Abstract: Equity for Children initiated the Approaches to Equity study in 2013. Based on the conclusions and recommendations of a first report published in 2015, this paper will inform the second phase of the project and focuses on the importance of the equity approach in the urban context. Although eradicating rural poverty is still a challenge, the new reality, shaped by rapid and progressive urbanization around the world, with nearly 70 per cent of the world’s population expected to live in cities by 2050, makes adopting an equity approach in urban planning policies a crucial step towards achieving human progress and sustainable development. Addressing childhood inequities is not only a social justice issue but also a legal obligation for the states that ratified the U.N. Convention for the Rights of the Child. Children are the most affected by income and multidimensional poverty. Deprivations and inequalities suffered during childhood have life lasting consequences for children and there is factual evidence that they also have an impact on economic development. Addressing childhood inequities in the urban context requires (i) obtaining appropriate and accurate data; (ii) including children as important stakeholders in the urban agenda; and (iii) providing them with equitable access to basic services. There is an urgent need for public policies in the urban context to adopt an equity approach in order to provide equal opportunities for children, allowing them to fully enjoy their rights, ending the intergenerational cycle of poverty and improving sustainable development.


Introduction

Equity for Children initiated the Approaches to Equity study in 2013 to investigate views about the concept of equity by leaders of international organizations, foundations and research institutions. By analyzing key institutional reports and conducting interviews with senior level professionals of international organizations as well as researchers and foundations, the findings set the stage for a common understanding of equity and contain recommendations for policy makers, practitioners and researchers.

Based on the conclusions and recommendations of a first “Approaches to Equity” report published in 2015, this phase of the research goes further and focuses on the importance of the equity approach, specifically in the urban context.

This paper will inform the second phase of the “Approaches to
Equity” project by defining its theoretical approach. To do so, we will attempt to answer questions that will define the basis and objective of the report: 1) What does the “equity approach” refer to and why is it necessary in the urban context? 2) Why is addressing childhood inequities particularly important? 3) How can childhood inequities be addressed in the urban context?

The objective is to define the equity approach and to emphasize why it is so important in the urban context; to understand why a focus on childhood inequities is a priority not only for the children themselves but also for society in general; and, finally, to highlight how addressing childhood urban inequities is vital for development. This paper will inform a more detailed report, which will include a look at practical experiences.

Achieving sustainable development has been traditionally related, among other issues, to ending poverty.¹ In fact, this has been one of the main objectives of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)² and it is at the core of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). One radical change in recent years has been the redefinition of poverty, which is no longer understood as exclusively characterized by a low level of income or consumption.³ Although defining poverty has been, and still is, a complex task, it is generally accepted nowadays that poverty is much more than a lack of economic resources. In fact, while some projections show that ending $1.90/day poverty is achievable,⁴ there are many overlapping disadvantages faced by poor people, including malnutrition, poor sanitation, a lack of electricity, or poor quality schools that cannot be solved simply by ending income poverty.⁵

Deprivations affect people in different ways. Children are usually the most impacted by poverty and inequality. Not only are they more likely to suffer deprivations that prevent them from enjoying full access to their rights but they are also more deeply marked by them. Shortcomings and deprivations have life lasting effects on their cognitive and physical development.⁶ Furthermore, child poverty and inequity also impact countries’ economic and social development.

The rapid and progressive urbanization around the world, with over 60 per cent of the world’s population expected to live in cities by 2030’ and nearly 70 per cent by 2050, makes ending poverty and promoting equity through urban development a crucial step towards achieving human progress and sustainable development.⁷ Cities may offer important opportunities for economic development and for expanding access to basic services, including health care and education, for large numbers of people.⁸

In order to design efficient and inclusive policies to tackle deprivations suffered by children it is vital to measure child poverty in an accurate and efficient way as well as to ensure they participate in the design and execution of policies affecting them. Only by addressing the needs of its most vulnerable members, can a society become more
1. What does an “Equity Approach” refer to and why is it necessary in the urban context?

1.1 Literature Review

According to Fraser there are different approaches to social justice. One related to redistribution, which seeks a more just distribution of resources and goods and another one, based on “politics of recognition”, which intends to achieve social justice through the acknowledgement of the rights of minorities. In addition to these two dimensions, Fraser adds a third one regarding representation in the political sphere. Representation serves to account for “ordinary political injustices”, which arise internally, within bound political communities and “meta-political injustices” which arise in the dimension of transnational political spaces, shifting the framework of analysis from a national to a transnational perspective. However, in order to seek more equitable societies, it is crucial to move beyond these approaches. Since these different optics of reality are overlapping, neither one of them can achieve social justice without taking into account the other.

The equity approach embraces Fraser’s theory of social justice, understanding that redistribution, recognition and representation are equally important. As mentioned in the 2015 Approaches to Equity Report, at its heart, the equity approach addresses the needs of people who suffer from multiple, overlapping deprivations — those who are the worst off — to enable their personal fulfillment. Equity is broadly defined in terms of fairness and avoidance of unnecessary deprivations. The main objective behind implementing an equity approach is the realization of human rights but this approach also has other outcomes, such as improving economic growth, cost efficiency, sustainability and social cohesion that deserve to be mentioned.

1.2 Poverty, multidimensional poverty and equity

The traditional assumed connection between economic growth and the development has been challenged in the last decades. Empirical studies have shown that economic growth does not necessarily lead to cohesive and sustainable.
poverty reduction and better living standards. At a global level, poverty is now understood as, “a condition characterized by severe deprivation of basic human needs, including food, safe drinking water, sanitation facilities, health, shelter, education and information. It not only depends on income but also on access to social services.”

From a right-based perspective, poverty limits people in exercising their rights, choose their future, and develop their capabilities and potential. This can be the result of immediate circumstances or of structural and systemic barriers, related not only to income but to more systemic challenges such as poorly functioning state social services, unequal access to resources or belonging to a special minority group. In this regard, it is essential to mention Sen’s capability approach, in which development is not only achieved by increasing income and asset shares, but also through augmenting people’s capabilities to lead lives they have reason to value. Poverty is defined by Sen as the inability to enjoy basic rights and substantive freedoms.

Only measuring monetary poverty is limiting and misleading. In particular, the World Bank's definition of expenditure levels at $1.90 per day is 'absurdly low' (Braathen, Wright, & May, 2016; Edward & Sumner, 2014; Gordon, 2006; Reddy & Pogge, 2010). No one indicator alone can capture the multiple aspects that constitute poverty. Income poverty does not describe all the factors that constitute poor people's experience of deprivation – such as poor health, lack of education, inadequate living standards, disempowerment, poor quality of work and threat from violence.

As Amartya Sen has affirmed income-poverty measures need to be complemented by other poverty indicators. Even if the $1.90/day poverty indicator is eradicated, it does not mean that other problems associated with poverty, such as malnutrition, poor sanitation, a lack of electricity, or poor quality schools are going to be solved. Ending poverty requires additional policies and investments, as well as measures that incentivize and monitor their progress. For this reason, poverty should be addressed as a multidimensional problem. In fact, it has been shown that people who are multidimensionally poor are not necessarily income poor and vice versa. This means that designing policies to tackle poverty based on an income poverty measure might lead to unsuccessful policies that fail to reduce or eradicate acute multidimensional poverty.

Sen argues that capability deprivation captures the internal aspects of poverty that may become lost or hidden in aggregate statistics. He advocates for a more holistic view of poverty, inequality, and development in order for the appropriate policies to help maximize individual freedom and choice.

This multidimensional approach also recognizes that poverty does
not affect every population group in the same way. Children, for example, experience poverty differently from adults especially with regards to developmental needs. In fact, child poverty has been more specifically described as a “deprivation of the material, spiritual and emotional resources needed [for children] to survive, develop and thrive, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, achieve their full potential or participate as full and equal members of society.”

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have come to recognize this multidimensional aspect of poverty by including the elimination of extreme income poverty, but also “poverty in all its dimensions” as it affects “men, women and children of all ages” (SDG 1).

The capability approach is per se a powerful framework for understanding children’s well-being in terms of capabilities since it focuses on the complexities that characterize their lives (from opportunity freedom to agency freedom). “What opportunities children have today and will have tomorrow, in line with what they can be reasonably expected to want, is a matter of public policy and social programs, involving a great many agencies.” This calls for an inter-sectorial approach that addresses needs holistically.

Regarding children, the term ‘equity’ may mean different things in different contexts, however the UNICEF definition states ‘equity’ is:

“all children having the same opportunities to survive, develop and attain their full potential. Fundamentally, it is about fairness and opportunity – a fair chance for every child. (...) Inequity occurs when certain children are unfairly deprived of the basic rights and opportunities available to others. It is frequently rooted in complex cultural, political and systemic factors that shape societies and the socio-economic status of individuals. Ultimately, these factors determine a range of outcomes, including children’s well-being.”

1.3 Equity and the urbanization process

Poverty and inequity are not exclusive problems of low-income countries. Since 2010 a ‘new geography of poverty’ has been discovered, understanding that poverty is not exclusively located in low-income countries or the least developed countries. Actually, three-quarters of the world's poor – around a billion people – live in middle income countries,” many of them in urban areas.

Over the last 20 years inequalities among countries have decreased, however, inequality within countries has increased. In fact, in-country inequality has risen to such an extent that the world is just as unequal as it was thirty years ago.

Despite the fact that poverty has been reduced significantly, from 43% in 1990, to 21% in 2010, inequity is a persisting problem. The top
20 percent of the global population enjoys more than 70 percent of total income; and the top 1% owns more than 30% of total wealth and about one quarter of total income.\textsuperscript{xxvi} As the last Oxfam report on inequality has concluded, the world’s 8 richest people (all of them men) have as much wealth as the bottom half of the population.

The 2030 goals recognize the critical importance of promoting equity. In this regard, the adoption of 17 goals, including a specific one on inequality (SDG 10), as well as 169 targets and the pledge that “no one will be left behind ... and we will endeavor to reach the furthest behind first,” committed to by the world’s governments represents a significant step forward.\textsuperscript{xxvii}

By 2050, 66 per cent of the world’s population will be urban, with the fastest urbanization on the African and Asian continents.\textsuperscript{xxviii} Urbanization provides opportunities for many and can even improve the possibility of achieving inclusion and better social and economic opportunities for all. Yet city dwellers can also face negative outcomes such as overcrowded living, housing issues, unemployment, loss of social and community networks, and other social problems such as crime and violence.\textsuperscript{xxix} If this demographic movement is not properly managed and planned, these same trends “can put a severe strain on urban systems: unleashing long-term stresses on their basic components and exposing their weaknesses to the disruptive impacts of multiple shocks.”\textsuperscript{xxx}

Facing urbanization processes will be one of the key challenges to pursue social justice and guarantee children’s wellbeing. Children in urban areas may lack access to essential services even when they live close to them. As a result, the risks for urban populations can exceed those in rural areas.\textsuperscript{xxxi} Besides, the exposure to environmental risk factors is also unequally distributed, and this is often related to social characteristics such as income, social status, employment and education, but also non-economic aspects such as gender, age or ethnicity.\textsuperscript{xxxii} Children living in slums and informal settlements in urban areas will be exposed to greater environmental threats\textsuperscript{xxxiii} and higher levels of violence.\textsuperscript{xxxiv} “The transformative force of urbanization and the role that cities can play in development have implications on the global human progress beyond their demographic manifestations and special expansion.”\textsuperscript{xxxv}

2. Why is the equity approach not only important for childhood policies but also for society in general?

2.1 International Agreements and Conventions

Tackling child poverty is not only a social justice issue but also a legal obligation for most governments. Since the approval and ratification
by almost every country in the world of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) children are no longer subjects of protection but also right holders, entitled to demand that their rights be met.

Child poverty directly affects the realization of children’s rights. Four core principles of the CRC serve to guide the development of approaches to multidimensional child poverty and deprivation: the right to life, survival, and development; non-discrimination; consideration of the best interests of the child, and respect for the views of the child.

In terms of social security, the CRC (art. 26) establishes that children – either through their guardians or directly – have the right to get help from the state if they are poor or in need. Furthermore, the CRC states the obligation of national governments to guarantee an adequate standard of living (art. 27) that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs. Governments should help families and guardians who cannot afford to provide this, particularly with regard to food, clothing and housing.

The equity approach and the principle of non-discrimination demand a major effort towards the accomplishment of the rights of those who are most marginalized. A rights-based approach therefore requires disaggregated analysis of poverty in regards to factors such as gender, age, race, ethnicity, caste, disability, and social status. “Disaggregating data will be essential to keep track of equity gaps and to ensure that gaps widened during the MDGs are, in fact, narrowing. The merits of a multidimensional approach are illustrated by disaggregating data, revealing the different types of deprivations groups are more likely to experience.”

Legal obligations of the states to address child poverty also derive from a range of other human rights treaties, including the Convention to Eliminate all Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention of the Rights of Disabled People, the Worst Forms of Child Labour ILO Convention, and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child among others.

Although the SDGs do not represent a legal obligation, they express the commitment of the international community with its goals and targets which directly refer to children’s rights. In particular, child poverty (SDG 1.2), health (SDG 3), education (SDG 4), gender equality (SDG 5) and violence against children (SDG 16.2) have been expressly targeted.

2.2 How poverty specifically affects children

Equity aims to improve the status of those who are in the most disadvantaged positions, the most vulnerable ones. It is a fact that poverty affects children’s quality of life in a more acute way than it does
adults’, but children are also more affected quantitatively and are more likely to be poor than adults. They are in the poorest income quintiles – globally, 48.5 percent of children are in the bottom two income quintiles, with access to only 9 percent of the world’s resources.xxxix

According to recent data, approximately 50 percent of children and young people are living below the $2/day international income poverty line.xi Moreover, according to the Human Development Report 2014, 1.5 billion people are subject to multidimensional poverty and at least half of these, around 750 million, are likely to be children.

According to Save the Children’s latest report many children are simultaneously subject to income and multidimensional poverty, but emerging evidence suggests that in some contexts, as many as half of those in either category do not fall in the other.xli This indicates that up to 880 million children are living in extreme income poverty and/or multidimensional poverty. In addition, approximately 950 million more children might be at risk of falling into poverty. Furthermore, the report highlights that the data on which these statistics are based exclude many of the poorest children, understating poverty by possibly up to 25 percent.

2.3 The impact on society as a whole

Poverty affects children in a different way than it does adults. Shortcomings suffered during childhood are likely to lead to disadvantages in adulthood, reinforcing the intergenerational transmission of poverty.xlii

Inequalities shape the future of children since birth. The future of a child depends on the circumstances in which she or he is born: the economic position, place of birth and residence, ethnicity of their parents among other criteria will determine the chances of survival and the fulfillment of his or her rights. Children coming from parents with little or no education, for example, will have less opportunities to learn and will be exposed to a broader spectrum of risks. This is what Save the Children called the “lottery of birth”.xliii

In addition to this unequal starting point for children, poverty and deprivations suffered during childhood have a broader impact on their life than it does on adult lives. The resolution of the 2007 UN General Assembly Special Session (UNGASS) on Children stated that:

“Children living in poverty are deprived of nutrition, water and sanitation facilities, access to basic health-care services, shelter, education, participation and protection, and that while a severe lack of goods and services hurts every human being, it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of
Even the Guiding Principles on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights established that:

“Given that most of those living in poverty are children and that poverty in childhood is a root cause of poverty in adulthood, children’s rights must be accorded priority. Even short periods of deprivation and exclusion can dramatically and irreversibly harm a child’s right to survival and development. To eradicate poverty, States must take immediate action to combat childhood poverty.”

These two statements reinforce the fact that while poverty, evidenced by lack of access to goods and services, can be harmful to all human beings, ‘it is most threatening and harmful to children, leaving them unable to enjoy their rights, to reach their full potential and to participate as full members of society.’ This is why children reached in early childhood have the greatest potential to avoid long lasting deprivations and thereby to end the cycle of poverty. Moreover, children living in poverty are more likely to be exposed to violence or other environmental hazards than wealthier children.

Regarding geographical distribution, despite the predominance of rural poverty in low-income countries, in some countries, the poorest urban children suffer worse outcomes than the rural poor. These statistics are particularly impactful considering that by 2050, 70 percent of the world’s population is expected to live in cities.

Supporting children’s participation and recognizing them as social agents can have a deeply positive impact on society. Children should be considered as active citizens and empowered to fulfill this role. Including children in the agenda can no longer be understood as simply taking into account their needs and priorities according to adult perspectives but should also mean that they become part of the process. Shifting the way in which children are considered and included them in the design and execution of policies is crucial. This will impact not only children’s right to participate in public decisions but also the way in which policies address the real problems they face around the world. Considering children as agents implies allowing them, to a varying extent (according to the maturity and age of the child), to influence his/her life and/or general rules in society. Participation should be understood as “the process of sharing decisions which affect one’s life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured.”

3. Addressing childhood inequities in the urban context
Increasing inequalities have particularly affected the configuration of cities and towns. The coexistence of high levels of wealth and poverty, as well as the increasing unequal distribution of goods and services in regards to the population that actually needs access to them, create a scenario of social tension and violence. In the case of Latin America, for example, for the first time in decades, people are more concerned about delinquency than unemployment. The proliferation of enclosed neighborhoods, also called gated communities, barrios cerrados, condominios fechados, is a clear expression of the loss of social cohesion and fragmentation of the community. This scenario is typically combined with environmental problems such as water and air pollution, which mainly impact the health of the population living in slums and precarious settlements.

3.1 Intra-urban disparities: why is it important to look at children in cities?

Today, urbanization is an ongoing process, more than 50% of the world’s population live in cities and towns; and according to estimates, by 2030 most urban dwellers will be children and adolescents. More than ever, the experience of childhood and adolescence is linked to urban environments.

In urban areas, children often have high standards of health, protection, education and sanitation. Due to economies of scale which facilitates the concentration of public and private goods, services and infrastructure, at first glance cities offer better opportunities for child wellbeing. Nevertheless, life in the city is affected by different kinds of inequalities and millions of children living in urban settings confront daily challenges and deprivation of their rights. Disparities among children within cities and towns are often greater than those among urban and rural children. Urban planning, thus is a key element in achieving equitable development for children. For example, urban improvements, such as the installation of safe water and sanitation systems, have a positive impact on reducing child mortality. According to the UNICEF report “MDG Update: Accelerate Progress for Children,” diseases like, pneumonia, diarrhea and malaria were the cause of a third of under-five death in 2012.

In Latin America, the most urbanized and unequal region in the world, three out of four children live in urban areas (115 million in absolute terms). UNICEF’s report “Infancia y desigualdad habitacional urbana en ocho países de América Latina,” based on the case of eight countries of the region, highlights that intra-urban inequality has a high incidence in fundamental areas of a child’s life, such as nutrition, prenatal care, adolescent pregnancy and school drop-out rates. For example, in Colombia, malnutrition affects 19% of children living in precarious urban
conditions but only 9.2% of their more privileged peers in the same area. The average rate of malnutrition in rural regions is 18.1% while in urban areas it is 12.6%. Although the urban-rural gap is 1.43, the intra-urban gap reaches 2.08. The same kind of comparison is established for the whole set of countries in terms of lack of parental care, where the urban-rural gap is 2.08 while the intra-urban gap is 2.74. In the case of adolescent pregnancy, the gap between pregnant adolescents in urban settings, living in precarious condition and those living in wealthier settings is 2.57 (24.2% and 9.4% respectively), which is higher than the 1.64 urban-rural gap (15.2% and 24.9%). Considering the average of the set, school drop-outs affect 21.9% of children between the age of 14 and 17; the intra-urban gap is 2.19, while urban-rural gap is 1.74.

The disaggregation of these indicators, according to urban and rural areas, but also considering intra-urban differences, shows that growing up in a city implies a wide scope of experiences, characterized by the coexistence of an extensive but deeply unequal distribution of public and private goods and services. Consequently, uneven urban configuration requires that the different actors involved with children’s rights pay particular attention to the challenges of that particular context.

3.2 Including children in the urban agenda: How can this be done?

According to the recommendations provided in Equity for Children’s report entitled, “Addressing Urban Inequities and Childhood,” it is crucial to incorporate children’s quality of life concerns in the urban agenda. This process implies recognizing the particularities of growing up in cities, not as an isolated aspect but as a crucial component of urban planning. Children’s knowledge and experience as urban citizens need to be incorporated in the discussion, children themselves should be considered key stakeholders in this process.

Cities and towns can be characterized by an abundance of resources due to the economies of scale that a more concentrated population provides. However, not all city dwellers have similar access to these resources. In a study focused on health services for children, Penchansky and Thomas propose to analyze this access according to five dimensions: 1. Availability: the relationship between the volume and type of goods and services and the volume and type of children’s needs. 2. Accessibility, the relationship between the location of the resources and the location of children’s home. Considering distance, the availability of means of transportation and its cost, the required time and also familiar strategies that allow adults to be present. 3. Affordability, the relation between a service or good’s cost (if there is one) and a family’s capacity to pay for it. 4. Acceptability: the relationship between clients and
provider’s attitudes toward the other. From the perspective of the family, it implies the quality of the service; which could be affected by providers’ expectations about the “acceptable” clients. 5. Accommodation: The relationship between the organization of the resources (open hours, appointment system, process of request, etc.) and the family’s capacity to accommodate these factors.\textsuperscript{lx} In addition to these five aspects, it is also essential to highlight the importance of other familiar resources required to organize the everyday routine implied in childcare and wellbeing access, such as having a car or the support of other members of the family (for examples, grandparents).\textsuperscript{lxii} Childcare, as well as other duties implied in reproductive/domestic labor, is deeply influenced by gender and class inequalities.\textsuperscript{lxii} As it is demonstrated by time-use surveys, women of all ages, mothers, sisters and grandmothers, are the main responsible of everyday familiar organization and provision of care.\textsuperscript{lxiii} However, economic inequalities placed women from lower income section of a city in a disadvantageous condition to successfully articulate domestic and paid work. “This is how, caregiving turns not only into an element of gender inequality, it is also a fundamental aspect of socio-economic inequality.”\textsuperscript{lxiv}

Taking into account the variables implied in ensuring access to goods and services and the recommendations provided in the report “Addressing Urban Inequities and Childhood,” another important tool for urban planning, is the utilization of reliable quantitative and qualitative information. Data needs to be disaggregated according to different urban areas, neighborhoods, population, etc. Equity for Children, in its commitment to foster the design of evidence-based policies and programs for children, partnered with Fundación Corona and various other organizations to incorporate into the “¿Cómo vamos?” initiative in several Colombian cities, specific indicators that target children wellbeing. The objective of the project is to provide adequate information about early childhood inequalities and quality of life. As part of Equity for Children’s work in Colombia, findings include disaggregated data and indicators that allows local community members to monitor the policies and programs targeting children under 5 years of age in the main cities of the country. This knowledge contributes to a better understanding of the challenges and improvements made in the different cities of the study thanks to indicators comparable over time.

In order to include children in the urban agenda, it is crucial to create mechanisms that allow them and their families to participate as stakeholders not only in the planning process, but also during the implementation stage. The dialogue between children, policymakers and government agents is the basis for social accountability, that tracks everyday aspects of access to wellbeing. In terms of the quality of the programs and their acceptability as a fundamental aspect of access, it is
important to consider the training and the compensation of service providers. Last but not least, it is crucial to connect local experiences and knowledge produced by community actors with decision-makers from local and national agencies. A fruitful dialogue along these different stages is required to grasp urban complexities and disparities, which is vital to achieve children’s wellbeing.

Conclusion

The last decades have proven that economic growth is not synonymous with equity. Inequities between the richest and poorest have risen all over the world, in both developing and industrialized countries, particularly after the last ten years of the XX century.

It is becoming increasingly clear that in order to match economic and human development, the expansion of the economy needs to be accompanied by an active intervention that promotes equitable wealth distribution. As the Nobel Prize in Economics, Joseph Stiglitz affirmed, high levels of inequality affect the stability of the economy and the democratic system. The international community, human rights organizations and development agencies, including the IMF, have recognized the central role of equity for development:

In fact equality appears to be an important ingredient in promoting and sustaining growth. The difference between countries that can sustain rapid growth for many years or even decades and the many others that see growth spurts fade quickly may be the level of inequality. Countries may find that improving equality may also improve efficiency, understood as more sustainable long-run growth.

Along those lines, equity is the avoidance of unnecessary deprivations, which are not the exclusive product of low income. Poor or inexistente provision of basic services represents one of the most important structural challenges for urban planning. Children are the ones more quantitatively and qualitatively affected by the consequences of inequality. This situation must end. On the one hand, children should enjoy full access to their rights and have the opportunity to grow up in a safe environment that enabling them to live a fulfilling life. Additionally, addressing the deprivations of the most vulnerable has positive impact in society. The question of equitable and sustainable development is particularly urgent for the youngest generations and the community as a whole.

Economic growth can be an important engine for change and
make a significant difference to children's lives. It offers financial space for governments and families to invest in children and create improved infrastructure and opportunity. But policies are needed to ensure that recent investments are sustained, focus on the most critical phases in childhood, benefit all children, and extend into early adulthood. In the formulation of effective policies, a great deal depends on which issues are prioritized.iii

Currently, 50% percent of the global population lives in cities, where the rich / poor gap has increased since 1980. A good 40% are children. Statistics indicate that urban inequities are growing and estimations affirm that the population living in cities will continue to increase. Consequently, urban planning becomes key to tackling inequality.

For urban policies to be efficient they must address the needs of the community they are meant to affect. This requires specific actions. In the first place, it is fundamental to generate accurate and disaggregated data. That is, measuring how poverty and deprivations affect different groups of population in the urban context. Secondly, all community stakeholders should be included in the urban planning agenda. Children and their families together with civil society and grassroots organizations, are key stakeholders in working with local governments to create and implement an urban agenda based on growth and equality. As such, they must be integrated in conversations with policymakers about the urban agenda, policy planning and design.

Finally, providing access to basic services should be understood in a holistic manner. Guaranteeing access to basic services for children is vital to ensuring the fulfillment of their rights. Poor or inexistent provision of basic services represents one of the most important structural challenges of urban planning.

Confronting child poverty through the equity approach improves economic growth and cost efficiency; moreover, it provides sustainability and social cohesion. Consequently, focusing on equity, emphasizes the urgent need for public policy responses targeting the most disadvantaged children, with the goal of creating a more just, inclusive and participative society.

End Notes


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UN Statistics Division provides actualized information by country. It is available on: https://unstats.un.org/unsd/gender/timeuse. Also, in accordance with an Equity for Children report of a study conducted in Latin America, older girls in many instances take on caregiver roles for their younger brothers and sisters. (http://equidadparalainfancia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Informe-final_Primera-infancia_todo.pdf, page 9 note 6)


