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PROLOGUE

Opportunities for fostering creativity and equality among children

Alberto Minujin

“Juanito Laguna might be poor, but he’s not a victim of poverty. He doesn’t let the circumstances of his life get him down; he is brimming with life and hope. Because he senses that he lives in a world full of promise, he can rise above the hardships into which he was born.”

Antonio Berni (1095 – 1981)¹

As our towns and cities have grown in recent decades, urban inequalities have become increasingly pronounced and taken on greater complexity. This is one of the most acute challenges of

the twenty-first century, particularly in Latin America where urban areas are home to around 80% of the population.

Inequality has a disproportionate impact on society’s more vulnerable groups — especially children. While children and young people are among those most severely affected by inequality, they also represent the section of the population with the greatest potential to bring about significant social change.² This is particularly applicable to those in early childhood. Not only are the very youngest children the most vulnerable, but the care and attention that a child receives at this stage is of paramount importance for his or her development. Addressing this issue requires significant action at the national governmental level.³

We are constantly presented with painful reminders that, although our cities are endowed with all the necessary resources to ensure that no child dies from preventable causes, and that all are able to reach their full developmental and creative potential, thousands of urban children continue to face conditions of vulnerability, inequality and discrimination. Despite being right in front of our eyes, these inequalities form part of an unseen and sometimes concealed reality that must be brought to light and properly documented. That is the aim of the work presented in this report, which strives to demonstrate the extent of these inequalities in order to prompt action and ultimately change.

After a great deal of experience working with Equidad para la Infancia, the ARCOR Foundation and UNICEF, I have witnessed at first hand the importance of having access to solid evidence and the right tools to allow us to identify these sources of inequality. Armed with this evidence, we can make an effective contribution to public policy and improve quality of life for all children, particularly the most disadvantaged.⁴ I have seen for myself that this work goes beyond an analysis of the circumstances affecting children’s lives to create a context-focused system for monitoring social conditions — a system that seeks to inspire and strengthen coordinated action at local, regional and national levels in order to ensure that progress is made towards improving children’s lives, particularly for those in early childhood.

¹ Museum of Latin American Art of Buenos Aires (2014) Antonio Berni: The story of Juanito Laguna. See: <http://www.malba.org/ar/evento/antonio-berni-juanito-y-ramona/>

² Fundación Arcor (2015) Informe de Actividades [in Spanish]. At: <http://www.fundacionarcor.org/es/detalle/640/informe-regional-de-actividades-de-inversión-social>

³ Berlinski S. and Schady N. (2015) “The Early Years: Child Well-Being and the Role of Public Policy” IDB, Washington

⁴ Equity for Children (2013) Approaches to Equity Report. At: <http://www.equityforchildren.org/approaches-to-equity/approaches-to-equity-report/>

To develop local initiatives aimed at reducing inequality, we need to look closely at children, families and communities in all their diversity, paying attention to variations in aspects such as cultural background, place of residence, gender, age, etc. It is not enough to understand the issues facing children in cities; we must also know where these issues are found, which groups are most severely affected, and how they are related to various other factors. A number of objectives and commitments have been declared at the global, national and municipal levels, but, as Satterthwaite and others ask, "What will it take for governments to turn these pledges into action? Who will act locally to ensure that these pledges are kept? How will progress be monitored in each community?"⁵

The work that has been carried out by Red Ciudadana Nuestra Córdoba brings us one step closer to answering these questions. It also presents us with a significant opportunity to promote and empower initiatives for social action and participatory governance that, based on the collection of statistical evidence and collaborative work shared between a wide range of actors, can make a real contribution to guaranteeing the rights of children living in cities.

The conclusions presented here are the outcome of an extensive program of work that Nuestra Córdoba has undertaken to monitor and evaluate quality of life in the city,

and draws on a blueprint for a system for measuring, monitoring and social accountability that has now been tried and tested in various different cities across the region.⁶ We designed, systematized and applied this methodology in partnership with the Colombian Cómo Vamos city network and the Corona Foundation; now, through the work of Nuestra Córdoba, it has been adapted to suit the specific characteristics of this city. Based on this foundation, the exercise described in this report is offered as an example that other cities in the province and across the country might follow. It provides a framework for identifying problems that are yet to be addressed, promoting mitigating action and making significant progress towards reducing inequalities among local children.

This strategy for measuring quality of life and inequality among urban children, which we at Equidad para la Infancia⁷ have developed as a tool for influencing local policy and which has served to support the work of Nuestra Córdoba,⁸ was devised and systematized with the intention that it should be adaptable to the particular social, political and legislative contexts of each city in which it is implemented. It aims to gather meaningful evidence that will serve as the basis for interventions to address the causes of these problems, and not just the symptoms.

http://www.equidadparalainfancia.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Informe-final_Primerainfancia_todo.pdf; also: 'Increasing childhood equality in cities: a practical intervention through policy, research and advocacy' in the World Social Science Report 2016 Challenging Inequalities: Pathways to a Just World. Available at: <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ulis/cgi-bin/ulis.pl?catno=2458258gp=1&mode=e&lin=1>.

8. Nuestra Córdoba, alongside the many cities in Colombia, Peru and Brazil that are actively implementing this social monitoring program for children's well-being, is part of the Latin American Network for Fair, Democratic and Sustainable Cities and Territories. This network brings together more than 70 initiatives in ten Latin American countries where the model devised in Colombia by the Cómo Vamos city network as a result of the work of the Corona Foundation is being implemented (<http://redciudades.net/>).

9. A more detailed discussion of the methodology used to implement the system can be found in the report 'Medición y monitoreo local del bienestar y las inequidades en la infancia: Manual para replica la experiencia', available [in Spanish] at: <http://www.equidadparalainfancia.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Manual-r%C3%A9plica-Como-Vamos-Infancia.pdf>.

5. Bartlett S. y Satterthwaite D. (2016) "Cities on a Finite Planet", Routledge London-New York p. 24).

6. The tool for measuring, monitoring and analyzing well-being and inequalities among children in local contexts, which Equidad para la Infancia has developed and put into practice in various local contexts with the support of the Arcor Foundation and the Corona Foundation, is aimed at providing evidence to galvanize citizen action and contribute to the development of public policies that serve to guarantee the rights of children and young people, with a view to overcoming inequality and bringing about a more socially just society. To find out more, see: Equidad para la Infancia (2016) *Desafíos Urbanos: Equidad en la Infancia* [in Spanish]: <http://www.equidadparalainfancia.org/desafios-urbanos-para-la-equidad-en-la-infancia/>

7. For more information on this exercise, see: 'Primera infancia cómo vamos: identificando desigualdades para impulsar la equidad en la infancia colombiana' [In Spanish]. Available at:

The proposal is built around four components: understanding and adopting the strategy as a tool for social and political action; putting the strategy into practice in local settings; promoting children's well-being; and identifying the forms of inequality that children and young people experience in their lives.

Our methodology consists of a number of stages, including:

- Constructing and analyzing a battery of indicators to evaluate the living conditions of children and young people in local contexts, based on the principles set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, which can be interpreted in accordance with the legislative and programmatic frameworks relevant to each location;
- Identifying sources of inequality associated with membership of specific vulnerable groups and their spatial distribution;
- Mobilizing the public to closely monitor public policies aimed at children;
- Getting civil society and local government involved in pressing for better programs and priority funding for local children.

The adoption of this tool will serve to strengthen civil society and provide resources for encouraging more vigorous efforts to bring about direct, positive improvements in children's well-being in the city of Córdoba, where approximately one third of the urban population is under the age of eighteen.

The Arcor Foundation has been a crucial ally in the development of this program, creating spaces for collaborative work and the exchange of ideas, and working to foster equal opportunities for children by promoting educational projects and community organizations focused on children's comprehensive development.¹⁰

Nearly thirty years after the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was signed, there remain multiple obstacles to ensuring that all children are able to fully realize their political, economic, social and cultural rights. Argentina has made a great deal of progress in terms of children's well-being,¹¹ but there is still much work to be done. The social monitoring program put into practice by Nuestra Córdoba offers a model for the kind of initiative that could help make the provisions of the UNCRC and of national, provincial and local legislation a reality, so that all children can exercise their rights and enjoy the opportunities that will determine their development.

10. Equidad para la infancia América Latina is able to carry out its work thanks to the support and continued collaboration of the Arcor Foundation. <http://www.equidadparalainfancia.org/fundacion-arcor/>

11. One particularly noteworthy example is the enactment of National Law No 26.061 on the Comprehensive Protection of Children and Adolescents in 2005. This law provides for comprehensive protection for children and young people and serves as a guarantee of their ability to exercise and enjoy the rights recognized under national law and in various international conventions on a full, effective and permanent basis.



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