Cities for and with children and youth

IDEAS TO INSPIRE ACTION
About the Research Series: Cities for Children and Youth

The Research Series: Cities for Children and Youth is published by the Global Alliance – Cities4Children. This series includes publications reflecting on a range of issues faced by urban children and youth and sheds light on promising initiatives and practices for sustained change. The series aims to inspire action, add to knowledge, improve program/project design and advocate for children’s and young people’s rights in the urban agenda. It is aimed at practitioners, policy makers, government officials, researchers and advocates for better cities for children and youth and includes a range of publications:

- Evidence to action briefs: These are short research summaries about different topics that are important to address when thinking about child rights and the well-being of children and young people in urban contexts.
- Case studies of success from different urban contexts to inspire change and action
- Country/city reports about the situation of children in urban areas
- Practical tools to work with children and young people to encourage their participation, better understand their needs and support their contributions in the urban context.

If you would like to contribute to this series, or download papers free of charge please visit our website www.cities4children.org

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT IS THIS PUBLICATION ABOUT?

Rapid and unplanned urbanisation, growing inequality, the impacts of climate change and the exclusion of children’s and young people’s needs from urban governance pose urgent and widespread challenges to the well-being of children and young people in cities across the world. Challenges include the growth of slums and the urbanisation of poverty, traffic-related hazards, cities that are unsafe for children to walk in, food insecurity, lack of access to safe and proximate play opportunities, exposure to harmful waste, pollutants and toxins, and inadequate access to quality and affordable early care services. All of these factors undermine children’s rights to survive, thrive and develop to their fullest potential.

These are complex issues which require long-term strategies and systemic changes to urban planning and the provision of high-quality basic infrastructure and services such as water, sanitation, waste management, education and health. For cities to be better for all children, young people and their caregivers, they need to be ‘rewired’ to respond to the needs of the most vulnerable, support healthy and active living, and mitigate and adapt to climate change impacts. This requires large investments, changing mindsets and lifestyles, re-orienting government priorities, enabling intersectoral collaboration and building local government capacities.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCAL AND LOW-COST ACTION

Many people and organisations have asked us: what can we, ourselves, do to make cities better for children and young people? This publication responds to this question by offering some ideas for local and low-cost action. It starts from the premise that actions can be done by ordinary citizens, by children, youth, caregivers, community-based organisations and others to improve cities and neighbourhoods for children and young people. The actions themselves have direct benefits, but they can also be a first step to inspire or trigger wider more scalable change reaching more children, schools, streets, neighbourhoods and cities. This is what this guide is about. It is about some ideas and actions that have worked in different cities around the world that can be starting points: low-cost actions that can spark interest, promote positive change and thus have potential for wider impact. Actions that can show us what better cities for children and youth could look like.

The eight guides in this publication provide interested stakeholders with a quick overview of some of the key challenges faced by children and young people, particularly the urban poor, in cities around the world. For each of these challenges, the guides provide examples of inspiring, successful, low-cost and impactful interventions which have the potential to change cities to be responsive to the needs of children and caregivers. Some of these are championed by children and youth while others are led by a range of stakeholders in partnership with children, youth, caregivers, local communities and other key stakeholders. The examples presented are from urban contexts with different sizes, backgrounds and governance capacities and hence present diverse possibilities for action. Many of the interventions we highlight pay close attention to improving the complex environments of urban poverty and low-income neighbourhoods in particular, as urban poor residents bear the brunt of the urban challenges noted above and because they are seldom prioritised in city-level plans, policies and programmes.
CITIES FOR AND WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

WHO ARE THESE GUIDES FOR?
The target audience for this set of guides is any individual, group, organisation or entity that is interested and committed to enabling and creating better cities for and with children and youth. You can use these guides to start grassroots movements to reclaim public spaces for children and youth or power-up community-led waste management, propose strategies for actionable change with local governments, community-based organisations and local communities, or create or enable one small change such as measuring air pollution in your neighbourhood school or supporting a community garden in a low-income settlement and see where it takes you.

INTRODUCING THE GUIDES
The first four guides highlight interventions that make city spaces safer, healthier, more accessible and playable, and cleaner and greener for children and caregivers. Guides 5 and 6 showcase the impact youth can have in enabling cleaner, climate-responsive and people-friendly cities. Guide 7 focuses on much-needed early childhood care and Guide 8 focuses on the complex issue of child malnutrition.

1 SAFE AND ACTIVE JOURNEYS TO SCHOOL
points to how unplanned urbanisation and rising vehicular traffic put children and young people at risk and reduce active mobility in cities. Three examples from Dar es Salaam in Tanzania, Austin in the USA and The Hague in the Netherlands present effective and low-cost approaches to enable safer and more active journeys.

2 PLAY STREETS AND POP-UP PLAY SPACES
emphasises the importance of close-to-home free play for children’s health, development and well-being. It describes through two examples in Bristol in the UK and Hanoi in Vietnam how neighbourhood spaces outside homes can be reclaimed and programmed for children’s play.

3 DATA-DRIVEN ADVOCACY FOR AIR POLLUTION
highlights how children’s exposure to harmful air-pollution levels can have life-long negative consequences for their health and well-being. It describes three different ways to advocate and act to reduce air-pollution levels in cities such as Coyhaique in Chile as well as New Delhi in India and Durban in South Africa.

4 URBAN GARDENING
describes how community gardening experiences are beneficial for children’s health, well-being, learning and play. It provides a case-study example of child-led urban gardening from Jhenaidah in Bangladesh where children initiate and nurture community gardens and share their experience and knowledge to inspire others.

5 YOUTH-LED SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT
draws attention to the enormous gaps in waste management in cities in low- and middle-income countries and its harmful effects, especially on children. It showcases two inspiring examples of youth-led waste management from Bangladesh and Kenya, where neglected public spaces are transformed to safer, cleaner and more productive spaces.

6 YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN URBAN GOVERNANCE
describes the importance of engaging youth and how their ideas and energies can inform and spark urban change. We describe two initiatives from Sin el Fil in Lebanon and Savar in Bangladesh, where youth collaborated with local governments to address urban issues that affected their everyday lives.

7 SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE ENVIRONMENTS
highlights the dearth in quality and affordable childcare provision for urban poor residents and how increasing access is fundamental to improving children’s health and well-being, women’s empowerment and poverty reduction. The guide describes the work of two organisations in New Delhi in India and Cape Town in South Africa, which enabled early childhood care in low-income settlements.

8 REDUCING MALNUTRITION IN YOUNG CHILDREN
draws attention to the high child-malnutrition rates in urban poor settlements and in situations of crisis. It describes three Infant and Young Child Feeding Practices interventions in New Delhi and Mumbai in India and in Za’atari refugee camp in Jordan to treat children with severe and moderate malnutrition and reduce child malnutrition rates.

STRUCTURE OF THE GUIDES
Each intervention guide is structured using a WHY, WHAT, WHO and HOW? format followed by a selection of brief case-study examples of successfully implemented interventions and their ACTIONS and IMPACTS:

- The WHY? section provides compelling evidence and arguments for why the intervention is necessary.
- The WHAT? section describes the nature of the intervention and provides examples of interventions which have been implemented.
- The WHO? section identifies stakeholders who can initiate or play a key role in enabling and promoting the intervention.
- The HOW? section draws on learnings from the case-study examples described in each guide and provides a set of ideas for implementation.
- The case-study examples are short descriptions of interventions which have been implemented. Each includes an ACTION section, which explains the actors and processes enabling the interventions and an IMPACT section, which provides a brief overview of progress, outcomes and impact related to the interventions.
- Further reading: some of the guides also include a selection of additional resources.
SAFE AND ACTIVE JOURNEYS TO SCHOOL

1

WHY?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), road-traffic injuries are the leading cause of death for children and young adults aged 5 to 29. Children in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) are often exposed to high levels of risk for many reasons, including unplanned urbanisation, poor road infrastructure, an absence of enforced traffic safety laws, violence, lack of supervision and increasing car ownership.1

Another growing preventable health concern in LMICs is the rapid rise of children who are obese and overweight in urban settings, which is associated with a wide range of serious health consequences and social and psychological effects. According to the WHO, the vast majority of the 380 million obese and overweight children live in LMICs where the rate of increase has been 30% higher than in developed nations.2 Enabling safe and active journeys to school – and generally ensuring children can move around safely within their neighbourhoods and cities – can achieve more just and equitable cities, shape cities to work for children and other vulnerable groups and ensure children’s rights to survival, health and education. It can also reduce preventable deaths and injuries and the implications these have for families.

WHAT?

For urban poor children, barriers for safe and active journeys to school often relate to environmental issues such as unpaved roads, unsafe bridges, lack of sidewalks, lack of bike lanes and road crossings, and a lack of traffic regulations. Social issues such as violence within neighbourhoods related to gangs and other anti-social behaviour also have an impact. So too does lack of supervision as caregivers are overburdened with household chores or demanding jobs. This often means they unable to accompany children to school and lack awareness of the benefits of children’s active journeys to school. Children can also face location-specific challenges, so bottom-up as well as top-down approaches are necessary to enable safer and active routes.

Several international efforts aim to address the issue through advocacy, policy and programmes including Vision Zero Challenge, Global Road Safety Partnership and Star Rating for Schools (SR4S). Child Health Initiative also provides toolkits, databases and guidance for national, city and local governments, local organisations and communities to take action.
A range of stakeholders can initiate and/or play integral roles in enabling safe and active journeys to school including community leaders, parents and caregiver groups, children and youth groups, school communities, grassroots networks, local authorities, police and traffic departments, built-environment professionals, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), media networks, research and academic institutions, and think tanks.

There are two key approaches to support safe journeys to school for urban poor children:

**CONNECT WITH EXISTING ROAD-SAFETY PROGRAMMES IN YOUR CITY OR TOWN** and explore how these can be better connected to support children living in urban poor settlements. For example, several organisations like the World Resources Institute, FIA Foundation, Global Road Safety Program, Global Alliance of NGOs for Road Safety, and those in the Star Rating for Schools (SR4S) initiative are partnering with national and local governments and local organisations to drive policies and programmes to enable safer journeys to school. However, there is a need to support these efforts to reach informal settlements and the urban poor.

**USE YOUR STRENGTHS TO INITIATE SAFE JOURNEYS TO SCHOOL** in low-income neighbourhoods where you have already built networks, relationships and trust. Children in these areas face particularly hazardous journeys to school. Ideas to initiate efforts include working with schools to develop and run education and awareness programmes on road safety, working with local communities to organise Walking School Buses (WSBs) and safe road crossings, conducting research to identify local barriers to safe and active school journeys, and using evidence to advocate for change. Employ tactical urbanism to engage, design and pilot interventions such as safe school zones. You can also connect with organisations such as World Resources Institute and others to ask for technical and programmatic support.

**EXPLORE**
Scope out ongoing initiatives in your city or town by connecting with relevant organisations, grassroots networks, individuals and local authorities. Prioritise engaging with initiatives where your group or organisation’s strengths can enhance and complement ongoing efforts.

**CONNECT AND COLLABORATE**
Engage with relevant stakeholders including neighbourhood groups, local businesses, local leaders, municipal departments, decisionmakers, community members and schools. Develop a holistic understanding of the issues, define roles of key stakeholders, source funds and resources, and identify local experts and champions. Ensure children, caregivers, school staff and local communities are actively involved in all phases of the process.

**MONITOR AND EVALUATE**
Understand, evaluate and refine interventions by gathering relevant data before and after taking action – such as children’s and caregiver’s experiences of school journeys, travel modes to school, child injury data on routes to school, and perceptions of safety and comfort on routes to school pre-and post-intervention. Use existing globally recognised tools such as those in the Child Health Initiative’s toolkit to assess, evaluate and use findings to design, develop and refine strategies, programmes and interventions.

**CAMPAIGN TO ADVOCATE**
Raise awareness for safe and active journeys to school using evidence-based tools such as Star Rating for Schools (SR4S) and proven strategies to enable safe school zones such as reducing speeds to 30km/hour in school zones and surrounding roads, introducing safe crossings and supporting WSBS. Engage all relevant stakeholders as well as traditional and social media in advocacy efforts to create awareness, attract funds and resources, catalyse ground-up movements, and promote supportive legislation and policies.

**STRATEGISE**
Organise, innovate and experiment using tactical urbanism interventions to create safer zones around schools including traffic-calming measures, dedicated walking and cycling paths and crossings, and programmatic interventions such as walking school buses and school road-safety awareness programmes.

**EMPower and ENABLE**
Build capacity of local authorities and local groups through workshops and training, providing locally adapted tools, and guidelines to scale up successful interventions to other localities.

**THREE EXAMPLES OF HOW TO ENABLE SAFE AND ACTIVE JOURNEYS TO SCHOOLS**

Taking an integrated approach can be the most effective way of enabling safe and active journeys to school. These combine initiatives such as traffic-calming measures, creating safe school zones, violence-reduction interventions, community organised programmes such as walking school buses, and road and pedestrian safety education and awareness programmes. These are best developed in close partnership with local communities, schools and local authorities. The following sections provide examples of how safe and active journeys to school were implemented in low-income communities in Tanzania, USA and The Netherlands.

**1. WALKING SCHOOL BUSES AND ‘CORNER CAPTAINS’ IN AUSTIN, TEXAS**

**ACTION**
In 2007, Zavala Elementary School in Austin, USA was located in a high-crime and low-income neighbourhood where 94% of students were eligible for free or reduced school lunches. Over 92% of children lived within walking distance of the school. However, with a prevalence of drug and gang-related crime and violence in the neighbourhood, the school community was concerned for children’s safety. This led the school to work with parent communities and local volunteers to recruit and train interested members as walking school bus leaders and ‘corner captains’ (parents, teachers, neighbours or other volunteers stationed at designated points along established routes to school) to increase adult presence and support for children walking to school.

**IMPACT**
This effort also coincided with a countywide social marketing campaign promoting children’s safe and active journeys to school, which significantly increased student participation in the walking school bus programme.

The walking school bus programme has helped more students to arrive at school on time as well as access the school breakfast programme, which is essential for low-income children to get a healthy start at school.
2. AMEND’S SARSAI PROGRAMME: CREATING SAFETY CORRIDORS FOR SCHOOL CHILDREN IN DAR ES SALAAM, TANZANIA

Key contributor: Ayokai Passapo, Amend

These infrastructural changes were combined with tailored pedestrian safety education and awareness programmes for school communities (children, teachers, staff and parents) in intervention schools. Amend collaborates actively with local communities, local authorities, and school communities in all stages of the SARSAI process. In Amend’s initial projects, interventions were basic: speed humps, zebra crossings and some signage. However, over time their interventions have evolved to include more footpaths, guardrails and other innovations such as specially designed motorcycle barriers in pedestrianised zones.

**IMPACT**

Between 2012 and 2022, the SARSAI programme has reached over 45,000 children from 32 of the highest at-risk school areas in the city. A peer-reviewed impact analysis study shows children in SARSAI programme schools now experience 36% fewer traffic-related injuries compared to other schools. In addition, vehicle speeds around school zones were reduced by up to 60%. Local communities perceive their neighbourhoods as safer places, parents are less worried about their children going to school, and children practice safe mobility while accessing other parts of the city. The programme has enabled an understanding of the importance of safe urban environments for enabling children’s health, safety and freedom among local authorities and school communities. Amend continues to keep in touch with programme schools and finds that interventions such as speed humps and footpaths continue to be effective and have been sustained over time. SARSAI is now active in eight other countries. 4

**ACTION**

Every year, Dar es Salaam’s highest-risk schools witness almost 12 children injured or killed in preventable traffic casualties. Like in other fast-urbanising cities and towns in Africa, increasing densities, unplanned urbanisation and increasing car ownership are making journeys to school dangerous for children. Amend is a not-for-profit organisation with a regional presence that works with international and local partners to promote safe and healthy journeys for children in several African cities.

As part of its School Areas Road Safety Assessments and Improvements (SARSAI) programme in Dar es Salaam, Amend first used surveys and existing data to identify schools at highest risk of road traffic injuries. These typically tended to be overcrowded schools in poor neighbourhoods with little supportive infrastructure. Next, Amend conducted comprehensive site assessments for selected schools. They developed context-relevant interventions to create zones of improved safety around schools and on routes to children’s homes. Interventions for each school cost around US$25,000 and included traffic calming measures such as speed humps, new footpaths and signage, and traffic-calming measures, as well as creating new entrances for schools in particularly dangerous areas.

On this street, footpaths, signage, speed humps and a raised zebra crossing were installed as part of Amend’s SARSAI programme outside a school in Dar es Salaam. © Amend

*Road safety education at a school in Dar es Salaam. © Edward Echwu, Amend*

3. BYCS’S BICYCLE HEROES PROGRAMME, THE HAGUE

Key contributor: Alex Baum, BYCS

Bicycle Heroes was developed by BYCS.5 It engages children in solving urban mobility challenges related to cycling as a way of addressing their needs and raising their awareness about the need for and benefits of cycling. The programme has been running for over three years in several cities such as Amsterdam, The Hague and Gelderland province in the Netherlands, as well as Dublin, Lisbon and Rome. A key aspect of this programme is enabling marginalised youth voices to inform local policies and action for making cycling in cities more child and youth friendly.

**OUTCOMES AND IMPACT**

Maëlle Jammet (age 11) was selected as Bicycle Hero of The Hague based on her idea for an anti-stress light:

When I began to cycle, I was very stressed by the cars that would drive so close next to me. Therefore, I came up with a light for your handlebars that you can turn on when you don’t feel safe. Drivers know then that they should give you more space.

A Bicycle Heroes squad was formed with 30 interested and engaged students. They will continue to work with the city government to implement their ideas as well as promote cycling to their peers in their local school and neighbourhood communities.

The Hague’s municipal government has been invested in the programme from the very beginning and finds that youth bring an important perspective to city governance and planning. Alderman Robert van Asten from the traffic and transport department observed:

It is very good to involve children in thinking about road safety in this way: they come up with very creative and important ideas that adults often overlook. We are happy to take the plans and especially the reasons they have for working on these solutions to the town hall, so that we can get started.

The program has also helped raise awareness amongst key decisionmakers and across the city (in particular in low-cycling, low-income neighbourhoods) about the benefits of cycling as well as the need for greater youth involvement in decision-making, which has helped generate demand for change.

Children participate in a design-thinking workshop focused on making their city safer and more fun for children to cycle in as part of the BYCS Bicycle Heroes initiative in Amsterdam, Netherlands. © BYCS

**ACTION**

In 2021, a Bicycle Heroes programme was conducted in the Hague led by the Bicycle Mayor, a changemaker identified and selected by BYCS to promote cycling in the city, in partnership with key stakeholders from local schools, the city public works department, universities, industry experts and local media. Over 600 children aged 9–12 from largely low-income communities with low cycling rates and high migrant populations were engaged through school and community programmes.

The aim was to engage children in thinking about creative ways to make cycling around their schools and neighbourhoods safer, more comfortable and more fun. A ‘jury’ made up of stakeholder members then selected 30–40 entries from the children’s ideas. The children whose entries were selected took part in a series of workshops at the Science Museum in The Hague to better understand the benefits and barriers of cycling. They then helped to co-create solutions to address key barriers. Their ideas were presented to city officials to be considered and implemented. The intervention cost around US$25,000.

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**FURTHER READING**

iRAP, RAP Infrastructure Safety Management Tools. https://irap.org/rap-tools
iRAP, Resources. https://irap.org/resources
National Center for Safe Routes to Schools (undated) Starting a walking school bus: the basics. www.walkingschoolbus.org/
WalkingSchoolBus_pdf.pdf
2 PLAY STREETS AND POP-UP PLAY SPACES

WHY?

Play is not a luxury. It is absolutely essential for children’s healthy growth and development and overall well-being. Through play, children make connections with their physical and social worlds, make sense of the world around them on their own terms, engage with risk and resilience by testing boundaries, develop coping mechanisms, learn life skills, make friendships and absorb culture.1

Outdoor play is seen to be particularly beneficial to children as it supports better physical and mental health and well-being, increases resilience and access to nature, and builds social relations. But despite the overwhelming cross-cultural evidence on the benefits of outdoor play and play in general, across the world children are deprived of free play. This is due to a range of barriers including lack of time due to overscheduled activities or helping with daily chores, parental concerns for children’s safety, increased attention to academic performance, rising popularity of video games, city neighbourhoods that are hostile to children’s safe play outside homes, and the lack of safe and easily accessible play spaces.2

Play streets and pop-up play spaces are two types of interventions that can better support children’s free play in places close to homes. They can help to reimagine streets and neighbourhoods for children more permanently, strengthen local social cohesion and reduce emissions.3 These interventions are low-cost temporary ways to support children’s safe, proximate and semi-supervised neighbourhood play and can be beneficial especially in low-income neighbourhoods, where home spaces are cramped and parents lack the time or resources to take children to play facilities at a distance from their homes.

These proximate play spaces are especially important for younger children, girls and children with different abilities who may face a range of safety, gender and mobility barriers to accessing far-off outdoor play and recreation spaces. They also connect neighbours to build a sense of community and increase perceptions of safety which in turn increases caregiver’s confidence in allowing children to play outside. It is also important to note that in situations where children face serious barriers to play, enabling such short-term intermittent opportunities for play can be highly valued. They remind people of the centrality of play in children’s lives and possibly lead to longer-term solutions.

WHAT?

Play streets and pop-up play spaces are the temporary claiming of neighbourhood streets and small open spaces to facilitate proximate free play experiences for children. Typically, streets are closed to vehicular traffic or selected neighbourhood spaces are animated for play. This can happen for a few hours in each week or month, or in some cases, on a daily basis during the summer months when schools are closed.

For example in the USA, play streets interventions in cities like Philadelphia, New York, San Francisco, Los Angeles are supported by the city, particularly in low-income areas, to reclaim and repurpose selected neighbourhood streets for play and other relevant programming such as mobile meals and library services for underserved children. Japan too has a long history of enabling play streets and pop-up play spaces, and the latter has been especially relevant for enabling play post-disaster. Australia has its 1000 Play Streets national campaign being led by Play Australia with support from a range of government and private-sector partners and local communities. In Bogota and Chile, play streets are an emerging aspect of the Open Streets movement in these Latin American countries. There is also evidence of play streets in Africa and Turkey. However, this formal claiming of neighbourhood streets in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in Asia and Africa is less common, as children often claim neighbourhood streets and lanes informally to play cricket and football and for other activities, although this is becoming less frequent and highly unsafe with increase in vehicular traffic. However, in informal settlements and low-income neighbourhoods in LMICs there are several examples of civil society organisations claiming small and large open spaces for mobile libraries, sports activities as well as pop-up play activities.

WHO?

City governments, NGOs and grassroots organisations can support play streets and pop-up and mobile play spaces in close partnership with parent groups, youth groups, community leaders and community-based organisations.

HOW?

Enabling and scaling up play streets and pop-up play spaces requires valuing and engaging with people in local governments, community organisations and most importantly, communities. People connecting and collaborating meaningfully together (at all levels) is the most effective strategy to identify opportunities, create shared values and overcome challenges.

- ADVOCATE
  Advocate for children’s free play using compelling evidence to ensure local communities and other stakeholders understand that play is absolutely essential for children’s physical, cognitive, social and emotional development and well-being.

- MAP
  Identify gaps in access to green space and prioritise marginalised neighbourhoods with high child populations. Governments, universities and civil society organisations can create open-source mapping platforms that can be used to prioritise neighbourhoods for play streets and pop-up play interventions. See for example this Parklet Plotter by Possible in the UK.
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UNDERSTAND LOCAL CONTEXT
Partner with local communities to identify local needs and barriers to children’s free neighbourhood play. Each local community will have specific physical and social conditions that shape children’s access to play. These could range from rules imposed by neighbourhood authorities or residents’ associations on children’s play to high-traffic streets or the presence of drugs and violence. See this report by Playing Out on identifying barriers to free play in a high-rise housing estate for more ideas.

PARTNER AND STRATEGIZE
Collaborate across government, civil society and corporate sectors to activate play streets and pop-up play spaces. A wide partnership base can bring complementary and necessary resources to the intervention. For example, legalising play streets and pop-up places in formally planned neighbourhoods requires local government support. Local universities and experts can support research and documentation efforts to enable evidenced-based interventions.

PLAN AND ACT
Develop locally relevant and responsive solutions that consider local risks, barriers and advantages. For example, the schedule for play streets in each locality will need to consider volunteer availability, low-traffic days, local children’s schedules, refuse collection and street-cleaning schedules. In some low-resource communities, NGOs, community-based organisations and local governments may need to play a more active role in coordination.

OPERATE AND MAINTAIN
Develop and empower a volunteer base and play leader within each intervention street and neighbour to successfully operate play streets and pop-up play spaces. Create locally relevant guides, training materials, templates and other tools to guide operation, management and maintenance and to leverage existing community engagement activities to support community outreach.

ENABLE
Ensure approval processes to enable play streets and pop-up play spaces (whether formal or informal) are simple and can be carried out easily by marginalised and underserved populations. Advocate to eliminate fees associated with getting the permits and approvals.

IDENTIFY
Select streets that are quiet and do not have transit routes or through traffic. One example is opposing one-way streets which discourage non-street residents from driving through streets.

SUSTAIN
Ensure play street events and pop-up play spaces are held regularly such as once a week where streets are closed to traffic for a minimum of 3–4 hours or for the whole day.

ORGANIZE
Organise and provide ‘loose parts’ such as ropes, blocks, water play items, boxes, chalk and fabric to initiate and facilitate play. Encourage participating residents to bring along food, drinks, shade umbrellas and movable chairs for residents to spend time outdoors in shared comfort.

PROMOTE
Promote play streets and pop-up spaces locally through word of mouth, street posters or handouts and use local social media groups to attract neighbours and local communities to participate.

PUBLICISE
Publicise widely the benefits of proximate play through social media, traditional media and word-of-mouth using success stories to inspire others to enable and create local play streets and pop-up play and create a culture of change around enabling and prioritising children’s proximate free play.

EXAMPLES OF PLAY STREETS IN THE UK AND POP-UP PLAY SPACES IN HANOI, VIETNAM

1. PLAYING OUT, UK: A NATIONAL MOVEMENT RECLAIMING STREETS FOR CHILDREN NATIONWIDE AND BEYOND

Key contributor: Alice Ferguson, Playing Out, Bristol, UK

ACTION
Between 2008 and 2009, two neighbouring mothers living in South Bristol, UK discovered during conversations with other like-minded parents an urgent need for supporting their children’s access to free play. Their neighbourhood was a place with dense housing, high traffic and few green spaces so in June 2009, they devised a simple ‘play street’ model, closing their street to through traffic for a few hours using a local ‘street party’ ordinance. This was hugely popular with local residents. Motivated by their success, the model was trialled and tested in five other interested local streets with a small amount of funding. Based on the success of this larger initiative, reports and advocacy and promotional material were developed to further spread the idea of the power of play streets. This caught the attention of local government members, universities and experts who further supported the idea to grow beyond Bristol and across the nation.

In 2011, Playing Out was registered as a community interest company. Its aim was to support resident-led street play across the UK. Later in the same year, Playing Out worked with Bristol City Council to launch its Temporary Play Street Order (TPSO) pilot, which allowed residents to open their streets for play for up to three hours a week. By 2012, following an evaluation of the pilot by the University of Bristol, the city council established the TPSO as an ongoing policy, setting a precedent for other councils to follow. Playing Out received three-year funding from the Department of Health. In 2013 in partnership with Play England, to grow the movement across the nation. This resulted in 480 street communities ‘playing out’, impacting 12,000 children. As part of its process, Playing Out has developed a range of toolkits, guides and templates to enable interested communities to facilitate and advocate for play streets in their neighbourhoods with ease.

IMPACT
Playing Out has continued to support interested communities across the nation and internationally in enabling play streets for children. By 2022, despite the setback of the pandemic when play streets were not allowed under England’s rules, the movement had spread to over 100 local government areas and 1,300 street communities across the UK.

While the movement started in a middle-income neighbourhood it has been leveraged by marginalised communities to better support children’s play in their neighbourhoods. One such example was led by Samira, a young Somali activist mother living in a tower block estate in central Bristol, which is home to 2,000 largely migrant school-aged children. She adapted the Playing Out’s play street model as part of her existing efforts to enable and facilitate free play and activities for children in her neighbourhood.

Samira came across the play street model on Twitter and connected with Playing Out, which helped her with the council application and she and her peer supporters spread the word through social media and word of mouth to advocate for and popularise the intervention in their locality. The first play street session saw scores of neighbourhood children ‘chalking, running, playing hide and seek, kicking a ball around. Even singing’, Samira recounts how mothers stood around chatting, volunteers stepped up to be stewards and how the local community bus driver contributed boxes of oranges for everyone to enjoy. Now, the play street runs every Sunday for three hours and provides a safe place for children’s doorstep play with trusted adults around in a neighbourhood which is saddled with traffic dangers, drug peddling and racism.

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2. POP-UP PLAY SPACES DURING THE COVID 19 PANDEMIC AND BEYOND, HANOI, VIETNAM

Key contributor: Kristie Daniel and Tran Thi Kieu Thanh Ha, HealthBridge

ACTION
As in other cities across the world, in Hanoi, the COVID 19 pandemic shut down the city, limiting access to schools and public facilities. This was particularly hard on families and children living in low-income communities in cramped housing. To ease the burden of care and enable access to safe free play and social interaction for children and caregivers in these communities, UN Habitat and Block by Block Foundation partnered with HealthBridge and local partners to create staffed pop-up play places in five low-income wards in the city. The process included collaborating with ward officers and local communities to advocate for the model of pop-up play spaces, identify suitable locations and train community-based volunteers as playworkers. The training for playworkers included raising awareness on the benefits of play for children, introducing them to different aspects of mobile/pop-up playgrounds and providing them with tools on how to organise and facilitate them, and information on safety principles and COVID-19 prevention measures to be followed. HealthBridge and local partners developed toolkits for community-based playworkers to enable them in sourcing recycled material such as ropes, crates, tires, toys and planks, craft play session kits, and facilitate play sessions with appropriate COVID 19 precautions measures in place. The whole intervention cost approximately US$12,000 with each pop-up space averaging at US$700.

IMPACT
These five pop-up play spaces provided vital opportunities for play and social interaction in low-income dense neighbourhoods. As part of the project, across the five wards 58 community members were trained as playworkers and 10 play sessions were facilitated, which were attended by over 500 children and several caregivers. While the project has ended, the sessions continue to be hosted by the volunteer playworkers, local women and youth groups in these wards. These sessions are highly valued by children and local communities. You can read more information on this intervention here.

FURTHER READING
Play Australia (2022) 1000 play streets toolkit for Australian local government: empowering Australian communities to reclaim their quiet residential streets as places to connect and play. www.playaustralia.org.au/1000-play-streets/local-government
Pop-up Adventure Play, Resources and research, www.popupadventureplay.org/resources-and-research

3. DATA-DRIVEN ADVOCACY FOR AIR POLLUTION

WHY?
There is very limited monitoring of air quality in LMICs. UNICEF estimates that just 6% of children in Africa live near a reliable air-quality monitoring source.¹ But in recent years citizen science, crowdsourced data and community-led monitoring have become popular ways to measure and monitor air quality using low-cost sensors and open source data monitoring platforms.

These methods can be effective ways to measure, monitor and map localised air-quality data in urban poor communities: within homes, on streets, at garbage dumps, and in and around schools, open play areas and other areas frequented by children. This data can be used to pinpoint major localised sources of pollutants, measure changes in local air quality over time, and inform the design and location of places for children such as schools, childcare centres and parks.

WHAT?
The World Health Organization (WHO) estimates air pollution causes 8 million premature deaths overall every year and 99% of people worldwide breathe polluted air.² For children below five years of age, indoor and outdoor air pollution contributes to 50% of acute lower-respiratory tract infection and is responsible for 1 in 10 deaths of children in this age group.³

Urban poor children living in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs) in Africa and Asia are the most vulnerable. Many live in cramped, smoke-filled and unventilated homes which are often located close to busy roads, factories and garbage dumps, which produce highly toxic fumes. Measuring where and how poor children are exposed to air pollution can provide evidence for advocating for change, prioritising areas for action, designing and delivering targeted interventions, and monitoring and evaluating impact.⁴
CITIES FOR AND WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

WHO?

A range of stakeholders can initiate and/or play integral roles in measuring and monitoring air quality and supporting data-driven advocacy and action for improving air quality including grassroots networks, school communities, health and environment agencies, traffic departments, NGOs, CBOs, media networks, local community members (such as parents/caregivers, children and youth), research and academic institutions, and thinktanks.

HOW?

Measuring air quality for children in urban poor communities is meaningful when paired with other relevant programmes and interventions in schools and communities such as green school initiatives, settlement upgrading programmes and neighbourhood or city-level clean air initiatives. Here are some key aspects to consider when starting an air quality initiative:

- **SCOPE AND AIM**
  Connect with relevant organisations working with children and youth in marginalised communities or engaged in upgrading interventions and environmental sustainability efforts in low-income settlements. These include grassroots organisations, academic and research institutes, city programmes, and civil society organisations. Choose an appropriate organisation and/or initiative to partner with and set clear shared objectives, aims and goals.

- **STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS**
  Invite relevant organisations such as grassroots networks, community decision makers, local politicians and policymakers to be part of the initiative. Work closely with them to identify what type of air-quality measurement methods should be used and how best they can be integrated with ongoing or new programmes and interventions to realise shared objectives and goals.

- **METHODS**
  Use complementary methods such as focus group discussions, interviews and community art and theatre to understand community knowledge and perceptions about air pollution and make visible what is largely seen as an invisible threat. Pair these methods with quantitative measuring and monitoring of air pollution using low-cost sensors.

- **SOURCE**
  Conduct market research and speak with relevant experts to identify appropriate technology and tools for measuring air quality. Take into consideration locational challenges, monitoring and maintenance of tools, and opportunities to calibrate and check data quality against reference or research-grade monitors.

- **TEST, CALIBRATE AND FINETUNE**
  Engage with experts and local communities to rigorously test and calibrate devices and tools. Have systems in place for data handling. Identify potential problems early on and have plans in place to address these proactively. Ensure there is an active feedback loop to address problems and finetune interventions.

- **ADVOCATE FOR ACTION**
  Publicise efforts and findings to create awareness. Use your evidence to lobby for air-pollution reduction policies, programmes and interventions and share experiences to inspire and support other potentially interested groups.

THREE EXAMPLES OF MEASURING AIR QUALITY USING LOW-COST PORTABLE SENSORS

Low-cost sensors (LCS) are mobile or fixed devices that can measure harmful particles and gases in the air with proven accuracy. They can be paired with platforms such as HabitatMap’s Aircasting platform to measure and map hyperlocal real-time air pollution levels. This provides sound evidence for advocacy and action for demanding cleaner air, and healthier and environmentally just cities and neighbourhoods.

In mobile mode, sensors can measure personal exposure levels. In fixed mode, sensors can be used to measure pollution levels in different places such as schools, homes, playgrounds, streets and other areas frequented by children. Data collected by the sensors are relayed to smartphones or stored in the device and later synchronised with online platforms to visualise air quality in a neighbourhood, a specific location, or in your daily life. While LCS are becoming increasingly popular there is concern about the reliability of some devices. You should take care to calibrate the sensors and check their performance and reliability before installation.

Cost of some commonly used low-cost sensors:

- **AirBeam** (US$249)
- **Purple Air** (US$200–300)
- **Dylos** (US$200–240)
- **IQ AIR sensors** (US$270–550)

The following examples show how sensors have been used to involve children and youth to fight for environmental justice and to educate and raise awareness about air pollution and its impacts in low-income communities.

1. **AIRES NUEVOS – DATA-DRIVEN ADVOCACY AND ACTION TO REDUCE CHILDREN’S EXPOSURE TO HARMFUL AIR POLLUTION LEVELS IN LATIN AMERICAN CITIES**

Key contributor: Loreto Stambuk, Horizonte Ciudadano

**ACTION**

In 2020, the non-profit Horizonte Ciudadano and the Centro de Acción Climática PUCV in Chile partnered with the Bernard van Leer Foundation and the Children’s Investment Fund Foundation to create *Aires Nuevos*, the largest citizen air quality network to measure, monitor and reduce children’s exposure to polluted air in Latin America. As part of this initiative low-cost IQ Air sensors were installed in 28 cities to measure and monitor air quality in settings frequented by young children such as preschools or parks. These settings were largely located in vulnerable neighbourhoods located close to factories, highways, and distressed urban areas with high CO2 and particulate matter emissions. In each city, collaborative partnership groups comprised of local public officials, university researchers and communities, were created to monitor and assess data and use findings to inform local laws, policies, and actions to mitigate children’s exposure to harmful air pollution levels. Additionally, citizens living in the participating cities can access real-time information on air pollution on the IQ Air website and the IQ Air APP.

School children in the Chilean city of Coyhaique resume outdoor physical activities based on analysis of air quality measurements generated by locally installed IQ Air sensors. © Aires Nuevos Coyhaique
2. MEASURING AIR QUALITY IN SCHOOLS IN MARGINALISED NEIGHBOURHOODS WITH OPEN CITIES LAB IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA

Key contributor: Megan Wadge, Open Cities Lab, Durban, South Africa

ACTION

In 2018, the Open Cities Lab (OCL) in Durban embarked on a citizen science project and engaged with two school communities in marginalised settlements to measure air quality, measure and monitor local air pollution levels, and develop data journalism skills for participating students. The process included five sessions to teach students about air-quality concepts, why it is important, and enable them to understand hyperlocal issues around air quality within their communities through discussions, writing and engaging with data skills.

Low-cost sensors were built and tested in each school in partnership with students and a data platform set up to manage and monitor data. Students also built their own monitors and installed them in their own homes to measure and monitor air-pollution levels. In 2020, OCL organised an Open Data Day where citizen scientists could collaborate on improving air-pollution monitors. Students who were part of the community science class run by OCL in areas with low air quality also attended the event and worked alongside experts and community scientists to update monitors so that they are more weather resistant, easier to install and better calibrated. At the end of the event participants switched out old monitors to new and improved ones to later install in their homes and communities.

IMPACT

School communities from both schools were sensitised to air pollution and its impacts. Students were highly engaged, and the sessions have spurred some students to further examine air-pollution issues in their local communities. For Open Cities Lab, the project was highly informative on how to build partnerships to achieve scalable impact and engage and develop changemakers for future generations. The programme still maintains a website to track and monitor data collected by sensors.

FURTHER READING


BreatheLife, A global campaign for clean air. https://breathelife2030.org

HabitatMap, Airbeam, User stories, The AirCasting platform empowers community-based organizations, educators, academics, regulators, city managers, and community scientists to map air pollution and organize for clean air. www.habitatmap.org/airbeam/user-stories


3. THE NEW YORK TIMES: WHO GETS TO BREATHE CLEAN AIR IN NEW DELHI?

ACTION

In 2021, the New York Times open an award for its Who gets to Breathe Clean Air in New Delhi? project that measured personal pollution exposure levels for two children in Delhi, India. New Delhi is one of the most polluted cities in the world. It has 1.8 million people living in slums, a significant proportion of whom are children. Slum dwellers are usually exposed to higher pollution levels than residents living in wealthier areas.

In 2019, the New York Times published its investigative article on air pollution. The project used low-cost sensors such as AirBeam2 (a sensor that measures nitrogen dioxide) and PurpleAir PA-II (an air-quality sensor that measures real-time PM2.5 concentrations) to measure personal pollution levels faced by a child living in a slum versus a child living in an apartment. The story piece together interviews with the respective children and their caregivers, pictures of places they frequented in their daily routine, and comparative data of pollution levels faced by each child during the course of one day. Combined, these elements told a visually compelling story – backed by scientific data – about the inequalities of air pollution in New Delhi.

IMPACT

The New York Times is read by over 5 million people worldwide and is an excellent platform for spreading awareness about how air quality – an invisible threat – affects the lives of two children. The article also highlighted the connections between inequality and exposure to air pollution and how poorer communities while being the most vulnerable to air pollution are also the most disenfranchised to deal with the problem.

CITIES FOR AND WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

PROGRESS AND OUTCOME

By 2022, 95 monitors have been installed mostly outside schools and preschools in 28 cities. Working groups in nine selected cities are in the final stages of developing local action plans and identifying effective interventions to reduce air pollution levels. Interventions being considered include tree planting, no-idling campaigns, traffic calming measures, art murals with environmental messages, green buffers, and low emission zones. The initiative is also in the process of developing and implementing environmental education and citizen science activities in schools and local communities in several participating cities.

One clear action that has been implemented is in Coyhaique, one of the most polluted cities in Chile. Here, public health concerns regarding children’s exposure to elevated levels of pollution during winter months had resulted in the canceling of outdoor physical education classes during these months, resulting in higher childhood obesity rates. However, real-time data from IQ Air sensors installed in schools in the city showed that pollution levels peak at night – when households are using wood-burning stoves – and drop between 10 am and 3 pm – when children are typically in school. This data was used to work with Coyhaique’s local government, health services and schools to identify the best time of the day for children to be outdoors and resume outdoor physical activities during winter months. A local action plan has also been implemented in the San Juan de Lurigancho neighbourhood in Lima, which included enabling safe routes to school, creating a calm zone, painting art murals, paving dirt roads, and conducting environmental education workshops.

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WHY?

Engaging children and youth in growing edible food has many benefits. It can foster good eating habits, diversify diets, increase nutritional intake, improve food security, impart gardening skills, provide a source of income, improve self-confidence and self-worth, instil pride, enable friendships and intergenerational bonding, and improve health and well-being. Gardening can also beautify places and increase children’s access to green spaces, outdoor activities and opportunities for nature-based play and learning.¹

WHAT?

Urban farming or community gardening is an emerging and evolving practice taking place in urban poor communities in cities in Africa and Asia. Communities, including children and youth, have collaborated with a diverse range of partners to test, refine and scale localised solutions to growing produce in what are often extremely constrained spaces which are prone to a range of threats. Some examples of gardening initiatives with children and youth in urban poor settlements include sack farming in Kibera, Nairobi, vertical gardens in an elementary school in a slum in São Paulo, Brazil, and vegetable gardening with families living in slums in Indore, India.

Across these initiatives, there have been multiple returns on initial investments in building local knowledge, technical capacities, testing and infrastructure – with sustained short- and long-term benefits for children and other community groups.

WHO?

A range of stakeholders can initiate and/or play integral roles in urban farming projects. These include grassroots networks, school communities, sectoral agencies (such as health, education, parks, forestry and agriculture, planning and housing), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), local community members (such as women, children and youth), built-environment professionals, community architects, community leaders, and research and academic institutions and thinktanks.

HOW?

Every project can have its own starting point and trajectory, depending on needs, location, and capacities and capabilities. However, there are more chances of success if the following aspects are taken into consideration.

- **INITIATE**
  This can happen through youth organising, national policies and programmes, NGO projects, school programmes, grassroots efforts, local government initiatives, competitions and programmes, to name a few. But regardless of how a project is initiated, it is important to gain buy-in from the local community from the very beginning.

- **INSPIRE**
  Share context-relevant examples of what other gardening project have achieved and how the groups involved have benefitted.

- **ORGANISE**
  Form a core group of children interested in driving the effort and connect them with reliable and supportive mentors who can inspire, encourage and energise them. Secure funds and resources such as land, seeds, fertiliser, tools and training, and establish leadership, maintenance and monitoring roles and activities from the beginning.

- **TEST**
  To see what works best in the local context, engage with experts and invest in prototyping, testing and identifying ideal plant types and optimal ways to grow them.

- **SCALE UP**
  Publicise efforts and share experiences to inspire and support other potentially interested groups.

- **SUSTAIN**
  Ensure there are mechanisms in place for generating revenue to continue efforts and have plans and resources to address challenges. Ensure that gardening experiences are enjoyable for children as play is an essential part of these types of projects. Create networks to exchange knowledge and expertise and invest in developing low-resource solutions for urban farming.
Figure 1 provides a simplified matrix to aid conceptualising, planning, developing and implementing urban farming initiatives with children.

**BENEFITS**
- Gardens become safe play spaces
- Children learn and practice growing and eating healthy food
- Improves health and overall well-being
- Creates a sense of community
- Fosters intergenerational bonding
- Transforms waste-laden open spaces into productive spaces
- Enables income diversification

**CHALLENGES**
- Lack of space
- Water dependency
- Gardens are neglected due to lack of routines and responsibilities
- Lack of sufficient resources and training
- Plants fail to thrive leading to disappointment
- Activities become mundane and children lose interest

**OPPORTUNITIES**
- Connects with relevant programmes and policies
- Collaborates with networks or groups operating in similar contexts
- Leverages technical expertise and resources from relevant organisations such as agriculture departments
- Publicises efforts to create awareness, advocates for more green spaces and attracts funding
- Links up spatially and programmatically with other children’s spaces such as libraries, youth clubs and schools

**THREATS**
- Exposure to environmental pollutants and pests
- Water shortages
- Climate change impacts such as overheating and flooding which can destroy gardens
- Land grabbing and insecurity which could lead to the taking back of land and undermining children’s efforts

**OPTIMISE**
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**MINIMISE**
- Lack of space
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**AN EXAMPLE OF COMMUNITY GARDENS INITIATED BY CHILDREN’S GROUPS**

Key contributor: Suhailey Farzana and Khondaker Hasibul Kabir, Co.Creation Architects, Jhenaidah, Bangladesh

In Jhenaidah, Bangladesh during the pandemic, many urban poor communities were motivated to grow their own food to improve their food security in uncertain times. They began by growing a variety of fruits and vegetables outside their homes. Capitalising on this ground-up interest in growing community-based food, community architects Khondaker Hasibul Kabir and Suhailey Farzana explored other ways to scale-up these efforts.

One idea was to organise a competition for children and youth – who were stuck at home as schools had closed – to improve community spaces. The competition drew several entries from groups of children. A common theme amongst the entries was cleaning up ‘dirty places’ and repurposing them to grow food and flowers. Following the competition, different children’s groups initiated community gardens and farms in their neighbourhoods with some support from the community architects as well as elders, parents, teachers, local authorities, community leaders, environmental experts and local nurseries.

Children’s groups tendencies to their garden where they grow greens, flowers and vegetables in a previously neglected community open space. The fencing was built by the children with help from community mentors and Co.Creation Architects to protect the garden from animals and other threats. © Co.Creation Architects

**ACTION**

Children were able to negotiate access to vacant, abandoned or disused public and private lands with support from their mentors. They transformed the dirtiest of places into cleaner, greener and more productive surroundings and grew a variety of vegetables, greens, flowers and fruit in their gardens. The community architects supported different gardens based on local needs such as access to transport, buying seeds and installing fencing and drainage pipes, using funds from a flexible grant provided by the Community Architects Network.

Once their gardens were flourishing, the children’s gardening groups began to organise knowledge-sharing events. These had a communal atmosphere, where people shared food, experiences and resources such as seeds. The community architects also used these sessions as a platform to connect children and their gardens with environmental experts and local authorities.

Children received freebies such as watering cans, seeds and seedlings to help keep their projects going.
Based on their experiences in creating and enabling community gardens, the community architects and the children's gardening groups created a video to support other interested children's groups to start their own gardens. The video outlines the essential steps involved:

1. Find people who are interested in gardening in your community. Include children, elders, mentors, teachers and parents.
2. Find a suitable place to garden such as dumpsites, open space outside homes or vacant lands by riversides.
3. Gather gardening materials and plants such as seeds, tools, containers and watering cans.
4. Share the responsibility of gardening. Create a rota to assign and rotate duties. This also helps to maintain accountability.
5. Design and landscape the area around your garden to support play, rest, gathering and learning.
6. Build relationships to foster communication and interaction between different gardening groups to share resources and experiences.
7. Create a citywide network by inviting and including local authorities, technical experts, teachers and other relevant groups.
8. Celebrate and publicise the efforts of gardening groups through community picnics, local media, large banners and conferences.
9. Share fresh produce with friends and neighbours and use the surplus to generate an income, which will help to sustain your gardening project.

Enabling factors included regular mentorship from adults in the community (teachers, parents, elders or other community champions for children), locating gardens close to youth clubs, libraries and schools, having regular picnics and sharing food as part of gardening activities, gaining recognition of their efforts from the local government, publicising children's efforts through posters and other media, and forming networks to help share gardening tips and resources such as seeds.

OUTCOMES

Over 40 gardens were initiated and nurtured by around 100 children and youth. Not all of the projects were sustained as children lost interest or returned to school. But many still continue to be cared for and are thriving plazas for growing vegetables, fruit and flowers, children's play, outdoor learning and community gatherings. The children's gardening groups have earned the nickname 'Green Energy' from local well-wishers.

At a recent knowledge-sharing event organised by Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) with other relevant partners in Dhaka, a child gardener from Jhenaidah summed up their network's ambition:

"Clean every little space found and turn them into beautiful gardens to create an example for future generations and inspire them to make Bangladesh beautiful."

WHY?

Solid waste in low-income cities in Africa and Asia, where 90% of urbanisation is most likely to occur over the next two decades, is projected to double in the next 15 to 20 years. But compared to high-income countries, cities in low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) have limited capacities to manage municipal solid waste.

In low-income areas or informal settlements where residents lack access to basic waste-collection services, uncollected waste becomes a public health hazard – with a particularly big impact on children. Foul odours make living environments unpleasant while the open burning of waste worsens the already-poor air quality. Accumulated waste blocks drains and sewers, contributing to localised flooding during heavy rains and extreme weather events. It also attracts insects, mosquitoes and rodents which expose children to a range of health hazards. A report from the World Bank shows that waste-collection rates in sub-Saharan African cities is on average 43% and much of this ends up in open dumpsites. In addition, e-waste generation has risen by 21% globally in the last five years. People and in particular children living, working or playing near e-waste recycling centres are exposed to a wide range of serious health risks, including those engaged in informal e-waste recycling.

A UN-Habitat household survey conducted in Nairobi and Kampala showed a stark contract between slum and non-slums in their access to basic waste-collection services. In non-slum areas, around two-thirds of the population have access, while more than 90% of those living in slums do not. Children from informal settlements...
CITIES FOR AND WITH CHILDREN AND YOUTH

and slum communities are disproportionately exposed to health hazards caused by uncollected waste and in cities like Dhaka in Bangladesh, children comprise up to 50% of informal waste pickers. Living near and sorting through waste exposes children to a range of health, psychological and social risks including but not limited to skin infections, upper respiratory problems, cancer, dropping out of schools and violence – all of which have short and long-term implications for children’s health, well-being and ability to thrive.4

WHAT?
To drive sustainable living and urbanisation, it is essential for solid-waste management to be equally a concern for individuals, communities and private and public-sector organisations.

HOW?
Like any other movement, starting and keeping alive a civic movement to clean, reduce, recycle or treat solid waste accumulating in cities needs visionary changemakers with qualities such as perseverance, determination and charisma. Here are some key aspects to consider for initiating and driving a civic action movement to address solid-waste management in your city or town:

ENVISION AND INSPIRE
As a group or individual you must be extremely passionate about the cause you identify. Pick an aspect of waste management in your area that you can most connect with and ideate a vision and mission with both short- and long-term goals.

PUBLICISE EFFORTS
Use social media, traditional media and word of mouth to create a buzz and generate momentum for action.

SORT, RECYCLE AND UPCYCLE
Try out different scalable methods, approaches and practices that will help you achieve your mission and goals. These can range from advocacy efforts to stop your city from using single-use plastics, to picking up a broom to clean and collect waste from city streets and public spaces, to mapping and tracking waste employing citizen science.

COLLABORATE
Connect and engage with municipal agencies and local schools, universities, CBOs, NGOs and global youth networks with shared or complementary goals to collaborate, share knowledge and resources.

ACT AND EXPERIMENT
Try out different scalable methods, approaches and practices that will help you achieve your mission and goals. These can range from advocacy efforts to stop your city from using single-use plastics, to picking up a broom to clean and collect waste from city streets and public spaces, to mapping and tracking waste employing citizen science.

STRATEGISE
Keep the message, process and action simple. To generate a citywide or nationwide movement, your call for action must be easily understandable and doable by the population at large.

DEMONSTRATE
The most powerful way to inspire action is to show transformation. Demonstrate repeatedly the benefits of the actions you propose to personal, local and institutional networks.

MONITOR, EVALUATE, REFINE AND COMMUNICATE
Measure, document and communicate successes and failures. Every movement has its ups and downs. What is important is to constantly document and understand their underlying causes to refine future actions. Sharing this information with other like-minded groups can also be valuable.

SORT, RECYCLE AND UPCYCLE
Connect with relevant groups to sort, recycle and upcycle waste at source using safe and effective ways.

INFORM POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES
Share your experiences and insights with relevant government agencies. The grounded knowledge gained in civic-led action can be valuable to shaping more responsive government programs and policies.

WHO?
To be clear, waste management is a government responsibility. However, youth-led action has proven to be particularly effective in supporting and enabling civic action movements to manage waste at scale where government action is inadequate. Other stakeholders who can play integral roles include community leaders, women and children, school communities, grassroots networks, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs), media networks, research and academic institutions and thinktanks.

WHERE?
Civic action movements to enable and create awareness around sustainable waste management can be led by governments (as in the case of India’s Swachh Bharat Mission) or by local civic champions (such as BD Clean in Bangladesh and the Bye Bye Plastic Bags team in Bali, Indonesia) or youth groups in informal settlements such as the Dandora Transformation League and Slums Going Clean and Green in Nairobi, Kenya. These efforts were spurred by young individuals and youth groups in cities and operate by inspiring and recruiting a large volunteer base and raising their awareness around waste-management and recycling to clean up cities, reduce plastic waste and transform waste-laden spaces into productive communal and public spaces. They also help diversify and improve livelihood opportunities.

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BANGLADESH AND KENYA: TWO EXAMPLES OF YOUTH-LED WASTE MANAGEMENT

1. BD CLEAN, BANGLADESH: A NATIONWIDE WASTE-MANAGEMENT INITIATIVE

Key contributor: Rashed Mostafa. BD Clean

BD Clean is a youth-led waste-management initiative that aims to create a clean Bangladesh. Its mission is to educate and inspire a large volunteer base to participate in regular waste collection and cleanliness initiatives. BD Clean operates by engaging local volunteers to collect waste in their communities, organizing large events in Dhaka to promote awareness and advocacy, and partnering with schools and campuses to encourage cleanliness and sustainability.

Prior to every weekend, BD Clean members scope out communities where there is a high concentration of waste and makeshift shelters. They then post the event’s date and gathering place on their local Facebook page. On the day, volunteers arrive with self-bought brooms and bags and they work through the night to clear waste from a 1.5km stretch of a major street.

2. DANDORA TRANSFORMATION LEAGUE IN NAIROBI: TRANSFORMING WASTE-LADEN SPACE INTO PRODUCTIVE PUBLIC SPACE

ACTION

Dandora is an extremely large informal settlement in Nairobi. It is located next to the city’s main dumping grounds which receive over 1,500 metric tonnes of waste every day. A significant proportion of the settlement’s population living close to the dumpsite are routinely affected by the toxins and fumes emitted from the site. The settlement itself has been beset by problems of youth unemployment, violence, crumbling infrastructure and non-existent municipal waste-collection service since the 1970s. But in 2014, Charles Gachanga, a resident who was born and raised in Dandora, gathered two of his friends and decided to change the narrative of his home and neighbourhood. They used resource-efficient, quick, and low-cost placemaking methods to transform a housing court (an open area surrounded by housing) from an unsafe waste-laden space into a green, clean, sociable and productive communal space called the Mustard-Seed Courts.

This proved to be a successful model of physical and social transformation and its success led Charles and his friends to partner with a local foundation to set up the Dandora Transformation League. To scale up their efforts, they ran three Changing Faces competitions in Dandora. Following this, in 2018 Changing Faces became a citywide competition under the aegis of the Public Space Network. Youth groups have been challenged and given the tools to transform waste-laden spaces into thriving and productive public and communal spaces. Youth groups are also encouraged to use these transformed settings to generate an income, through enterprises such as car washing, hiring out skates to children and urban agriculture. In addition, they receive payments from local community members for maintaining these spaces for regular use.

IMPACT

Between 2014 and 2019, Dandora Transformation League’s Changing Faces competitions have led to the renovation and rehabilitation of over 200 waste-laden and disused open spaces within and beyond informal settlements involving over 4,000 participants and over 200 youth groups. Since the initiative began in Dandora, violence has decreased and more youth have been productively and gainfully employed. Children and families now have safe, secure clean and green spaces for play, recreation, socialising and celebration. And all of this directly contributes to children’s and young people’s health, well-being, safety and security. Since 2018 these efforts have been scaled up citywide with similar success.
YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN URBAN GOVERNANCE

WHY?
Youth aged 15 to 24 make up 16% of the global population. In 2019, the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA) estimated the global youth population to be 1.2 billion and projected it to peak at 1.4 billion by 2065. Much of this growth will take place in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). In sub-Saharan Africa for example, the youth population is projected to increase by 89% by 2050.

However, youth across the world are often stigmatised as ‘troublemakers’ and face a range of issues such as increased exposure to violence, unemployment, a lack of or poor-quality education, and a lack of access to public spaces that cater to their needs. In poor urban settlements, evidence shows that youth are especially vulnerable as they are exposed to violent crime, gangs, alcohol and drugs, targeted by police, and turned away from jobs because of where they live. Empowering and enabling disenfranchised youth to participate in local governance can be one way to communicate the needs of youth to local officials, develop relevant youth-sensitive programmes and policies, and build trust between youth and local officials.

In the international development world, it is increasingly recognised that youth, as a group, have the ability to channel a unique combination of idealism, energy and positivity to advocate for and demand action for a just, inclusive and sustainable world. A recent global survey by UNICEF involving 21,000 respondents from two age cohorts – aged 15–25 and aged 40 and older – shows that youth are 50% more positive about the future of the world, more inclusive and global in their outlook, and believe more in international cooperation as compared to the older generation. It also revealed that 83% of youth in low- and lower-middle-income countries who were aware of climate change called for increased government action to address it. Meanwhile, 58% believed it is important for political leaders to listen to children and youth.

Engaging youth meaningfully and valuing their opinions upholds their rights as citizens. When youth are actively engaged and supported in shaping their cities, they become more engaged citizens and potentially future changemakers. They develop a sense of attachment to places and people, build social relations, learn a range of skills, engage in positive action, improve their chances for employment, and most importantly provide a critical perspective of their environments from their point of view.

WHAT?
Youth advocacy, participation and action can be self-directed, as is evident in various examples in this guide. It can also be enabled by different stakeholders including international agencies, national and local governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), community-based organisations (CBOs) and grassroots organisations. In Brazil, UNICEF has initiated and supported a multi-region rights-based, indicator-driven participatory governance and action programme called the Municipal Seal of Approval. The programme requires establishing Adolescent Citizen Groups and enabling them to identify local concerns, engage in dialogue with policymakers, inform municipal action plans, and develop and translate ideas into action.

UNICEF’s Voices of Youth, C40 Cities Global Youth and Mayors Forum, and the Child Friendly Cities Initiative are other established platforms and models for enabling youth voices to inform local governance.

Urban poor grassroots federations in cities in Asia and Africa also have youth federations as integral members of their organisations and these federations have been instrumental in carrying out local surveys and mapping of informal settlements, using media and data-driven strategies to advocate for their rights and access to basic services, and raising awareness on local health and environmental issues.

The two case-study examples we present below are initiatives that allow urban youth in lower- and middle-income neighbourhoods to engage with local governments on issues that concern them.

WHO?
United Nations agencies, children’s organisations, local and national governments, NGOs, community leaders, grassroots organisations, academia and research thinktanks are some stakeholders who can enable youth to actively engage with local social and environmental issues and advocate for change.
There are several resources available to enable youth participation and action such as the Her City Toolkit by UN Habitat, UNICEF’s Engaged and Heard! and Save the Children’s Youth Participation Best Practices Toolkit. Here are some key aspects to consider.

**ENABLE**
Recognise, promote and enable youth engagement and action as core processes of urban intervention efforts.

**ADVOCATE**
Advocate using inspiring examples to establish formal and informal inclusive youth engagement processes to inform and advance local change.

**ESTABLISH STRUCTURES**
Collaborate with key stakeholders such as municipal governments and politicians to set up decentralised representative municipal youth councils. Set up formal and informal mechanisms to facilitate youth participation and action in developing policies, programmes and interventions that concern them.

**BE INCLUSIVE**
Ensure that marginalised youth are represented in formal and informal youth participation structures to inform local policy, programmes and projects relevant to youth.

**CAPACITATE AND EMPOWER**
Build capacities of participating youth through trainings, skills workshops and hands-on interventions to develop their competencies for action research, advocacy work, citizen journalism, resource mobilisation and management, group organisation, and engaging with key stakeholders.

**ENABLE ACTION**
Support youth groups to research local issues, prioritise areas for action, and advocate and act for change that is beneficial to all children and youth and other marginalised groups.

**GO DIGITAL**
Employ digital tools to attract youth participation as well as facilitate effective data collection and analysis.

**LEVERAGE SOCIAL MEDIA**
Facilitate the safe use of social media to promote youth groups and their activities, attract other young people to participate in local action, and collaborate in dialogue with key stakeholders.

**FACILITATE DIALOGUE**
Facilitate collaborative, synergistic and cooperative dialogue and action between youth groups and local government authorities.

**APPRECIATE AND PUBLICISE**
Recognise and appreciate the efforts of youth groups by celebrating their achievements with local communities, presenting meaningful awards, and publicising their efforts.

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**TWO EXAMPLES OF YOUTH ADVOCACY AND PARTICIPATION IN CREATING MORE INCLUSIVE CITIES**

### 1. YOUTH RESOLVE INITIATIVE LED BY WORLD VISION AND PARTNERS IN LEBANON

**Key contributors:** Rim Khatem and Ramzi Zoueini, [World Vision](#)

**ACTION**
Youth Resolve in Lebanon is a project led by World Vision with local and international partners. The initiative aims to enable and capacitate local youth to assess, communicate and act on local needs concerning all youth in partnership with local governments. As part of the initiative, official municipal youth committees have been set up in three municipalities in Lebanon. Youth have been trained through skills-building workshops and training sessions to engage local and refugee youth of all genders, backgrounds and abilities to better understand local needs, assess local environments and prioritise areas for action.

In Sin el Fil municipality (a city suburb east of Beirut), the youth committee was set up in partnership with the local government in 2015. Between 2018 and 2019, youth committee members used an online app-based survey, focus group discussions, and interviews with municipal officials and other relevant stakeholders to understand young people’s local needs, experiences, and priorities with regard to public safety, public transportation and public space. The surveys engaged 847 youth aged 15 to 30 years, 15% of whom were refugees, from low-, middle- and high-income neighbourhoods.

The participatory action research revealed that 68% of youth have witnessed violence in some form (e.g., physical, sexual or verbal) in their neighbourhoods and attribute the lack of police presence, unsafe road conditions and theft as key issues that undermine safety in their neighbourhood. Other concerns included poor street lighting, presence of substance abuse, the lack of appropriately located bus stops and congested, unclean and overcrowded public transport.

**IMPACT**
Based on survey inputs and interviews and discussions with local youth and taking into consideration six key criteria (impact, inclusiveness, sustainability, resources, practical feasibility and livelihoods) youth committee members made several recommendations and proposed specific interventions. These included:

- Establishing a hotline for emergency response by the municipality to enable better communication between neighbourhood residents and municipality officials to address safety (roads, lighting, theft and policing).
- Building micro bus stations to increase connectivity in different neighbourhoods of the city. These stations could include entertainment elements such as trivia boards and access to Wi-Fi to make the waiting time less boring for youth.
- Installing fixed sports equipment in different public spaces with the required security measures to attract youth and encourage them to practice sports.
- Starting a pop-up urban cinema/performance station within green spaces to attract youth and other residents to these spaces and create more room for interaction.

From these recommendations, several interventions were implemented. These included youth-friendly hubs in public spaces such as safe places where young people could meet as well as a mobile app, which allowed city authorities to provide information to citizens while also enabling youth and other citizen groups to communicate with city authorities about protection issues faced by them, such as violence or power outages affecting street lighting. The youth committees used different tools such as graffiti art to promote the mobile app.

Youth Resolve is currently in Phase Two of operations and by 2023 expects to create 17 youth committees across different municipalities in Lebanon. The committees will engage and train over 200 youth in relevant youth-led local area assessment skills, engage and train over 500 youth as playmakers to refurbish public spaces, facilitate sports programmes, and create a National Youth Platform and a National Youth Advocacy plan.

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*A mobile app developed in partnership with youth to address local safety issues in Sin el Fil municipality and graffiti art created by local youth to promote the app to citizens. © World Vision Lebanon*

This research initiative cost US$15,000. The municipality was an active partner supporting the youth throughout the process, hosting their meetings within the municipal building, providing logistical support in the community and co-funding the quick-impact project selected for implementation.
2. AGAMIR SAVAR: CHILD AND YOUTH ADVOCACY AND PARTICIPATION IN URBAN RESILIENCE, BANGLADESH

Key contributors: Obidul Islam, Simon Rohman and Mahmuda Hoque, Save the Children Bangladesh

**ACTION**

Savar is a municipality in the Greater Dhaka metropolitan area with a population of over 1.4 million residents. In August 2021, as part of Save the Children’s long-running urban resilience project Proyash in Savar, Bangladesh, around 40 to 50 children and youth from six vulnerable wards in the municipality were engaged in initiating, running and maintaining a Facebook group called Agamir Savar (meaning Future Savar).

The Agamir Savar group uses the platform to communicate young people’s priorities to relevant stakeholders and the population at large and to mobilise local stakeholders. It was initiated by Save the Children with their local implementing partner the Social and Economic Enhancement Programme (SEEP). Facebook is extremely popular with local children and youth as well as adults, so the aim was to leverage the social media platform to raise awareness about local social and environmental issues faced by them as well as other community groups on a day-to-day basis and to ramp up child and youth engagement around local urban resilience issues.

Several workshops have been organised to build the capacities of children and youth around using social media safely and proactively, including how to maintain a Facebook group and create and moderate relevant content. Clusters have also been organised to raise awareness through the Facebook group on a range of local issues such as road safety, air pollution, waterlogging, water pollution and waste management.

**IMPACT**

Over the past eight months, children and youth have regularly posted to Agamir Savar about relevant local environmental and social issues as well as urban risks and vulnerabilities using either their own devices or their parent’s devices. They have organised an orientation session for local government members to introduce them to and acquaint them with the social media platform so they can refer to this online group to access the opinions of local children and youth. Some of the issues raised by the Agamir Savar online group – such as deteriorating road conditions and dangerous open drains – have since been acknowledged and rectified by the local government. Agamir Savar members have appreciated these changes and have posted images of these repaired spaces to their online group.

Since it began, Agamir Savar has grown in membership from 40 to 1,300 members mostly through children and youth as well as Save the Children and SEEP promoting the Facebook group to their local networks. A citywide children and youth photography competition on urban resilience issues has also attracted scores of members to post to and join the Agamir Savar group. The platform is now being further leveraged as an advocacy tool by local children and youth, with Save the Children training child and youth journalists to run campaigns, conduct assessments on protecting water bodies from pollution, and connect and promote dialogue among a broad range of stakeholders around urban resilience issues.

**WHY?**

Globally over 40% of children – 350 million – below primary-school-entry age need childcare but do not have access to it. According to the Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development, nurturing early care (which includes good health, optimal nutrition, security and safety, opportunities for early learning and responsive caregiving) supports children’s growth and development, protects against the effects of adversity, and produces lifelong and inter-generational benefits for health, productivity and social cohesion. It is also seen to reduce poverty, boost economies and promote more peaceful and sustainable communities. Yet working parents in low-income communities in cities are increasingly having to rely on poorly equipped and managed informal childcare centres, which are often overcrowded and lack basic infrastructure and services.

Enabling and supporting affordable and scalable quality early childhood care environments can provide vulnerable children in low-income communities with a healthy start in life and protect their rights to survive and thrive. At the same time, these care environments support parents to earn a livelihood, do daily chores and take care of their personal and social needs. All of these factors contribute to decreased stress and more nurturing home-based care.
Ideally, childcare centres are safe, secure and hygienic environments with access to basic services such as water and sanitation. They should provide regular responsive nurturing care, nutritious food, and age-appropriate play and learning activities. However, universal access to childcare is a challenge even in high-income nations. Low- and middle-income countries (LMIC) seldom prioritise universal access to childcare at the national level.

There have been some efforts such as India’s Integrated Child Development Services programme as well as national-level programmes in Chile and Colombia to universalise access to quality childcare. However, challenges such as the lack of financing, appropriate quality standards, human resources and cross-sectoral collaboration continue to undermine the scaling up of efforts. To fill the gap of access to childcare in LMICs and address the specific needs of childcare provision in low-income communities, some promising scalable and cost-effective models have been developed by private sector organisations. These include early care interventions and programmes supported by Mobile Creches in India, Kidogo and Tinytotos in East Africa, and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) in South Africa, two of which are described as short cases in this guide. Many of these interventions offer health, nutrition, stimulation, care and learning services as part of their programming and are modelled to be affordable and accessible to working mothers in low-income settlements. However, there is need for better monitoring, research and evaluation and outcome data to better understand the full potential of these interventions.

Governments, civil society organisations (CSOs) and social entrepreneurs can all play a significant role in ramping up provision of affordable and quality early childhood care provision in low-income communities.

**WHAT?**

Most low-income neighbourhoods in urban areas have some form of childcare. One of the best entry points is to recognise existing childcare initiatives, improve their quality, and scale up provision. Here are some steps to consider:

**LOCATE**

Identify and prioritise low-income communities or workplaces such as construction sites and factories employing migrant workers and where access to quality affordable childcare is lacking.

**PARTNER AND STRATEGISE**

Connect and collaborate with local early childhood development (ECD) centres, local government departments, universities, parent communities, local non-governmental organisations (NGOs), local employers, and community-based organisations (CBOs) to understand the needs and gaps with regard to childcare within the community, to identify risks and the barriers to quality affordable childcare, to negotiate a workable ECD strategy for the neighbourhood or workplace, and secure funds.

**WHO?**

Recruit and train local youth, grandparents, mothers and interested local residents where cost-effective models have been developed by private sector organisations. These include early care interventions and programmes supported by Mobile Creches in India, Kidogo and Tinytotos in East Africa, and Violence Prevention through Urban Upgrading (VPUU) in South Africa, two of which are described as short cases in this guide. Many of these interventions offer health, nutrition, stimulation, care and learning services as part of their programming and are modelled to be affordable and accessible to working mothers in low-income settlements. However, there is need for better monitoring, research and evaluation and outcome data to better understand the full potential of these interventions.

Governments, civil society organisations (CSOs) and social entrepreneurs can all play a significant role in ramping up provision of affordable and quality early childhood care provision in low-income communities.

**HOW?**

**IDEATE, PLAN AND CREATE**

Develop an ECD programme by collaborating with national and local ECD thinktanks and experts as well as drawing on local knowledge, attitudes and practices. Ensure the programme is open for at least eight hours/long enough time to allow mothers to work and provides a comprehensive programme that addresses health, nutrition, early learning and care, and developmental needs of children.

**BUILD AND EQUIP**

Create a childcare centre in a safe place easily accessible to children and caregivers. Ensure the centre has a stable structure, access to basic and quality services such as water, electricity, sanitation and waste management, good ventilation, child-friendly interiors and furniture which are easy to maintain, age-appropriate and durable play and learning materials, and an outdoor play space where possible.

**IMPLEMENT AND EMPOWER**

Recruit and train local youth, grandparents, mothers and interested local residents where relevant in delivering the programme. Include regular upskilling sessions and create a support platform for trained facilitators for sharing experiences and challenges and finding solutions.

**ADVOCATE**

Campaign and advocate for ECD services within the neighbourhood and use outreach strategies to engage and attract caregivers and children to the programme.

**SYNERGISE**

Consider coordinating with other services such as healthcare, well-baby and pre- and ante-natal care services, immunisation, reproductive care, adult literacy and livelihood training so that childcare centres become a physical hub for an array of support for mothers and young children.

**FOSTER LOCAL SUPPORT**

Enable and support the creation of a community-based support group comprising parents, grandparents, interested neighbours and community leaders to share experiences and knowledge around locally relevant good practices for childcare.

**MONITOR AND EVALUATE**

Develop and put in place a rigorous research, monitoring and evaluation framework that regularly assesses locally appropriate care standards, quality of environments, teachers’ abilities, and children’s health and development and access to care. Use findings to make necessary adjustments to the ECD strategy.

**SCALE UP**

Once a successful model has been established, develop a scaling-up strategy to improve access to ECD services in other neighbourhoods in need.
1. MOBILE CRECHES IN INDIA

**ACTION**

Mobile Creches (MC) was initiated in 1969 by two women in Delhi to provide care for young children whose parents worked at a construction site. Over the last five decades, the two-woman team has grown to include several professionals, health, education and nutrition experts, managing staff and trained community-based crèche workers spread across several cities in India. At present, based on their experiences from years of trialling childcare interventions and programmes at construction sites and urban poor settlements, MC has developed five evidence-based models through which it reaches thousands of underserved children.

At construction sites, MC uses three models of care. They include the MC-run demonstration model, where MC sets up crèches at construction sites, trains crèche workers and provides eight hours of programming six days a week addressing health, education, nutrition and developmental needs of enrolled children. The model builds community awareness about the importance of early care through home visits, street theatre and by setting up local advocacy groups. It also pilots new ideas and generates new evidence to support programming across its models.

Models 2 and 3 (the tripartite model and the employer-run model) are run at construction sites. With the tripartite model, MC engages and trains local NGOs working with women and children to run childcare services at construction sites by providing technical and financial support until the NGO partner is capable of running the centre on its own. With the employer-run model, employers at construction sites set up and run crèches. MC provides technical support for setting up the model, training, periodic supervision, and enabling community awareness and sensitisation about ECD issues. As of 2019, MC was running three demonstration centres in informal settlements and six community-based crèches. Models 4 and 5 are funded fully by MC, whereas with models 1, 2 and 3 costs are shared between the employers at the site and MC.

Across the models, MC aims to provide or support comprehensive childcare addressing health, nutrition, early learning and care, and the developmental needs of children. It invests heavily in training its childcare workers as they are seen to be fundamental to upholding the quality of the programme, linking caregivers and children to health, protection and education services, and enabling better childcare practices in homes. MC has developed a set of common quality standards and guidelines to guide crèche set up and management, safety and protection protocols, mandatory infrastructure requirements, training processes and learning materials, across all the centres.

**OUTCOMES AND IMPACT**

Over the last 50 years, MC has reached close to a million children, trained 6,500 women as childcare workers, established or supported over 1,000 childcare centres, networked with over 100 partners across government, civil society and corporate sectors, and engaged with over 250 building agencies. It also co-founded the Forum for Creche & Childcare Services – a national advocacy platform comprising of 50 member organisations advocating for better childcare options for marginalised communities through campaigns, grassroots movements, policy advocacy, and interventions and research.

In 2019, 83% of children in Model 1 centres maintained or improved their nutritional status, and all children received full immunisation. MC has also informed national policies related to early childhood care and development to ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach and content, and has played a leading role in ensuring that the childcare needs of informal workers in the construction sector were represented in the Building and Other Construction Workers Act 1996, which calls for provision of crèches on construction sites.

where community-based organisations (formed by women who are trained by MC) run crèches in their neighbourhood. As of 2019, MC was running three demonstration centres in informal settlements and six community-based crèches. Models 4 and 5 are funded fully by MC, whereas with models 1, 2 and 3 costs are shared between the employers at the site and MC.

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**SCALABLE EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTIONS IN LOW-INCOME COMMUNITIES IN INDIA AND SOUTH AFRICA**

**ACTION**

Mobile Creches (MC) was initiated in 1969 by two women in Delhi to provide care for young children whose parents worked at a construction site. Over the last five decades, the two-woman team has grown to include several professionals, health, education and nutrition experts, managing staff and trained community-based crèche workers spread across several cities in India. At present, based on their experiences from years of trialling childcare interventions and programmes at construction sites and urban poor settlements, MC has developed five evidence-based models through which it reaches thousands of underserved children.

At construction sites, MC uses three models of care. They include the MC-run demonstration model, where MC sets up crèches at construction sites, trains crèche workers and provides eight hours of programming six days a week addressing health, education, nutrition and developmental needs of enrolled children. The model builds community awareness about the importance of early care through home visits, street theatre and by setting up local advocacy groups. It also pilots new ideas and generates new evidence to support programming across its models.

Models 2 and 3 (the tripartite model and the employer-run model) are run at construction sites. With the tripartite model, MC engages and trains local NGOs working with women and children to run childcare services at construction sites by providing technical and financial support until the NGO partner is capable of running the centre on its own. With the employer-run model, employers at construction sites set up and run crèches. MC provides technical support for setting up the model, training, periodic supervision, and enabling community awareness and sensitisation about ECD issues. As of 2019, MC was running three demonstration centres in informal settlements and six community-based crèches. Models 4 and 5 are funded fully by MC, whereas with models 1, 2 and 3 costs are shared between the employers at the site and MC.

Across the models, MC aims to provide or support comprehensive childcare addressing health, nutrition, early learning and care, and the developmental needs of children. It invests heavily in training its childcare workers as they are seen to be fundamental to upholding the quality of the programme, linking caregivers and children to health, protection and education services, and enabling better childcare practices in homes. MC has developed a set of common quality standards and guidelines to guide crèche set up and management, safety and protection protocols, mandatory infrastructure requirements, training processes and learning materials, across all the centres.

**OUTCOMES AND IMPACT**

Over the last 50 years, MC has reached close to a million children, trained 6,500 women as childcare workers, established or supported over 1,000 childcare centres, networked with over 100 partners across government, civil society and corporate sectors, and engaged with over 250 building agencies. It also co-founded the Forum for Creche & Childcare Services – a national advocacy platform comprising of 50 member organisations advocating for better childcare options for marginalised communities through campaigns, grassroots movements, policy advocacy, and interventions and research.

In 2019, 83% of children in Model 1 centres maintained or improved their nutritional status, and all children received full immunisation. MC has also informed national policies related to early childhood care and development to ensure a holistic and comprehensive approach and content, and has played a leading role in ensuring that the childcare needs of informal workers in the construction sector were represented in the Building and Other Construction Workers Act 1996, which calls for provision of crèches on construction sites.
WHY?
In 2020 globally, 149.2 million children under the age of 5 years were stunted, 45.4 million wasted and 38.9 million overweight. 1 Of the 5 million under-5 deaths in 2020, nutrition-related factors contributed to 45%. 2 In underserved urban poor settlements, limited access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), poor housing and infrastructure, inadequate childcare and poverty contribute to higher rates of child malnutrition and related morbidity and mortality than in more well-to-do neighbourhoods. 3

While malnutrition has been more prominent in rural areas, it is becoming increasingly an urban poor issue – one that demands urgent and coordinated action, complicated as it is by inadequate sanitation. One in three stunted children lives in an urban area and it is increasingly recognised that malnutrition and stunting in young children can be intimately tied to a chronic state of intestinal infection related to contaminated environments. 4 Additionally, climate change-related issues such as rising temperatures, heat islands and frequent flooding along with a lack of access to fresh and nutritious food in urban poor settlements further raise the risk of severe and acute malnutrition for young children in these settings. 5

The effects of malnutrition, particularly in the first 1,000 days of life from conception to a child’s second birthday, are often irreversible and can include poor physical and cognitive development, later manifested in poor school achievement and higher school drop-out rates, with life-long and intergenerational consequences. 6

During the recent pandemic, when government-issued safety and prevention measures forced childcare centres to close temporarily, several informal childcare owners who depended on monthly fees were close to shutting operations permanently as they could not afford to maintain staff or the facilities. During this time, VPUU actively identified vulnerable ECD centres and parents with young children and worked with strategic partners to extend digital community care vouchers to 13,500 parents of children aged six and below and to 2,156 ECD teachers to buy essential supplies such as food. Additionally, VPUU provided COVID-19 compliance care hampers of sanitisers and personal protective equipment (PPE) to 264 formal and informal crèches in eight neighbourhoods. VPUU also extended free Wi-Fi to ECD centres and nearby localities so teachers could access digital content free of cost for lesson planning and supporting other ECD activities. All of this allowed informal childcare centres to weather the pandemic, reopen their premises observing stringent safety and prevention protocols put in place by the government, and offer much-needed childcare services for children and relief for parents in these settlements. 8

FURTHER READING
The World Health Organization in collaboration with partners has developed the Nurturing Care Handbook and created a repository for additional resources for enabling early childhood care globally.


OUTCOMES AND IMPACT
By 2017, VPUU had established and activated 15 emthonjenis in Monwabisi Park and Lotus Park and has reached 840 children and interacted with 2,015 parents through its ECD outreach efforts. VPUU sees these interventions as supporting citizenship and lifelong learning, building community social capital, enabling safe communities and improving quality of life for all residents.

On implementing the Unlimited Child Curriculum, first aid and other relevant topics for informal childcare-centre staff. Additionally, through its Social Development Fund, VPUU has supported ECD centres to purchase learning materials and other equipment and provided Enviro Loo toilets to each of the centres that have space in their yard. Another ongoing initiative is connecting ECD centres and emthonjeni staff with the resources to set up and grow small gardens with healthy and nutritious food (where space is available) to ensure children have direct access to healthy food options and also have the opportunity to participate in gardening activities. 8

A one year old ready to be weighed at a Save the Children health centre in Mumbai, India. © Rajan Zaveri – Save the Children

A one year old ready to be weighed at a Save the Children health centre in Mumbai, India. © Rajan Zaveri – Save the Children
UNDERSTAND LOCAL CONTEXT

Child malnutrition is best addressed though a data-driven, collaborative, multistakeholder and community-based approach. It cannot be emphasised enough that lack of access to adequate WASH – a leading cause of enteric infectious diseases in young children – can strip any benefits of nutrition-relevant programmes need to accompany nutrition-specific interventions such as IYCF will fail to have long-term effects in reducing malnutrition in young children. Below, we describe three IYCF interventions to improve children’s nutritional status in informal settlements in India and in the Za’atari refugee camp in Jordan.

WHO?

International agencies, children’s organisations, national and local governments, civil society organisations, academia and research thinktanks, and local communities can all play important roles in setting and furthering the agenda to reduce child malnutrition. They can support policy advocacy, secure funds, develop and test locally relevant strategies, build a strong evidence base, monitor and evaluate interventions and strategies, support the scaling up of successful strategies, engage local communities in Community-based Management of Acute Malnutrition, (CMAM) and share knowledge.

HOW?

Child malnutrition is best addressed though a data-driven, collaborative, multistakeholder and community-based approach. It cannot be emphasised enough that lack of access to adequate WASH – a leading cause of enteric infectious diseases in young children – can strip any benefits that nutrition-specific interventions such as IYCF may have and perpetuate the vicious cycle of infection and malnutrition. Therefore, nutrition-relevant programmes need to accompany nutrition-specific interventions for sustained improvements in child malnutrition in urban poor settlements. That said, here are some key aspects to consider with regard to implementing nutrition-specific interventions:

- SELECT LOCATIONS
  Use data to identify neighbourhoods in cities with high under-5 malnutrition rates to implement interventions. If this is unavailable, advocate with government agencies and collaborate with academia to collect disaggregated child malnutrition data by ward or neighbourhood levels.

- UNDERSTAND LOCAL CONTEXT
  Use surveys, interviews and group discussions to assess local barriers to child health and nutrition.

SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE

Save the Children India’s Against the Silent Emergency initiative, Save the Children in India launched a three-month nutrition campaign in Arvalli Gram Panchayat in the slums of South Delhi. The project aimed to address the problem of child malnutrition in the area.

- TRAINING CAREGIVERS TO TARGET MALNUTRITION
  - Caregivers were trained on the importance of nutrition and how to provide nutritious foods to children. They were also sensitised around nutrition issues and the importance of nutrition-rich foods. Pregnant and lactating women (PLWs) were also trained on maternal nutrition and how to promote breastfeeding.
  - Children were also trained on the importance of nutrition and how to provide nutritious foods to children.
  - Community members were trained on the importance of nutrition and how to promote breastfeeding.

- PROVIDE AND TREAT
  - Caregivers and children were provided with information on how to prepare nutritious foods and how to promote breastfeeding.
  - Caregivers and children were also provided with information on how to prepare nutritious foods and how to promote breastfeeding.

- MONITOR, EVALUATE AND REFINE
  - Caregivers and children were provided with information on how to prepare nutritious foods and how to promote breastfeeding.
  - Caregivers and children were also provided with information on how to prepare nutritious foods and how to promote breastfeeding.

Three Interventions for Reducing Malnutrition in Young Children in Vulnerable Communities

1. Training Caregivers to Target Malnutrition Interventions in an Informal Settlement in India

Key contributor: Dr Tanvi Chauhan, Save the Children India

ACTION

As part of the Vandre Healthy India Project on Malnutrition: Fight Against the Silent Emergency initiative, Save the Children in India has been implementing IYCF interventions between 2020 and 2022. The aim is to tackle undernutrition among young children in an informal settlement in South Delhi. The intervention has included screening all children aged below 5 for malnutrition and providing caregivers and children with information on how to source low-cost nutrition-rich foods locally. It also enables caregivers of SAM/MAM children to improve home-based nutrition through conducting information and education sessions relating to childcare and nutrition as well as providing them with baskets of nutrition-rich foods. Pregnant and lactating women (PLWs) were also sensitised around nutrition issues and the importance of early breastfeeding.
At the start of the project, fieldworkers were tasked with conducting a quarterly screening of all children aged below 5, to identify malnourished children in the settlement and monitor their growth and development. The initial screening in January 2020 revealed that among 343 children, 44.5% were stunted, 30.7% underweight and 14.6% wasted. However, subsequent screenings could not be carried out due to COVID-19 lockdowns and even after the lockdown was lifted field staff and parents were hesitant to continue with screening protocols as they feared exposure to the virus. During this time, project staff adapted their programming strategy to a remote model, which included phone calls to follow up on the progress of SAM/MAM children and remote monitoring of nutrition. To restart screening protocols, the project staff trained caregivers of children aged under 5 to measure height, weight and mid upper arm circumference (MUAC).12 Over 50 caregivers successfully learnt the screening methods and were able to apply these easily and effectively. Additionally, MUAC tapes were given to all caregivers to enable household-level screening.

**OUTCOME**

Between March 2020 and April 2021, caregivers were able to screen 185 children effectively, while the remaining children were screened by fieldworkers. During the second COVID-19 lockdown in April 2021, trained caregivers proactively carried out screening and reported findings to project staff. Cross checks carried out by the fieldworkers found that the measurements caregivers had provided were highly reliable. By mid-2022, 100 caregivers from the settlement knew how to measure MUAC and were monitoring their children regularly. All of this translated to effective screening and targeting of IYCF within the settlement, during a time when unemployment, poverty and food insecurity was on the rise and 38% percent of children with SAM/MAM showed improvements in malnourishment.

**3. MOTHER-AND-BABY-FRIENDLY CARAVANS IN ZAATARI REFUGEE CAMP, JORDAN**

**ACTION**

The Zaatari refugee camp was established in Jordan in 2012 to accommodate Syrian refugees. Since the beginning of the crisis, hundreds of thousands of refugees have been registered at the camp. It is located 70km from Amman and due to the protracted nature of the Syrian crisis, Zaatari has morphed into a dense semi-permanent settlement with 32 schools, 8 medical clinics, 58 community centres, local markets and other amenities. In 2022, the camp housed 80,909 Syrian refugees, almost 55% of whom are children.

At the beginning of the emergency, an inter-agency nutrition assessment was used to determine the nutritional needs of camp residents. Based on findings of the assessment, a key recommendation was made to initiate and promote IYCF, such as early and exclusive breastfeeding to protect infants and young children from an increased risk of infection and from becoming malnourished. In response, Save the Children and partners launched an infant and young child feeding in emergencies (IYCF-E) programme in Zaatari camp, which aimed to reach 90% of pregnant and lactating women (PLW) and children aged under 5 living in the camp.

As part of this initiative, three mother-and-baby-friendly spaces in the form of airconditioned caravans with flexible spaces for nursing, counselling and education programmes were created. These were situated close to three schools within the camp where they could be easily accessed by PLW and young children and their caregivers. The caravans were operated by a team of trained IYCF counsellors, educators and Syrian community mobilisers. The counsellors were responsible for individual counselling sessions and follow up. Educators conducted group classes on nutrition, breastfeeding and complementary feeding for PLW and supporting Syrian community mobilisers were responsible for community outreach such as identifying mothers who needed breastfeeding support and promoting IYCF messages.

In the mother-and-baby friendly caravans, PLW were able to breastfeed their babies and interact with each other in a safe and comfortable environment and receive relevant IYCF information. They also received a nutrient-dense snack, a bottle of water and breastfeeding shawls for privacy (provided by UNHCR). A battle-for-cup exchange programme also encouraged mothers to exchange feeding bottles for a measured cup which was considered safer, more hygienic and easier to clean.

**IMPACT**

The three mother-and-baby friendly caravans were open daily from 9am to 3pm and were visited daily by 120-150 mothers on average. Between December 2012 and May 2014, the programme reached 15,600 mothers in Zaatari camp. Higher rates of exclusive breastfeeding were noticed among mothers who were regularly followed up by IYCF counsellors, and anecdotal reports showed lower incidences of diarrhoea and respiratory infections among breastfed infants compared to non-breastfed infants.19

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**FURTHER READING**


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**2. AAHAR PROGRAMME TO IMPROVE CHILD MALNUTRITION IN MUMBAI’S INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS**

**ACTION**

The **Aahar Programme** is led by the **Society for Nutrition, Education and Health Action (SNEHA)**, a non-profit organisation. It aims to reduce child malnutrition in Dharavi and Wadala, two informal settlements in Mumbai. As part of this initiative, SNEHA has partnered with several stakeholders including government agencies, NGOs, companies and CBOs to regularly screen children for malnutrition, identify and treat children with SAM/MAM, and provide behaviour-change communication for pregnant women and mothers.

The Aahar programme uses a two-pronged model. It works with communities to improve careseeking behaviour and increase their access to health services, while also working with local government stakeholders and functionaries to ensure that high-quality care is delivered. SNEHA’s field staff known as community organisers conduct screenings in local government-run anganwadi centres (childcare centres), conduct frequent home visits to SAM and MAM children, provide medical nutrition therapy (MNT), educate mothers on hygiene and health-seeking practices, and monitor the progress of malnourished children. Community organisers also routinely engage frontline workers in anganwadi centres in their activities and provide regular training to increase their capacities and equip them with the required growth-monitoring and critical response skills required to tackle malnutrition. The first phase of the Aahar programme was conducted between 2012 and 2015 and the second phase began in 2018 and is ongoing. The programme employs rigorous research, monitoring and evaluation to finetune its programming and uses a mobile app to collect and analyse child malnutrition data.13

**OUTCOME**

Between 2012 and 2015, the Aahar programme reached 31,000 children and 6,000 women. It achieved a 28% overall reduction and a 23% net reduction in wasting levels in five neighbourhoods where the full intervention was in effect and increased exclusive breastfeeding practices by 37%. Additionally, the partnership with local government and anganwadi centres resulted in 109% increase in integrated child development services received by children in Dharavi.

The programme is seen to be highly cost effective with an estimated cost of US$23 per disability adjusted life year (DALY) averted.14 Between April 2018 and March 2019, the programme served an average of 34,149 children and 3,662 pregnant women per month and achieved a 29% net reduction in wasting levels. During the second phase, to increase community ownership and sustainability of the initiative, close to 1,000 volunteers have been identified and recruited from the community.15

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ENDNOTES

1 SAFE AND ACTIVE JOURNEYS TO SCHOOL

4. To learn more, visit www.amend.org/out-work
5. For more information on how to implement safer school routes, see: Safe Routes to Schools National Partnership (2010) Implementing safe routes to school in low-income schools and communities, a resource guide for volunteers and professionals. https://bit.ly/3L1b17
6. BYCS is an Amsterdam-based global NGO guided by the belief that bicycles transform cities and cities transform the world. Alex Baum, programmes and systems manager at BYCS, was a key contributor to this section. https://bycs.org/alex-baum

2 PLAY STREETS AND POP-UP PLAY SPACES

4. To learn more, visit www.amend.org/out-work
5. For more information on how to implement safer school routes, see: Safe Routes to Schools National Partnership (2010) Implementing safe routes to school in low-income schools and communities, a resource guide for volunteers and professionals. https://bit.ly/3L1b17
6. BYCS is an Amsterdam-based global NGO guided by the belief that bicycles transform cities and cities transform the world. Alex Baum, programmes and systems manager at BYCS, was a key contributor to this section. https://bycs.org/alex-baum

4. WHO (29 October 2018) More than 90% of the world’s children breathe toxic air every day. https://bit.ly/3D1i4C6
5. For example, see the methods used here: Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine, Tuppyune. Non-communicable lung disease in Kenya: from burden and early life determinants to participatory inter-disciplinary solutions. https://istmed.ac.uk/tuppyune
6. No-selling campaigns and policies promote turning off non-moving vehicles in pick-up and drop-off areas frequented by vulnerable groups such as outside schools and hospitals

4 URBAN GARDENING


5 YOUTH-LED SOLID WASTE MANAGEMENT


3 DATA-DRIVEN ADVOCACY FOR AIR POLLUTION


4 YOUTH PARTICIPATION IN URBAN GOVERNANCE

4. UNICEF (16 November 2021) Landmark intergenerational poll shows young people are 50% more likely than older generations to believe the world is becoming a better place – yet impatient for action on mounting crises. Press release. https://bit.ly/34Ft0t5
9. ‘Proyash’ is a Bengali word meaning to achieve something.

7 SUPPORTING EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE ENVIRONMENTS

2. The Nurturing Care Framework for Early Childhood Development is hosted by the World Health Organization (WHO), UNICEF and the World Bank and is supported by a range of partners, including The Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health, and The Early Childhood Development Action Network

6 Mobile Creches, MC impact. www.mobilecreches.org/imma
8. UNICEF (2021) Landmark intergenerational poll shows young people are 50% more likely than older generations to believe the world is becoming a better place – yet impatient for action on mounting crises. Press release. https://bit.ly/34Ft0t5

8 REDUCING MALNUTRITION IN YOUNG CHILDREN

7. Malnutrition in children is usually categorised by four sub-forms: wasting, stunting, underweight, and deficiencies in vitamins and minerals. Wasting is defined as low weight for height and refers to children experiencing severe weight loss in a short span of time due to lack of food and/or infectious disease such as diarrhoea. Stunting is defined as low height for age and refers to children experiencing chronic undernutrition usually associated with poor socioeconomic conditions and inappropiate infant and young child feeding and care. Children with low weight for age are wasted as underweight. A child who is overweight may be stunted, wasted or both. Children with micronutrient deficiency lack adequate intake of vitamins and minerals such as iodine, vitamin A, and iron, which are vital for proper growth and development. Obesity and overweight are when children are too heavy for their height. See: www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/malnutrition


12. MUAC is a measure to assess nutritional status. It identifies acute malnutrition and is commonly used in children aged 6–59 months and pregnant women. Source: www.globalhealthlearning.org/taxonomy/term/1573


