

Just Cities for Children:

Voices from Urban Slums



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Front cover photograph © World Vision Indonesia: Children and youth participating in an annual planning session in Surabaya, Indonesia

Inside photos © World Vision staff

Introduction

In the near future, the majority of the world's children will grow up in cities and towns, according to UNICEF's *State of the World's Children 2012* report.¹ Children account for an average of 37 per cent of the population in developing countries, and up to 49 per cent in the least-developed countries.² Worldwide, almost half of all children live in urban areas and are often seen as the most vulnerable in these contexts.³ As a child-focused organisation with a commitment to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable children, World Vision is investing in learning about child vulnerabilities in order to address child well-being in urban contexts.

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. Life in a slum includes risks such as eviction, violence, trafficking and a violation of children's basic rights. Impoverished slum dwellers living in fragile pockets of a city suffer from high infant mortality rates and poor health, as evidenced by the prevalence of stunting and being underweight. Inadequate nutrition, unsanitary living conditions of slums and exposure to contaminated water leave children and their families at greater risk of disease and chronic health problems.

As informal communities continue to grow, children remain neglected in both the formation and focus of policies, programmes and budgets. Furthermore, over one-third of children in urban areas are unregistered at birth, and widespread disparities in health, education and safety are being hidden in statistical aggregates. If children are to live in safer, friendlier and more caring cities, their experiences and solutions to improve their neighbourhoods need to be heard.

World Vision endorses the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which proclaims that participation is a fundamental right and thus children are agents of their own lives. They have the capacity to engage in important decision-making processes, in accordance with their evolving needs and capacities.

This report highlights World Vision's experience in supporting children to express their ideas for a better city to key decision makers on a global platform, and in mainstreaming child participatory processes into its urban programmes. The paper analyses the ways in which children are able to contribute to safe, healthy, resilient and prosperous cities by influencing urban policies, processes and institutions that better reflect the diverse needs of children. This paper also addresses questions about children's abilities to participate, and how this engagement takes into account their evolving capacities and vulnerabilities.



World Vision's Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming

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

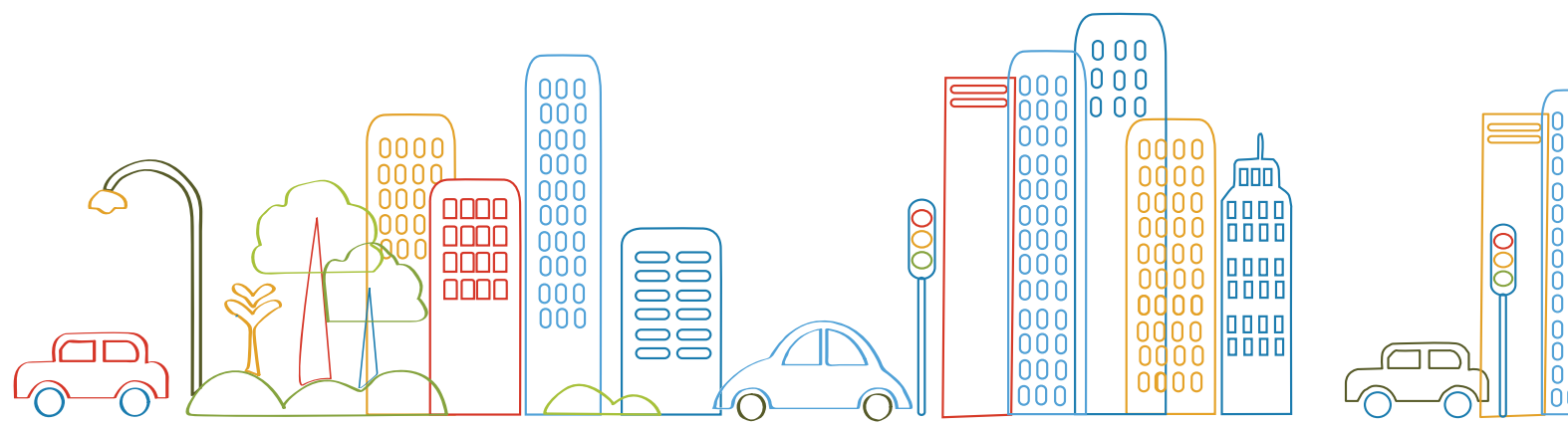
Since 2008, World Vision's Urban Centre of Expertise for Urban Programming (Urban CoE) has been developing and testing approaches to address child well-being in cities, through six pilot projects, located in Bolivia, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Lebanon and South Africa. Applying an action-research and learning approach, the pilots are testing innovative, locally driven solutions to urban poverty, such as securing urban land rights, influencing municipal policy implementation and creating livelihood opportunities – with children and youth leading change in their communities.

The learnings from the urban pilots are contributing to a global knowledge base on how World Vision should approach complex urban contexts and issues with solutions that demonstrate impact and genuine child participation. This growing evidence base has contributed to the development of the '**Cities for Children' (CFC) framework**. The CFC framework provides a multi-disciplinary, integrated model for contributing to child well-being outcomes in urban contexts, in collaboration with partners. It highlights four domains of change required to ensure sustainable and just cities for children: healthy cities, prosperous cities, safer cities and resilient cities. Central to the realisation of these domains is the participation of the most vulnerable children and communities.

In April 2013, the Urban CoE signed a global memorandum of understanding with UN-Habitat (the United Nations entity responsible for leading programmes on informal settlements), establishing a global partnership. World Vision's role is to provide the child well-being lens to the World Urban Campaign and other global advocacy processes and initiatives, such as the Post-2015 and Habitat III agendas.



Cities for Children Framework



First Children's Assembly at UN-Habitat's World Urban Forum 7

With a commitment to genuine child participation, World Vision applies contextual and diverse strategies to ensure that children's voices are included at the local and national levels. Several World Vision field offices have launched Children's Parliaments, Councils and Clubs to involve them in issues and decisions that affect their daily lives and to play a role in shaping cities of the future. An ongoing global advocacy initiative includes World Vision's Child Health Now campaign, which incorporates children's voices and participation in its quest to end preventable child deaths.

In partnership with UN-Habitat, World Vision is launching 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.

By leading the first Children's Assembly, World Vision 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.

'This is the city that we imagine; it can exist for good. Where we can be quiet, in peace. With more green areas and children walk, play and enjoy the city. I imagine a city in the future, where children play without violence and pollution.'

– Walter, Colombia



At the Children's Assembly, over 200 children expressed their views on the city they need



Like millions around the world, many of the children at the Children's Assembly live in poor urban neighbourhoods. They face constant threat of eviction and lack access to clean water and clean toilets. In crowded areas and homes, they are vulnerable to infectious diseases. In overcrowded schools, they suffer from poor quality of 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 also highly vulnerable to trafficking, child labour, violence and living on the streets.

In discussing their dream cities of the future, the children called for safer, healthier, cleaner, friendlier and more equitable cities. They hoped for places to play, to go to school, and to live in secure homes with their families.

The children presented their dream cities through creative activities such as painting, building and debating, to inform a formal Children's Charter that was presented by a child representative from World Vision Colombia to UN-Habitat's Executive Director, Dr Joan Clos, during the Forum's World Urban Campaign Special Session.

World Vision's partnership with UN-Habitat will continue to provide a solid platform for the genuine inclusion of children's voices in the global processes that are shaping the future urban agenda.

'What I don't like about our city is that there is too much violence and delinquency; the government is not the best. They say this is an innovative city but it's not so. If you go into other suburbs you can see it isn't like this.'

– Ballentina, Colombia

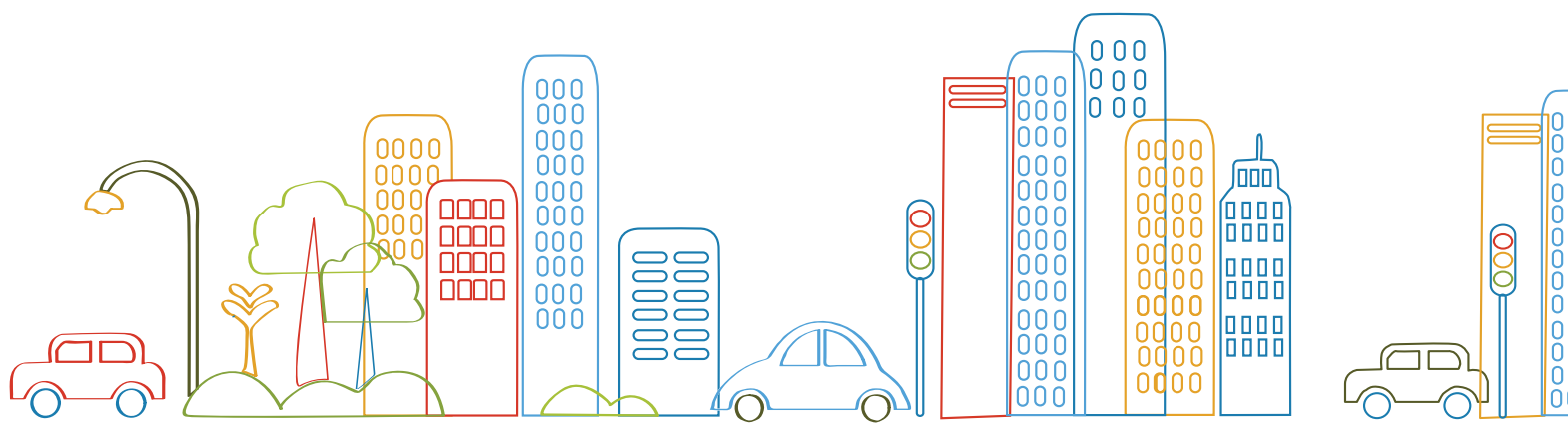
'We would like to dream of a city where going out to the streets would not be a hazard; a city of neighbourhoods with no invisible borders, where security is not only in the hands of the police but that it will be constructed by all of us as citizens.'

– Child participant

'The first Children's Assembly provided a unique platform for children to reflect, discuss and debate their experience of living in a city, and to play a role in the city and voice their opinion in the city they need.'

– Christine Auclair, Project Leader, World Urban Campaign, UN-Habitat

Children building their dream city at the Children's Assembly



Children taking the lead in their neighbourhoods and cities

Children often experience serious limitations to their participatory rights, and these restrictions are due more to prejudiced adult attitudes rather than children lacking the ability to participate and engage in decision-making processes. Other factors, including the disempowerment that adults face living in informal settlements, also undermine the capacity of children to be heard and listened to. In addition, children's participation in issues that affect their lives is still seen by the majority of people as a special concession rather than a guaranteed right.

Children have an invaluable view of the challenges faced growing up in urban environments. They experience daily and first-hand effects of poor urban planning. In 2013, during the Urban CoE's Global Urban Summit in Nairobi, Kenya, children from the Korogocho district gave raw accounts of the issues they faced living in a Nairobi slum. They wished to live in a city where children's protection, health, freedom and survival were ensured. Today, children's dreams, concerns and aspirations of their dream city have been included in the development of Nairobi City Council's Integrated Urban Development Master Plan.

'The government should provide more jobs for our parents, so that we don't have to become child labourers, and are allowed to go to school.'

– Vivilashan, Nairobi

Evidence from the Urban CoE's pilot projects indicates that several initiatives in urban slums have gained increasing recognition for children as social actors with the ability to influence their peers and wider

community. While children have been integrated into community activities and decision-making, the shift from perceiving children as objects to subjects of rights is nevertheless a complex process that requires tackling traditional stereotypes and changing discriminatory attitudes based on age and power.

Child participation also relates to the application of good governance. By working with children and their parents, World Vision has seen greater social inclusion at the local and city levels (in particular, in Indonesia and Bolivia), leading to the introduction of participatory structures to strengthen child rights. Despite this fact, many governments lack fully developed urban policy to support children's rights initiatives. An effective response depends on understanding the different experiences of children in and across slums and informal settlements.



Moira, a child representative in Bolivia, speaking up about her dream city without violence.



Case Study I: Surabaya Transformation and Research Project, Indonesia

This project worked with children to design 'Child-Friendly Neighbourhood' and 'Child-Friendly City' concepts to support their engagement with decision makers towards their dream city and to promote children's rights.

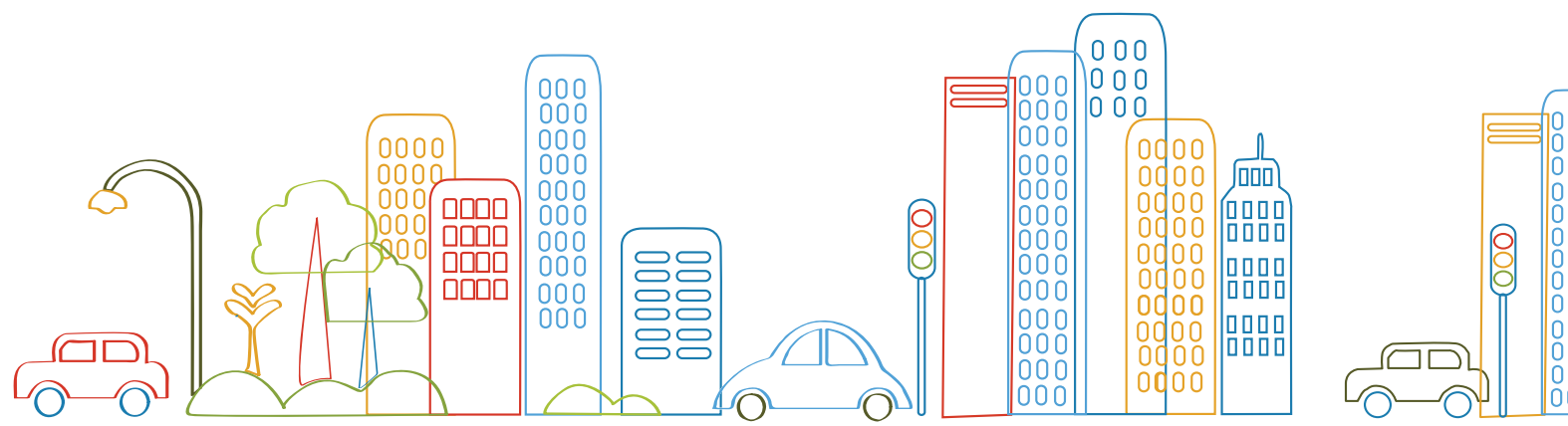
Children identified seven indicators defining a child-friendly neighbourhood and city, based on clean, healthy and safe environments, active participation in decision-making, access to education, and the commitment and open-minded approach to addressing children's needs by their parents, community and local authorities. As a result of this initiative, the local municipality signed a declaration for Surabaya to become a Child-Friendly City.

World Vision continues to work with the children's groups to support their ability to express their opinions and be active citizens in their community's development.

'A child-friendly city is where a city is able to provide the children rights and protection, then also there is no violation toward the children.' – Dio, Surabaya



Children's group members using photography to express challenges faced by their community



Case Study 2: United to Live Better and Sowing Unity Urban Pilot Project, Bolivia

This project empowers children and youth, and promotes their active participation in the municipal development of La Paz. This initiative aims to provide a space for children and young people to participate and to be considered in decision-making processes, especially in forums held in their districts.

Children from urban slums in Bolivia identified several issues that affected them, including violence against children, lack of supervision and protection during the day, few opportunities for positive use of free time, teenage pregnancy, and the rising number of youth gangs involved in risky behaviours. To address these problems, children use local-level advocacy methodologies such as Citizen Voice and Action to monitor policy and practice, and to hold the government accountable. They also conduct community mobilisation activities to transform their neighbourhoods into better places to live.

‘We need to close the gaps. Education and health for all and that the cities do not develop themselves, but that we can develop them.’ – Cecilia, La Paz



Children and youth identifying urban vulnerabilities to discuss with local authorities, community leaders, school teachers and their families.



Case Study 3: Ain el Remmaneh Peacebuilding Urban Pilot Project, Lebanon

This project engages children in promoting long-term sustainability of peacebuilding and reconciliation efforts in this multi-sectarian and conflict-prone community southeast of Beirut. The initiative encouraged and empowered children and young people to participate in youth-led actions to create a healthy and resilient community for peace.

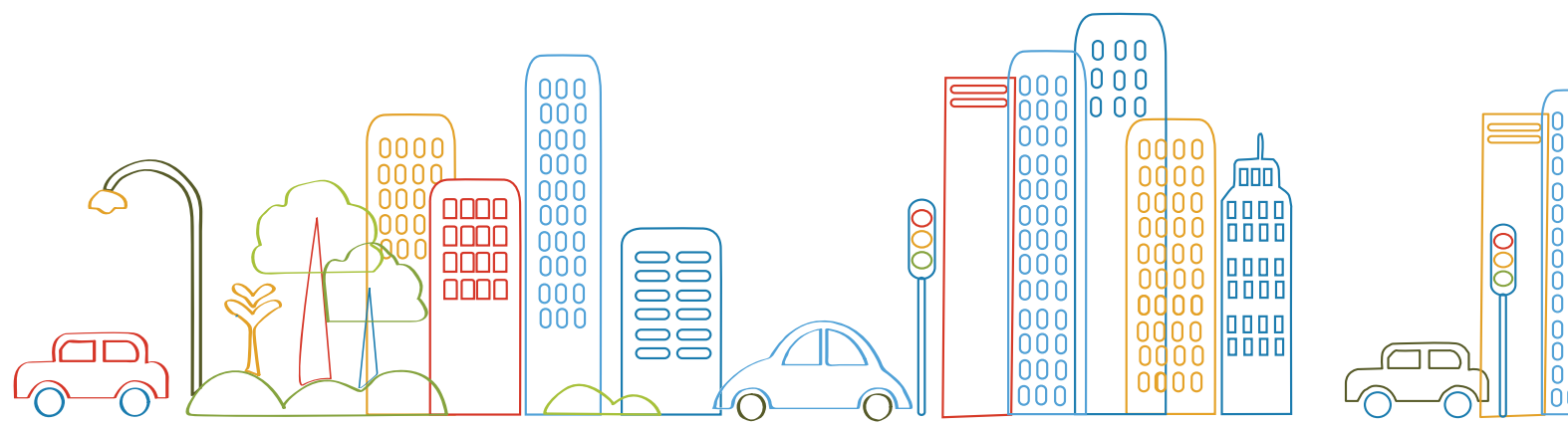
World Vision partnered with the local municipality to set up a youth group and ensure adequate space for them to meet, socialise and plan activities. Children and youth attended training and capacity-building events to build up their life skills for personal development, including leadership, communication and conflict resolution skills. Youth group members also organised child-focused events such as interfaith celebrations, peace marathons and peace summer camps.

In 2013, World Vision Lebanon facilitated a child- and youth-led city-wide design process that mobilised 80 children and 70 youth to address the emerging issues affecting their well-being. Positive development and safety emerged as two priority focus areas.

‘I need to live in a city where all neighbourhoods and streets are safe and secure, well-lit, and people watch over security.’ – Rebecca, Beirut



Children and youth leading the design of the Beirut city model



Case Study 4: Kopila Siliguri and Avsar Kanpur Urban Pilot Projects, India

These projects aim to address child labour and child trafficking in the cities of Kanpur and Siliguri through the rehabilitation of child labourers, livelihood development, community mobilisation and local advocacy initiatives. The projects focus on informal schooling, establishing child well-being groups and youth clubs to create positive peer environments, and equips children and youth to develop skills necessary to lead change within their local communities.

‘Following the formation of the children’s club, we were given training on how to speak up. Our fear of speaking disappeared. Now, we can participate in meetings everywhere.’

– Rina, member of Siliguri children’s club.



Children and youth from a World Vision informal education centre in Siliguri



Addressing the challenges to child participation in urban slums

In contrast to the promising practices highlighted on previous pages, urban slums present a number of challenges due to their particular characteristics. These challenges can be addressed by creating meaningful spaces for children, where they can receive tools and knowledge to influence their communities. This approach requires gender-sensitive and age-appropriate strategies, as well as changing traditional programmes that are not relevant to disadvantaged and vulnerable children. Children who are out of the school system require special attention and an outreach strategy to address their specific needs and include them in decision-making and community initiatives.

When engaging the most marginalised and vulnerable children, experience from the field programmes has demonstrated that it is important to address crucial issues such as power relations, struggle for equal representation, ethnic segregation, gender discrimination and social vulnerabilities, all of which might exclude young slum residents from participating on an equitable basis.

‘We are the present;
we will be here
tomorrow and adults
need to listen to us.’

– Carolina, Colombia

The gap between the Convention on the Rights of the Child principles and the reality in which they operate arguably highlights the difficulties of operating global frameworks at local levels. This tends to be very apparent in cities, exacerbated by the limited capacity, competency and resources of local governments to act on these principles, especially in complex and dynamic informal settlements. Non-governmental organisations, including World Vision, believe that without a solid foundation of good governance, investment from civil society will be isolated and will have limited impact, especially within cities.

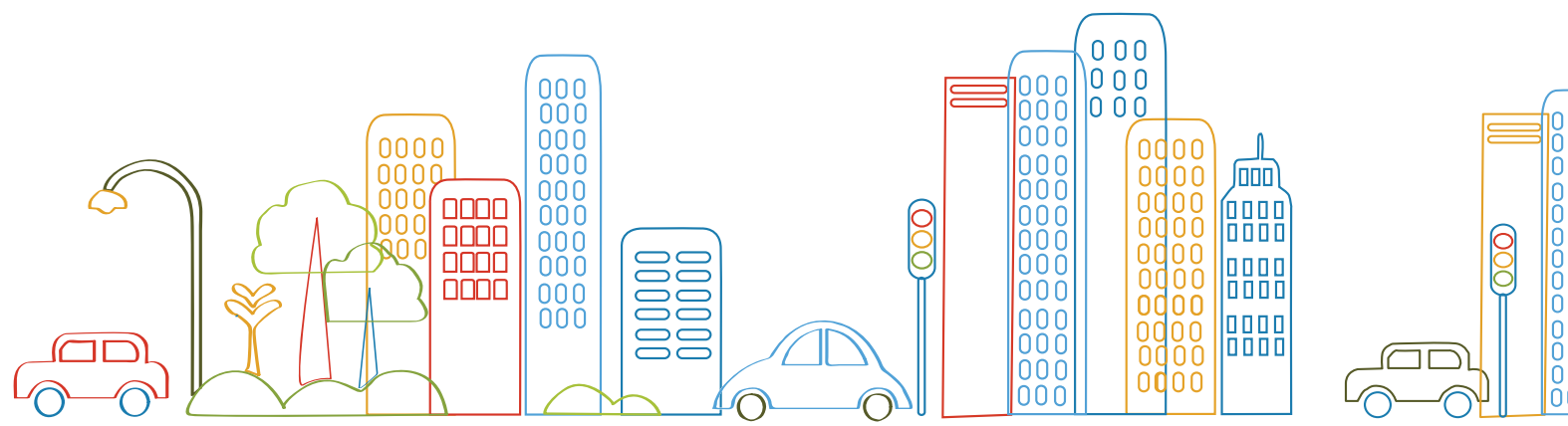
Post-2015 Development Agenda

The Post-2015 Development framework is a chance to promote the inclusion of urban children and young people into an equitable agenda. World Vision makes a strong call for children to be at the centre of all discussions to ensure the current process for a Post-2015 Development Agenda has children at the forefront.

World Vision calls for the creation of spaces for children to participate and be heard. The Post-2015 Development Agenda must ensure the promotion of children’s rights and prioritise the participation of children and young people, especially the most vulnerable and those living in urban slums.

Consultations and participatory research with children are two practical ways to promote their participation and gather information about them, as well as to incorporate their voices in the design and implementation of urban decision-making and governance. A growing body of evidence shows that children are able to participate meaningfully in research processes; indeed, some have carried out their own research. The data collection, analysis and reporting produced by children can easily be included in any stage of the urban debate.

Inclusion and full participation of young people can be achieved by setting up programmes to help them develop self-esteem, improve interpersonal skills, strengthen peer networks and actively engage with the community where they develop and grow. Special attention must be paid to reduce the numerous obstacles to participation resulting from unequal power relations and patriarchal values, whereby girls are valued less than boys, or are banned from participating in society altogether.



Child participation from a development and rights perspective

The concept of child participation is an essential component of Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which explicitly affirms a child's right to express an opinion, to be listened to and to participate in decisions that affect his or her life. The Convention also recognises that children are agents of their own lives and have the ability to engage in decision-making in accordance with their evolving capacities and increasing autonomy.⁴

Sustainable implementation of the principles set out in the Convention requires strengthening children's capacity to exercise their rights, and removing the barriers that keep them from doing so. States, as main duty bearers, are called to develop frameworks that empower children to speak up for their rights and equip them with the space and skills to participate actively in decisions that affect their lives.

To operationalise World Vision's endorsement of the principles and articles of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocols, the organisation has developed a definition of child participation from a development perspective.

Child participation is when children under 18 years of age contribute to decisions and take action on issues that affect their lives. This is best done through empowering children and nurturing positive relationships between children, adults and communities based on mutual respect and partnership at familial, local, national and international levels.⁵

The principle of child participation outlined in Article 12 of the Convention and World Vision's definition emphasise the notion of participation as a means to develop a sense of autonomy, independence, social competence and resilience.⁶ Through meaningful participation, children are able to become actively involved in social and cultural development and to bring positive social change amongst their peers and communities.

As stated in the Convention, child participation is an essential component for informed, effective and responsible citizenship. However, children still experience enormous limitations to their right to participate and to be listened to. These severe disadvantages are due to cultural barriers, traditional patriarchal values, age-based discrimination, and lack of political will, which prevent the development of policy and practice that ensure that children exercise their right to meaningfully participate.

World Vision Guiding Principles for Child Participation:

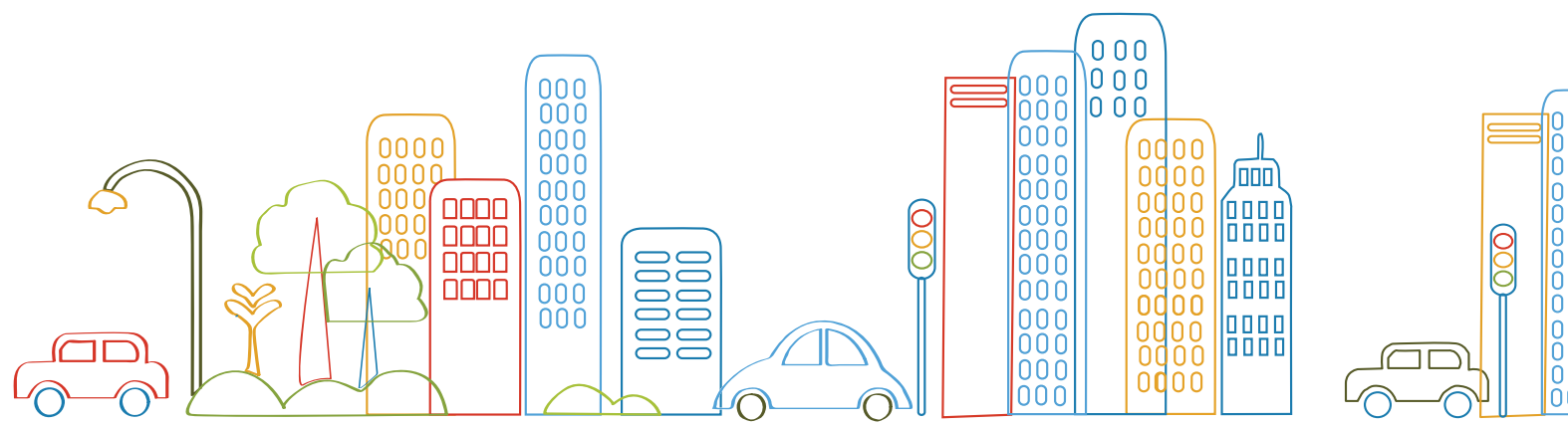
1. Participation is a right and works to fulfil other rights.
2. Participation is ethical and safe.
3. Participation is meaningful and sustainable.
4. Participation strengthens familial, community and societal relationships.
5. Participation is a process and method across different sectors.



Recommendations for improving child participation in urban contexts

- Promote a culture that supports and is committed to long-term child participation initiatives as framed in the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- Implement child-focused urban programming, and work through partnerships to achieve sustained child well-being outcomes, including participation and empowerment as essential components.
- Build capacity to value child participation at the community level, in order to create an environment for children to participate in decisions that affect their development.
- Ensure that urban policy and practice tackle and eliminate social exclusion and discrimination against young urban residents.
- Develop capacity-building programmes to help community members, stakeholders and organisations working in slums and informal settlements to understand and strengthen approaches to child participation.
- Implement mechanisms to ensure meaningful and ethical child participation and to address critical issues of tokenism, age-based inequality and other vulnerabilities.
- Involve children in participatory consultation processes that are tailored to their evolving capacities and are responsive to their desires and needs.
- Ensure that children have access to child-friendly activities and an environment for playing, learning and interacting with other children.
- Ensure accountability to children who participate in projects. Allowing children to give feedback on the impact and challenges of previous projects means they are more engaged and able to contribute their ideas to move the agenda forward.
- Conduct training sessions to give children the opportunity to build upon their competencies, so that they have a greater impact and are more influential within such processes.

As the world moves towards the Post-2015 development agenda and Habitat III, UN-Habitat and World Vision International are proposing that children be regarded as valued contributors to the formulation and measurement of the new urban agenda for the 21st century. The two agencies plan to ensure that children's voices, especially the most marginalised and vulnerable, are identified and included in city planning processes. The inclusion of an urban sustainable development goal – *'Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable'* – presents an opportunity for World Vision to lead and strengthen child participation and ensure children's inclusion and interaction with global processes and city authorities.





CHILDREN'S ASSEMBLY

MY DREAM CITY LA CIUDAD DE MIS SUEÑOS

We, the children of Medellín, of the country and other Latin American countries as Honduras, Bolivia, El Salvador, Venezuela, gathered in the city of Medellín in the assembly of children, "Cities for Children – Towards the city we need" carried out under the Seventh World Urban Forum meeting in the following working groups: Letter to the City, the city of my dreams and I build my neighbourhood, want to tell the world what our dream City is:

First of all, we thank you for listening and keeping us in mind. This is important to us.

- "This is the city that we imagine, it can exist for good. Where we can be quiet, in peace. With more green areas and children walk, play and enjoy the city. I imagine a city in the future, where children can play without violence and pollution" (Walter Jaramillo, 14).
- "These buildings will be torn down to build new forests, for having better air thus building a better city." (Jose Edith Fernandez, 10)
- "I want a healthy, educated, safe and clean city without violence and with real leaders who can defend child rights". (Guadalupe Castillo)
- "We need to close the gaps. Education and health for all and that the Cities do not develop themselves, but that we can develop them." (Cecilia Condori, 13, La Paz, Bolivia)
- A friendly place "is the home of my grandparents, because there are many children and toys around the house." (Diana Spring, 5, Venezuela)
- "I draw the track: airports are not safe for children, because you cannot get into the track. I wish there was a fair and that the airport was not so noisy." (Diego Antonio Arias, 7)
- "This is a soccer field for children to play, to have fun and feel happy." (Sebastian Salazar, 12)
- "The malls are good to go to play games with the children." (Maria Alejandra Pinto, Barranquilla)
- "A friendly city requires that we will be listened to and that there are more quality schools and hospitals to attend the sick people first." (John Sebastian, 12)
- "I want more houses, more playgrounds and green areas to plant carrots, lettuce and tomatoes." (Sebastian Mesa, 13)
- "The City needs to have mountains because there is much noise in the streets. The mountains bring peace." (John Sebastian, 12)
- "In the neighbourhoods, I would like to have more ramps for disabled people." (Santiago, 12)
- "A friendly city is that which builds many houses for those who live on the street so that they can have a place to live." (Leni)
- "I like playing with toy buses on the street." (Camilo, 4)
- "May we have more fish, houses, trees, rivers and lakes."
- "More peace, love and tranquillity." (Juliana, 5)
- "I feel good in a place where people are friendly." (Michel Angelo, 9)
- "We want a city with more green places to play than houses."
- "We want to see less pollution and safer and healthier places to play."
- "There are children who sleep on the street because they do not have a home, neither a mom and they are poor, so we can get them a mom."
- "We would like to dream of a city where going to the streets would not be a hazard; a city of neighbourhoods with no invisible borders, where security is not only in the hands of the police but that it will be constructed by all of us as citizens."
- "We dream of a city where men and women have equal opportunities, where children are heard and can go out into the streets without fear of something bad happening to us."

April 7, 2014





Medellín
todos por la vida

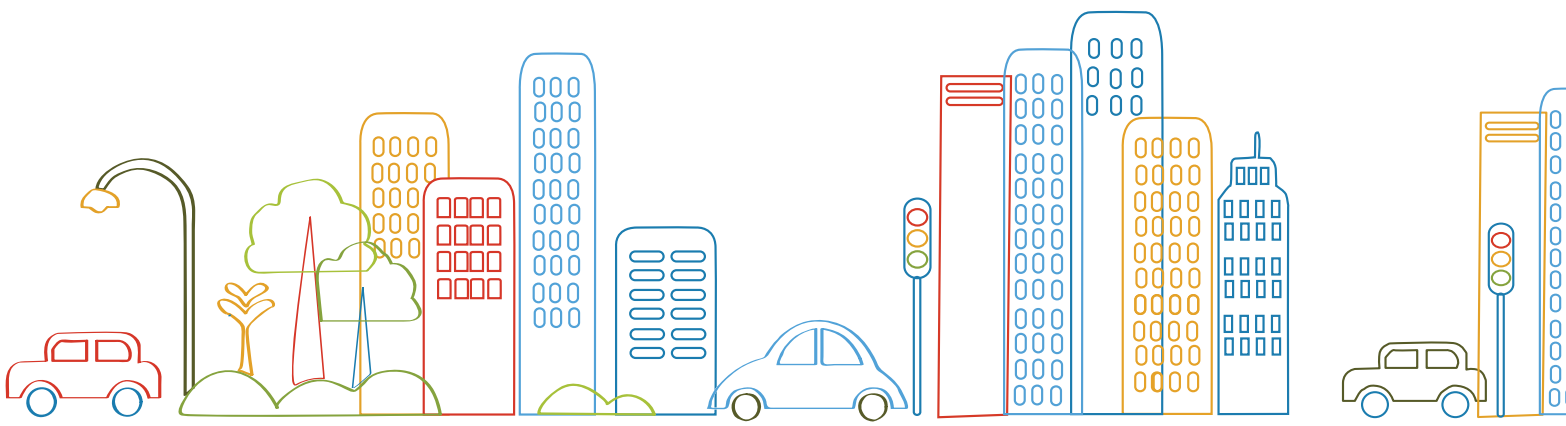


This Children's Charter was presented to UN-Habitat's Executive Director, Dr Joan Clos



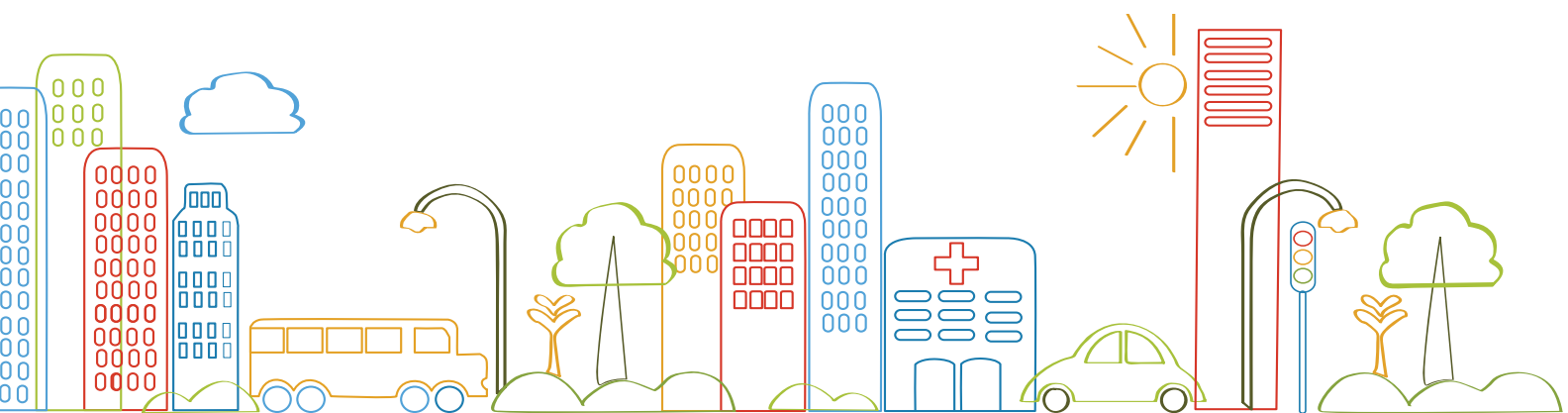
Endnotes

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