Urban Health: Young Voices

A survey among children and youth to uncover the main health challenges in their cities

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Context

High-density low-income neighbourhoods, inadequate housing and infrastructure, limited access to basic services (weak primary health care system and outreach) and exposure to environmental hazards are major factors that contribute to a lack of health and wellbeing for children and young people in urban contexts. In fragile cities, the fear of violence and violence itself are a threat to the health and wellbeing of young people.

In cities, interconnected aspects of the physical and social environment affect children and young people's health and wellbeing. Air pollution, malnutrition, and lack of safe public spaces and sanitation are all major global health and wellbeing challenges to which children and young people are particularly vulnerable. In urban contexts, proximity to basic services does not always equal access. Disadvantaged children and young people continue to be excluded from basic health and social services due to various levels of institutional invisibility and social marginalisation. Overall, causes of urban illness and death have shifted from infectious diseases to chronic diseases.

However, COVID-19 has compounded problems caused by existing structural inequalities of poverty, inadequate housing and economic exclusion for those living in urban informal settlements and fragile/conflict affected urban areas in the global South – problems which have hit children and young people particularly hard.

World Habitat Day is held on the first Monday of October and launches **Urban October** which gives an opportunity for everyone who is interested in sustainable urbanization from national and local governments to universities, NGOs and communities to be part of the conversation about the challenges and opportunities created by the fast rate of change in our cities and towns.

The Urban Thinkers Campus (UTC) is an initiative of the World Urban Campaign driven by UN-Habitat to provide an open space for critical exchange between urban researchers, professionals, and decision-makers who believe that urbanization is an opportunity and can lead to positive urban transformations. For that, on October 25th, World Vision International, Plan International, Slum Dwellers International, UNICEF, and Dreamtown (all members of and the Global Alliance Cities4Children) facilitated an intergenerational dialogue on children and youth-led solutions to urban health challenges and a deep dive into specific challenges, opportunities and solutions to securing and promoting urban health and well-being for children and young people in marginalised and poor urban areas.

Why did we do it?

The inter-generational dialogue aimed to provide children and young people the space to raise their voices and shape the discussion with practitioners in this field. Children and young adults spoke on the importance of local solutions and youth movements/civic participation in relation to promoting health and wellbeing, with engagement from urban experts from the World Health Organization, UN-Habitat and UNICEF to create an inter-generational and inter-organisational dialogue.

The UTC webinar was planned for 90 minutes and it engaged 7 young speakers from Kenya, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Bangladesh to participate and represent their community groups and local organizations. However, the UTC partners are committed to provide the needed space for children and young adults to participate using diverse methods in discussions affecting their lives, for that, a small survey was developed and disseminated to gather as much input from children and youth in different cities prior to the webinar date.

Approach

The survey was developed using Google surveys and consisted of 6 questions as described below:

#	Question	Status
1	Name	Optional
2	Age	Mandatory
3	City	Mandatory
4	Main urban health challenges in the city	Mandatory
5	Proposed youth led solutions	Mandatory
6	Additional input	Optional

Even though the survey was only in English, respondents have filled it using several languages. The UTC partners agreed to disseminate the survey to their country offices and urban networks. Additionally, the survey was shared on social media platforms like Cities4Children account and other individual accounts for children and youth with internet access to fill it out. The process was not scientific.

Outcomes

A total of 261 survey results were submitted by children and young adults across 35 cities and towns in 16 countries worldwide. The age range of the respondents were 6-38 years old. Respondents inputted text in several languages and all the answers were translated into English.

After the data cleaning was conducted, the answers were categorized into similar themes to try to make sense of the data. These themes are displayed in the Annex 1 and 2.

When asked about the key urban health challenges faced by children and young adults, the top results were: air pollution (15% of the results), diseases (9%), Dengue (8%), waste management (7%), followed by health services, malnutrition, garbage and water (which got 5% each), followed by health facilities and sanitation (4% of the results each). Other responses were scattered and ranged from

service quality, climate change, mental health, drugs, medical supplies, reproductive health, unemployment, lack of spaces, poverty, ignorance, housing, alcohol among others. Refer to Annex 1 for the full results in table and word cloud formats.

When asked about local youth-led solutions to address these issues, the top results provided by children and young adults were awareness raising (17% of the responses), children and youth empowerment programs (13% of the responses), community cleaning campaigns (9%), re-greening initiatives (7%), waste management (7%), equitable health services (5%). The rest of the answers were scattered into health education, social accountability, policies, water management, safe spaces, nutritious food among others. Refer to Annex 2 for full results in table and word cloud formats.

Limitations

There were several limitations for this survey as indicated below:

- The survey was only available in English which might have limited the number of participants or biased the results
- The time given to fill the survey (1 week before the webinar) was limited and this affected its overall reach to more cities and countries.
- There is no gender question which prevented the gender segregation of the results
- The results are not segregated by age groups to better understand different needs per age groups.

Annex 1 – Urban Challenges

Category	Repetition	Category	Repetition	Category	Repetition
Air Pollution	45	Mental Health	7	Data Gaps	1
Diseases	26	Drugs	6	Depression	1
Dengue	24	Medical supplies	6	Eating Habits	1
Waste Management	22	Medical Access	3	Food Quality	1
Health Services	15	No Spaces	3	Government Service	1
Malnutrition	15	Awareness Gaps	2	Lack of toilets	1
Garbage	14	Insecurity	2	Nature degradation	1
Water	14	STI HIV	2	Prostitution	1
Health Facilities	13	Access to energy	1	Road accidents	1
Sanitation	11	Access to Info	1	Social Injustice	1
Service Quality	10	Alcohol	1	Traffic	1
Climate Change	9	Child labour	1	Transportation	1
Ignorance	8	Crime	1		

Annex 2 – Urban Local Solutions

Urban Health Solutions

Category	Repetition	Category	Rep.	Category	Rep.
Awareness	38	Drainage system	3	Infrastructure	1
Youth Empowerment Programs	30	Drug prevention	3	Poverty Reduction	1
Community cleaning Campaigns	21	Mental Health Education	3	PPP	1
Regreening	16	Sanitary services	3	Reproductive Health	1
Waste Management	15	Dengue control programs	2	Research	1
Equitable Health Services	12	Job creation	2	Resource mobilization	1
Public Awareness	8	Recycling	2	School cleaning campaigns	1
Water Management	8	Reduce Air Pollution	2	Social Services	1
Social Accountability	7	Advocacy Campaigns	1	Solutions to air pollution	1
Health Education	6	Business Development	1	Urban Health	1
Cleaning Water Sources	5	Climate Action	1	Vaccinations	1
Policies	5	Education	1	WASH in schools	1
Child Empowerment	4	Employment	1	Women campaigns	1
Nutritious food	4	Food Drying	1	Urban Health	1
Safe Spaces	4	Free Rehab	1		
Clean Energy Solutions	3	Healthy water usage	1		