



UN-HABITAT

STATE OF THE URBAN YOUTH 2010/2011

LEVELING THE PLAYING FIELD



URBAN
YOUTH
SUPPLEMENT

YOUNGER THAN EVER, POORER THAN EVER

Humankind today is younger than it has ever been with half of the global population under the age of 25. Yet the “youth bulge” has become a major feature of the urban divide where young people are finding themselves marginalized and excluded from their “rights to the city”.

The **State of the Urban Youth 2010-2011** report has called for international and national support in “Leveling the Playing Field”, which will be the main focus of the World Urban Forum in Brazil in March 2010. In the first report of its kind, UN-HABITAT focuses on youth exclusion from opportunities in urban areas in order to raise international attention and action towards this critical issue. Given the concerns expressed by young people around the world, the report argues that this is the time to provide targeted youth programmes.

The report is based on a survey of the historical and generational detriments of youth opportunity, inequality and deprivation across four developing regions: Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. City surveys and focus group discussions were conducted with youth aged 15-32 in Rio de Janeiro, Mumbai, Kingston, Nairobi and Lagos. Each of the cities selected are urbanizing fast with more than 20% of the population living in slums and a growing number of jobless youths.

The survey suggests that poorer young people have unequal access to basic services, housing, education and employment, contributing to the growing problem of “idle youths” who do not work or study. This is reflected in the answers from large proportions of respondents who believed their respective cities deprived them of equal access to economic, social, cultural and political opportunities. An average of 30% ranked the five cities as failing to provide equal access to basic facilities where a further average of 35% felt they were excluded from economic activities.

The **key findings of the report** strongly suggest outcomes of inequality (earning and assets) that define youth exclusion from urban life are related to the unequal opportunities that occur in successive life stages. Education is a key determinant of equal opportunity but there are various factors which prevent youth’s access to schools and good quality education.

- **Predetermined circumstances** that are beyond youths control can have a life-determining impact on their opportunities in future outcomes. Factors which influence inequality include gender, race, ethnicity, education level of parents, disability and region of birth.
- **Family resources** such as childhood residence and access to basic services and a secure shelter could effect the mental and physical growth of a child, which in turn could limit their social, economic and cultural networks.
- **Intergenerational inequalities:** Parents who are educated are more willing to invest in their offspring’s education and place high expectations on them receiving good results. Research suggests that uneducated mothers place less emphasis on education especially concerning their daughters.
- **Gender disparities** in education lead to unequal opportunities in later life. Girls have a very high drop out rate with very few completing secondary education, due to a number of socio-economic factors such as young pregnancies and social pressures.
- **Inequality of opportunities:** Those who live in low income areas have no choice but to attend poorly taught and badly equipped schools, bearing the brunt of bad local and national policies and implementation. Higher literacy rates do not necessarily result in high employment. On average poorer children have lower test scores and are less likely to go into college or further their education.

Education has been highlighted as the most important driving force for “leveling the playing field” and providing today’s youth with equal opportunities regardless of their race, gender or social circumstances.

Increased access to quality education is an investment in the future of society; research shows that higher enrolment and completion rates reduce income disparity and boost gross domestic product. By providing

formal and informal learning platforms, governments can generate skilled human capital that will not only drive economic growth and social innovation but reduce urban crime and shape the young into valued members of society.

While quality education, to a large extent determines inequality, there are various multi-dimensional factors that must be addressed. The report sets out a number of recommendations for policymakers. These include:

- Governments need to construct **multi-dimensional policies** orientated towards youth opportunities in early life stages to their transition to becoming responsible adults.
- Policies must provide youth with an equal opportunity in their decisions on urban land, housing and employment and give them political opportunities to express their opinions. There must be a shift from **outcomes to opportunities**.
- **Cross-sector coordination** of policies is needed, with national and local governments working alongside local leaders, communities and the private sector to implement effective programmes, which target the marginalized groups of society.
- **The Millennium Development Goals (MDG)** should be reviewed by policymakers so that they address young people and the gender gap in education.
- **Education**, especially quality primary education in low income areas, must be an urgent focus of policymaker's time and resources.
- An **Education Fund** is the best way to target youths in slums, with special consideration for female education can greatly reduce future income disparity. Targets must be made to remedy the gender disparities in secondary education as females are one of the most vulnerable groups in society.

Employable skills are an important factor to be considered by the government, schools, the private sector, communities and municipalities. It is essential that youths are provided with skills that are suited to the local economy. Many developing regions have a shortage of skilled labourers and continue to employ foreigners, when they have a huge potential group of unemployed youths that are more than willing to learn the necessary skills. The main challenge for youth training programmes is the way young people market and use skills once they have them.

ROLE OF THE UN:

The **UN-HABITAT Opportunities Fund for Youth-Led Development** promotes the poverty reduction aims of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) for better, more sustainable and equal living conditions in cities throughout the developing world. With USD 2,000,000 worth of financing from the Norwegian Government the fund is looking to invest from USD 5,000 to 25,000 in organizations led by young people, aged 15-32. Support will be provided primarily for those working to improve slum conditions and to raise opportunities for young people growing up in poverty especially those encouraging gender equality.

If young people are to shape our collective future, they require four main forms of opportunity; economic, social, political and cultural. Youth need these four main dimensions of collective life in order to form their own legacy to the best of their abilities and prepare for the next generation, their own children.