

STATE OF URBAN YOUTH REPORT 2012-2013 YOUTH IN THE PROSPERITY OF CITIES





Youth in the Prosperity of Cities

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Foreword



I am pleased to present the second State of the Urban Youth report focusing on Youth and the Prosperity of Cities. This Report builds on the 2010/11 edition, "Leveling the Playing Field – Inequality of Youth Opportunity" and its insights into the state of urban youth. Much like the findings of the previous report, this

one provides further evidence of the fundamental importance of job oriented education to the development of urban youth.

At a time when the global economy is looking for paths to recovery and seeking innovative, ideas to rejuvenate itself, young people may offer the best hope. The events of the Arab Spring demonstrated that youth can be a powerful social force for positive change. The unexpected nature of these events, point to an underlying problem that afflicts youth in all corners of our world. The question is, why, in an increasingly urbanised world, are young people underappreciated by many governments and not at the forefront of economic activity and innovation?

The increasing prominence of the youth bulge in most urban areas presents a unique opportunity, as they represent the most dynamic human resource available. Their numbers today are larger than at any point in human history. Yet this group suffers the most from urban unemployment and often feels that they lack equal access to opportunities. This is especially acute in developing countries, which have a relatively youthful population that must be mobilised to realise greater economic and social development goals.

Today, 90 million youth around the world are unemployed (or 47per cent of the total number of unemployed) and an additional 300 million belong in the "working poor" category —they are in unskilled, insecure jobs and live in poor conditions. This Report takes a closer look at the condition of youth in major urban centres in four developing nations -Accra (Ghana), São Paulo (Brazil), Bangalore (India) and Cairo (Egypt).

The conditions of these cities, and the way they are perceived by young people, are seen as representative of those in their respective regions, and therefore provide a reasonable basis for policy recommendations focused on shared prosperity for urban youth. The four-city survey demonstrates that young people suffer disproportionately from poor prospects and low quality employment. The developing world continues to feature the fastest growing numbers of youth unemployment and persistent rural-to-urban migration; if these young people are to realise their potential, they need innovative solutions that are anchored in local realities.

Survey outcomes suggest that educational and training systems must be better aligned with the current and future needs of young people. In this regard, it would be helpful to share experiences and to investigate alternative educational arrangements for the provision of basic literacy, job skills training and lifelong education. This Report is a step in that direction.

Young people in the survey want equity for better shared prosperity both for their own and their cities' benefit, and they regard education as the best way of bringing about a more equitable type of urban development. They point to other significant challenges like structural constraints and lack of a democratic culture in their respective cities. These are issues over which local authorities wield a degree of influence that puts them in the best possible position to take remedial action. Local authorities must also seek to mainstream youth issues into all aspects of their planning and operations policy areas.

The report recommends a better match between skills and labour markets through vocational training and with the participation of the private sector. 'Soft' skills matter more in service-oriented economies, young people in informal settlements need entrepreneurial abilities, and capacities must be better geared to knowledge-intensive business services.

With their typical dynamism and energy, young people can exercise a unique multiplier effect on urban prosperity: the more they are allowed to benefit, the more they can give back, for the overall good of the society.

"No nation can achieve prosperity unless it makes education one of its central concerns. Education brings honour, independence and freedom to a government and its people" - 16 year-old Supawat Yasothon province, Thailand.

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Joan Clos Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat)

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