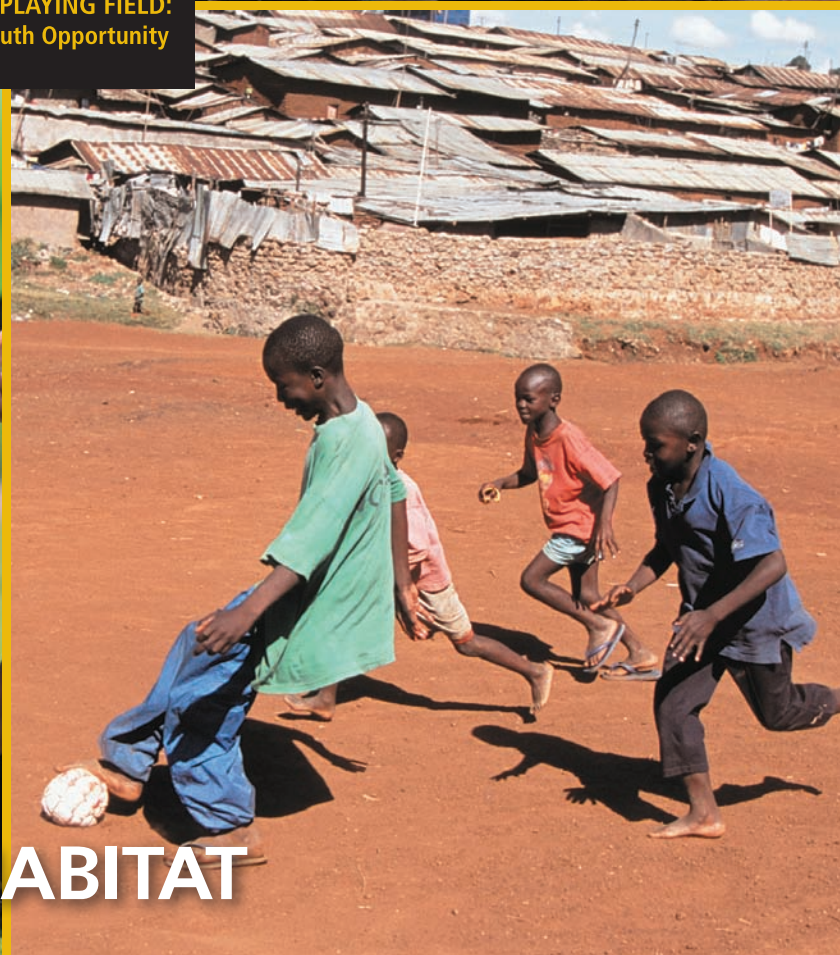


STATE OF THE URBAN YOUTH 2010/2011

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD:
Inequality of Youth Opportunity



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State of the Urban Youth 2010/11

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Inequality of Youth Opportunity**

UN  HABITAT

Foreword



Never have so many young people around the world been so healthy and literate, but the opportunities attached to the unprecedented prosperity of our cities keep eluding too many of them. That so many of those in charge of our collective future are denied the right to fulfilling lives and remain consigned to the sordid urban dead ends known as slums comes as a major challenge to sustainable development policies.

At this unique juncture in history where half of humankind is under 25 years of age, youth exclusion features as a major aspect of the “urban divide” that gives its theme to UN-HABITAT’s 2010/11 State of the World Cities report. What experts refer to as the “youth bulge” in today’s global demography is as good an opportunity as any to launch this companion State of Urban Youth report which, from now on and every other year, will sharpen the more general focus of the main flagship report.

This Youth Report, the first of its kind, comes in response to calls from young peoples’ organizations across the world. The fact that these requests were heard, and subsequently endorsed by an attentive Governing Council in 2009, is testament to this organization’s, and more generally the UN system’s, ability to respond to emerging global challenges with an appropriate mix of well-informed analysis and realistic policy recommendations.

As is the case with the main State of the World Cities document, the analysis in this Youth Report combines the latest available policy and academic research with the opinions voiced by well-selected local focus groups in a number of representative cities. This cross-regional survey of five cities where a gaping “urban divide” urgently needs bridging also scrutinizes the determinants of youth opportunity and inequality. The main finding is that unequal access is a phenomenon that begins in childhood and continues into youth, and then into adulthood through inequality in income, employment and housing.

Consistent with the “rights-based” approach endorsed in the main report, the five-city survey reflects local young people’s perceptions of the extent to which the “right to the city” is effective in its four dimensions – political, economic, social and cultural – in their respective day-to-day environments. Survey returns suggest that persistent inequality of opportunity deprives youth of their rights to the city, and that promoting equal access to shelter, education and services results in more stable and cohesive societies. Education appears as a major determinant of equal opportunities, and the “right to the city” is more effective for those who have access to services and education early in life.

Equality of opportunity requires a “leveling of the playing field”, so that circumstances that are beyond an individual’s control do not adversely influence her/his life chances. Predetermined circumstances such as gender, parents’ education, father’s occupation and the location where one was brought up determine outcome opportunities in adulthood.

This Report confirms that more education results in more opportunities. Access to school is largely determined by economic factors (costs) that ultimately depend on political will (fee exemptions, etc.). Just as relevant is the quality of education, which can also be affected by predetermined factors like class, race and social status.

Like the main report, this one also confirms the negative role of gender disparities in education. Following from the findings, this Report makes a number of policy recommendations. These include a call on governments to allocate more resources to education and to target special support at underprivileged and more vulnerable groups. The Report also advocates a review of those Millennium Development Goals that address young people and education.

Another major finding in this Report is that access to land and safe urban space is important for the protection, voice and empowerment of young people, it calls on public authorities to meet these needs for safe peer exchange. The findings in this Report also have a significant potential bearing on UN-HABITAT'S own youth policies and programmes. Taking advantage of training and education opportunities represents both an acquisition of skills and a capacity builder for urban youth. The main challenge for youth training programmes has to do with the way young people market and use skills once they have acquired them.

In its own effort to broaden the scope of opportunities for underprivileged urban youth around the world, UN-HABITAT is extending the reach of its partnerships beyond local authorities and civil society. With its recently-launched Opportunities Fund for Youth-Led Development, our organization supports dynamic young individuals who demonstrate the determination to put their entrepreneurial skills at the service of local communities – in the process helping to pave the way for environmentally and socially sustainable, inclusive cities.

Since humankind today is younger than it has ever been, our collective future will, more than ever, be shaped by today's youth. In this sense, this fledgling 21st century belongs to young people. If we want our, the older generation's, legacy to endure for the decades to come, let us make sure that we pass it on to those billions of able young hands that are only waiting for the opportunity.



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