

Addressing Inequities in Cities: Integrating Children's Voices and Needs in the Urban Agenda

In April 2016, Equity for Children hosted the *Urban Inequities and Children Conference*¹ with the support of the Van Leer Foundation, the Center for New York City Affairs, Fundación Corona, and the Global Urban Futures project at The New School. The conference addressed challenges to identifying urban childhood inequities and promoted the importance of gathering, measuring and translating evidence into action; including the views and voices of children in the design of cities; and fostering equity for all inhabitants. Although 70 percent of global GDP is generated in cities, child poverty and inequality persist in urban environments. In Latin American cities, one in every three children grows up in precarious households while in a large metropolis such as New York, 30 percent of all children live in poverty. Over half of the world's people – including more than a billion children – now live in cities and towns, many without access to basic services and therefore unable to enjoy the urban advantages. Everything is available – just not for them.

In order to address inequities in cities and to activate children's voices in the urban agenda, Equity for Children proposes the following recommendations, which emerged from the discussions and presentations held during the *Urban Inequities and Children Conference*:

- 1. Reframe discussions about cities so that children are inherent stakeholders in urban planning.** Opportunities and challenges that particularly affect city-dwelling children must be front and center when local authorities and urban planners design and implement city policies, plans and programs. Addressing the interconnection across all dimensions of city planning and policy from the perspective of a young child, such as accessible and navigable public transportation networks, public spaces including safe child recreational places, health concerns of infants and access to early childhood education will benefit the city as a whole, creating a safer, more resilient and sustainable urban society.
- 2. Utilize reliable quantitative and qualitative evidence to understand the drivers of urban childhood poverty and inequality, in order to guide policy and planning.** Disaggregate and map urban data to create indicators tailored to children's lived experiences and to uncover important information within and between cities. Develop policies more closely adapted to neighborhood and local population needs. Collect qualitative information, too, by working with children as well as with their parents, caregivers and direct service providers at the community level to understand the story behind the figures and statistics.
- 3. Create social accountability mechanisms that promote dialogue, action and monitoring between policymakers and their constituents -- the children, their families and direct service providers.** Increase trust and engagement from marginalized families by using a holistic view of participation with the policy-making process to improve child wellbeing. Utilize mechanisms such as community monitoring of public service delivery, citizen advisory boards that help track public expenditure, and citizen score cards to create a citizenry that is more connected to policy makers.
- 4. Invest in quality programs that serve a greater number of children and families more effectively.** Draw upon existing early childhood development good practices in local communities that know what works for families in areas such as parenting and early intervention programs. Train, and compensate well, existing human services and childcare providers to ensure quality programming and to retain and develop talent.
- 5. Think and act politically, connecting decision-makers from local and national government agencies with those within communities, in order to scale up effective and sustainable initiatives.** Reduce urban inequities by developing and supporting committed, high-level champions for children -- mayors and city leaders who lead cross-sectoral reforms and provide the political will to invest in children continuously. Develop deep partnerships between governments and the local community to measure and analyze inequalities and to ensure that the voices of those affected, particularly the children, are heard. Engender support for policy frameworks that outlast one electoral cycle. Encourage child advocates, including community level direct service providers, to understand decision-makers' constraints and perspectives.



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