issues (e.g., land tenure issues).

- There was a need for flexibility and for project models that were different from the standardised approaches carried out by World Vision in rural programmes, which have a structured strong project framework and long-term (15-year) plans. In urban areas, programmes and project designs were affected by changing political environments, emerging priorities and new players often dictating interventions in a city. Flexibility and adaptation remained key to contributing to successful programmes. Urban programmes need to have shorter time frames and more flexible allocation of resources.
- Several World Vision partners expressed concern about the rigidity of World Vision structures in relation to expenditure and allocation of project responsibilities. Partners felt that decisions take a long time in World Vision, often resulting in lost opportunities.
- Development is political in a city. It is difficult to remain apolitical. Staff need a better understanding of risks that play out in urban contexts and need to develop risk mitigation strategies rather than ignore the emerging political dilemmas.
- The daily activities of responding to the complex urban environment are often difficult to measure. Project staff invest a lot of time running meetings, participating in public gatherings, providing advice, linking stakeholders and making referrals to service providers, as in the case of Orlando East in South Africa and Kanpur and Siliguri in India. These activities are conducted in highly charged political environments with a high degree of sensitivity to stakeholder interests, political undertones and ethical considerations such as equity and inclusion. Relationships with communities and partners need to be managed with maturity and transparency in order to be effective.
- However, the most important learning is the issue of livelihoods in an urban context, which is non-negotiable for programming in cities. Families and individuals migrate to the cities for opportunities and well-being. The link between World Vision's economic development interventions and child well-being is difficult to realise and measure in any kind of three- to five-year project time frame. This needs to be explored in depth during the second phase of the operational research, which is currently being planned.



INTERNATIONAL OFFICES

World Vision International Executive Office

**1 Roundwood Avenue,
Stockley Park
Uxbridge, Middlesex UB11 1FG
United Kingdom
+44.20.7758.2900**

World Vision Brussels & EU Representation ivzw

**18, Square de Meeûs
1st floor, Box 2
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium
+32.2.230.1621**

World Vision International Geneva and United Nations Liaison Office

**7-9 Chemin de Balexert
Case Postale 545
CH-1219 Châtelaine
Switzerland
+41.22.798.4183**

World Vision International New York and United Nations Liaison Office

**919 2nd Avenue, 2nd Floor
New York, NY 10017
USA
+1.212.355.1779**

World Vision International Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming

**1 Vision Drive
Burwood East Victoria 3151
Australia**

<http://www.wvi.org/urban/>