GROWING UP URBAN

youth supplement

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state of world population 2007

UNFPA

Contents

Preface

This is the second edition of the Youth Supplement to UNFPA's *State of World Population* Report. The 2007 Report focuses on urbanization; the Youth Supplement addresses the challenges and promises of urbanization as they affect young people.

In 2008, for the first time, more than half of the world's population will live in urban areas. By 2030, towns and cities will be home to almost 5 billion people. The urban population of Africa and Asia will double in less than a generation.

This will greatly increase the number and proportion of young people in the urban population. Most will be born into poor families, where fertility tends to be higher. The wave of urban population growth calls for policymakers to consult young people and reflect on their needs, both to realize individual potential and to stimulate urban economies. The challenges will include increasing the number and quality of schools; attracting new investments to create jobs and economic vitality; and providing health services, including sexual and reproductive health, so that young people can live fulfilling lives and make their own decisions on marriage and family formation.

The Youth Supplement profiles the lives of young men and women from seven cities – Tianjin, China; San Salvador, El Salvador; Mumbai, India; Dhaka, Bangladesh; Cairo, Egypt; Rufisque, Senegal; and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Their stories give a sense of the lives of young women and men and the opportunities, pressures, and risks of modern urban living: as migrants who have left the countryside to work and make their home in the cities; as community organizers fighting for better housing and services in the margins of cities; as victims of sexual abuse and violence; sometimes even as perpetrators of violence themselves; as young women freed from traditional gender roles and discrimination; and as urbanites involved in music and culture to escape from urban poverty and insecurity, and to celebrate their lives.

The *State of World Population* Report points out that the urban wave of the 21st century presents an opportunity to enhance development and promote sustainability; if the opportunity is missed, the urban wave could deepen poverty and accelerate environmental degradation. This Youth Supplement is a voice on behalf of the right of young people in the world's cities to lives of opportunity, free of poverty, violence, and abuse.

Introduction

The world is undergoing the largest wave of urban growth in its history. The 3 billion population of towns and cities in 2005 will increase by 1.8 billion by 2030.[1] The urban population of Asia and sub-Saharan Africa will double in less than a generation.

The fastest growth will be in the poorer urban areas. For example, the slum population of Dhaka has more than doubled in a decade, from 1.5 million in 1996 to 3.4 million in 2006.

Most urban growth comes from natural increase (more births than deaths). The urban poor have higher fertility rates than other urbanites: women have less education and less autonomy; they know little about sexual and reproductive health services, and have little access to them.[2] Rural-urban migration also contributes to urban growth.

Young people under 25 already make up half the urban population and young people from poor families will be a big part of the urban wave. The future of cities depends on what cities do now to help them, in particular to exercise their rights to education, health, employment, and civic participation. Investment in young people is the key to ending generations of poverty. In particular it is the key to reaching the Millennium Development Goals and halving poverty by 2015.

Young People in the Cities Today

Most urban young people were born in the cities. Others arrive on packed buses or trains, bringing with them few possessions, great expectations, and an eagerness to engage fully in a better life. They come with the hope of a good education, adequate health services, and a society with plenty of jobs to choose from: a plan for escaping the poverty in which their parents are trapped.

Urban centres attract economic investments, and offer a high concentration of jobs and public services. Political power is concentrated in national, state or district capitals, and secondary schools, higher education institutions, and health care centres are better and more accessible in urban areas. The high disparity in the rates of school attendance among urban and rural youth illustrates the "urban advantage": rural boys' and girls' school attendance rates are, respectively 26 and 38 per cent lower than their urban counterparts'.[3]

A vanishing dream?

At the beginning of the 21st century, the best recipe for a life without poverty is still to grow up urban; but young people's dream of moving beyond their parents' poverty is quickly vanishing. Although cities offer better jobs, housing,

education, health care, and opportunities are unevenly distributed. Most people in the poorest countries, including the young, have little access to the amenities of urban life.

Although school attendance is higher in cities than in rural areas, many young people in poor areas, especially girls, *never start school, or drop out* before finishing secondary level.

In urban centres, young people are faced with higher *unemployment* rates than adults; work is more likely to be in the unregulated "informal sector" where they are often exposed to abuse and exploitation.

Housing for the urban poor is most likely to be in *slums* – crowded homes and poorly-built neighbourhoods with *little or no infrastructure* like paved roads, electricity, gas, piped water or sanitation. In some cities this applies to more than half the population.[4] In most African cities, for instance, only ten per cent

of the population is connected to sewers, and many have no sewers at all. Many young women and men grow up resenting their exclusion from the promise of city life.

Extreme poverty, family conflict, violence and neglect, alcoholism or drug abuse in the home, or the illness and death of parents, may drive young people to *live on their own*. In some countries a high proportion of urban adolescents do not live with their parents, for instance 30 per cent of Ethiopian girls aged 10 to 14.[6] In Benin 14.3 per cent of a sample of children up to age 14 in urban areas lived with neither parent, though both were alive, compared with 8.9 per cent of rural children. Some children live in the streets.

For young people brought up in poverty with low-quality education, health care and housing, and few prospects for steady work, things can go very wrong. Young people are often the risk takers

and experimenters: they are regularly reminded of their *unequal state* and lack of opportunities – luxury cars in the streets; smart houses in safe neighbourhoods; opulent lifestyles in the mass media and on the Internet. Exclusion and frustration can lead to *crime and violence*.

Many young women leave their villages to avoid marrying young or dropping out of school early. But slum life can be particularly dangerous for young women. Pervasive *gender discrimination* puts them at risk of sexual exploitation and violence. Poverty may force them to work long hours in unsafe and distant places, returning home alone on dark and dangerous streets. Having no knowledge or power to protect themselves, and *poor health services*, they are at increased risk of unwanted pregnancy, and childbirth without skilled care. Many teenage mothers have no support from their families or the fathers

of their children. They may have to turn to transactional sex work to survive.

Positive signs
The creation of safe spaces for adolescent girls and young women can help turn urban life into a positive experience through which they may find *autonomy*, *access to resources*, and *self-control*.

By design, the city brings people closer. *Youth urban culture* adds music, dance, and sports shaped by global and local issues. Information and communication technologies such as the Internet and mobile phones have changed the way young people in cities relate to one another, and to their counterparts in other countries. They have introduced and spread globalized aspirations and patterns of consumption

The future of young people in the cities

The future of cities depends on the future of young people. In particular, it depends on what policymakers can do to equip young people to break the cycle of poverty. This in turn depends on involving young people in the decisions that affect them. This report draws attention to some challenges and possibilities, and suggests some actions that will help young people live up to their potential.

The wave of urban growth, and the consequent increase in the supply of labour, has the potential to stimulate economic growth – if local and municipal governments in developing countries can improve the quality of governance, and develop the institutional capacity to provide infrastructure and services. Services include universal access to education and health care,

essential elements in the formation of human capital.

Governments must do four key things over the next 25 years to cope with change, reduce poverty, and create a stable environment for young people's active participation in the urban transformation:

• **Support young people to stay in school longer**, so they are better educated and have access to technological innovations, information, and the life skills needed to enter changing labour markets.

• **Support young people's ability to exercise their right to health**, including sexual and reproductive health, so they can stay healthy and free of sexually-transmitted diseases and HIV infection; avoid early pregnancy, postpone starting their families until they are ready, and have their children safely.

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- **Attract new investments** to cities to create jobs and allow young people some economic security before they start their families.

- **Encourage organizations of young people**, to facilitate their leadership and participation in local decision-making, and act as a positive force for better governance.

 As UNFPA's *State of World Population* Report says, the wave of urbanization means that the battle for the Millennium Development Goals is being fought in the cities of developing countries. Young people will be in the forefront. Success depends on how well cities, countries and the international community strengthen and support them.

Bing•

ESCAPING RURAL POVERTY, EARNING A LIVING IN THE CITY — TIANJIN, CHINA

When he was about twelve, Bing wanted to be a soldier. His father spoke to him passionately of his days in the army, and Bing had seen soldiers in his town and on television: he admired their bearing, their uniforms, their pride. Besides, he thought that if he were a soldier he would be able to leave his town and see the world. And if he was lucky he would have a chance to defend his country like the historical figures his teacher spoke of: none of them was more riveting than Chairman Mao and the story of how he freed his country.

When I said that I wanted to be a soldier, my sisters encouraged me. They told me that since I was a man, I could go wherever I wanted.

Bing was born in 1980, just before China launched its family planning policy, encouraging each family to have a single child. He had three sisters; the eldest, who was almost fifteen years older than him, looked after him like a mother when their parents went out to work in the fields.

Bing was born in Fuping, in China, but he was just over a year old when his parents decided to leave their hometown to try their luck in Zha Lantun, in Inner Mongolia. They were very poor

and they believed that in those remote lands they would have more and better opportunities. They first herded sheep; later, they began to raise chickens. His family's income depended on the weather: if the crops and animals grew, the family got by. If not, they didn't have enough to eat.

When he turned six, Bing started school. He didn't like it: he was smart but naughty, and the teachers didn't know how to handle him. Bing still remembers the time when he was nine or ten years old and he stole a lollypop from a classmate because he never had money for lollypops. The other children found him out, chased him and tried to hit him. But at home he almost never went hungry.

They gave me everything they could. I was the only boy and the youngest.

In traditional Chinese families, the mother and sisters go without if necessary so that the youngest son gets enough to eat.

Didn't your sisters resent that?

No, they respected the tradition, and besides they loved me a lot.

When Bing was fifteen, his parents' chicken ranch started to go well, and there was a bit more money. So they bought their first colour TV.

I first saw what big cities were like on TV.

What did you think?

They had so many colours! In my town there were almost no colours: white in the winter, green in the spring, yellow in summer, gold and red in fall. In the city, though, all the colours mixed together at the same time. It was amazing.

Bing decided that one day he would see that world. But before that, when he was sixteen, his father sent him to a faraway school: in the small city of Haila'er, to the far north, several hours from Bing's town by train, there was a reputable institute which, thanks to the chickens, Bing's parents could afford.

It was fearfully cold in Haila'er. On Bing's first day it was -45°C. The teacher took the students out into the courtyard to get some exercise. He told them that if their ears hurt from the cold, they should rub snow on them; that way, a little skin might come off, but if they rubbed them without snow, he explained,

their ears would fall off. He also told them to work hard.

If you do work hard you can be successful, make something of yourself. If you don't, you're going to be a nobody your whole life.

Bing never forgot that. He graduated from high school with very good grades, but when he took college entrance exams he failed because his handwriting was bad, he says. He couldn't get into the military academy to make his dream of being a soldier come true. When his father found out, he cried. Bing had never seen him so sad, so disappointed.

Rural migrants often assume that employment opportunities are better in big cities; they are often right, although the people in search of work usually outnumber the opportunities

I wanted to escape, to run away. He had such high expectations of me, and he had spent so much money on me… I was willing to do anything to show him that I had not failed him. I heard about a business school in Tianjin that would take me; I asked him to pay for my first year and after that I would pay for it myself. My father was going through a hard time financially, but he gave me his last savings to help me study. That was how, in the end, I came to the city.

Bing was nineteen and felt that he was coming into a new world. Tianjin is a coastal city one hundred kilometres from Beijing. It has ten million inhabitants, and is becoming the newest pole of Chinese economic development. When Bing got off the train, he thought it had even more colours than he had seen on TV. Bing couldn't believe how tall the buildings were or how many cars he could see.

Bing shared a room in a university dorm with seven others and started attending classes. Everything was going well, though the city was too noisy, too full of strangers; he missed the stars that he used to see in his hometown. Shortly after arriving, he discovered that he could make a little money by giving Chinese classes to foreign students, but it took him a few months to set up his first serious business.

At his college, there were public phones that required special cards. Bing found a place where he could buy these cards cheap, and started to sell them to his classmates for twenty or thirty percent more.

You mean, you took advantage of your roommates?

Yes.

Didn't that trouble you?

No. But I didn't want them to be angry with me either, so I included them in the business. I would give them cards to sell and we would share the profit,

stuff like that. That's the Chinese way of doing business: get more people to participate and earn money, that way you know they will support you. If you want to win, you have to share your prosperity.

Bing earned enough money to pay for his studies. And, when he graduated, he came up with a better business: he and a friend got two old machines and opened a small copy shop across the street from the university. The business was a success. Suddenly, Bing found himself earning more than 200 yuan – US$25 dollars – a day. He was twenty-one years old, rich, a self-made man, a true entrepreneur.

Bing bought a mobile phone and felt like the king of the block. His dreams were coming true, and it had been so easy. Soon he would be able to bring his parents and show them what he had done. Meanwhile, he spent his money on clothes, books and stamps.

After a year, the owner of the store told them that he would substantially raise the rent. Bing and his partner couldn't afford to pay so much more. They couldn't find anywhere else to go and, just like that, his life as a businessman vanished into thin air.

I had forgotten what it was to work hard. I thought that everything was easy: I thought I could do whatever I wanted.

Bing got a well-paid job at a computer company, but never actually got paid. He couldn't find another job and, after three months, he had to ask a friend to put him up. Bing
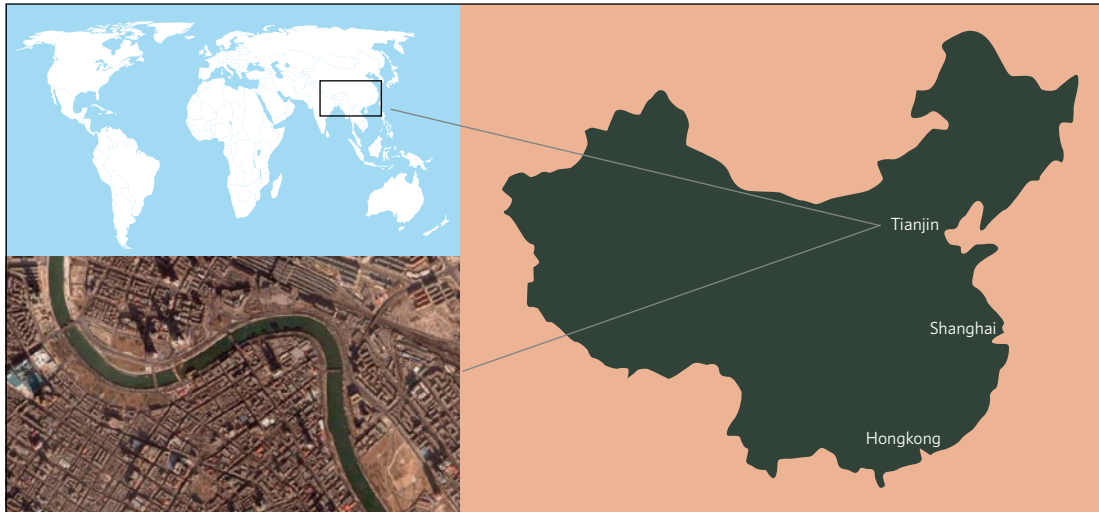
- Tianjin has a population of 10 million and its urban area is the third largest city in Mainland China

- After China began to open up in the late 1970s, Tianjin has seen rapid urban development

- 37% of the China's population live in urban areas

- 19% of China's population live below $1 a day

- Young people make up 16% of the China's population

- Tianjin is birth place of the first university in China, the Tianjin Beiyang School established in 1895

couldn't always afford to eat. Someone told him that they were hiring waiters at a large karaoke club called the Oriental Pearl. Bing applied and, after a few days of training, he was serving food and drink. Now he was earning in a month what he used to earn in a day.

That was a terrible time, but I tried not to let it get me down. Anyway, there was no way back. I couldn't go home; my father would never have accepted me as a loser.

The Oriental Pearl is a sort of shining monster, several storeys high with a hundred rooms where customers drink, sing, relax, have fun. Bing has been working there for five years. Intelligent and persevering, he was given several promotions and now he is a lobby

manager; he has many people working under him. He earns about US$500 per month and he saves two-thirds of his salary. Bing now has about 100.000 yuan – US$13.000 – invested in stocks for when he decides to start another business. Bing says he wants to be like the man who owns the Oriental, and six more clubs: a native of Tianjin who started out with noth-ing, and is now rich and successful.

You went to business school, had a business of your own and now you work in a karaoke club. How do you feel about that?

Here in China it is said that at thirty you have to be someone. Well, I still have four years left. And for now I'm saving and getting ready to set out on my own.

What are you thinking of doing?

I'm not sure, but I was investigating the market here in Tianjin, and I think there's room for a store that sells brand name purses. So I could open one and sell a lot of purses.

Originals or copies?

Copies, most likely, so I'll earn more money.

Bing thinks that it is logical and fair that some people have a lot and others very little. According to him, rich people are the ones who have potential and work hard; they deserve what they have. Poor people don't work hard enough, he says.

You mean that China is a country of lazy people?

No, the thing is that China only started to open up recently. And to a large extent success depends on

the environment you are in. That's why I wanted to come to the city, where you can be successful.

Since China undertook market reforms, around 150 million young people have migrated from the countryside to the cities in search of success – or at least the possibility of eating every day. Most of these young people were a part of the first wave of migrant peasants who provided cheap labour to factories in the cities. The more skilled migrants, like Bing, are a sort of second wave who have better prospects and more resources. They all converge on the large cities and they have changed the way of life and physical appearance of these cities.

The city is the place where things happen. The city is the future, where anything is possible.

Bing has a girlfriend who was just fired from her job in an office because "her clothes were too sophisticated". She and Bing are planning to get married in 2008, the year of the Olympics. He says that that will be a joyous time for everyone and he wants his wedding to be a part of the celebrations.

So, if everything turns out well, what will your life be like in ten years' time?

Realistically, I think that in ten years I will have my own business, people working for me, a house, a wife, a good car.

What make?

An Audi, definitely.

Bing isn't worried about the fact that he doesn't have a *hukou*. The *hukou* is the document by which the Chinese government gives each person the right to reside in a certain district and, hence, to use its schools, hospitals and services. The vast majority of the 150 million migrants don't have a *hukou*, and their status is a major political and social question, a matter of constant debate. Though they are no longer sent back to their places of birth, they still don't have full access to services where they live. Still, if you have money it is not so hard to get a *hukou*, and Bing says that that is not going to stop him.

THE CITY AS THE MAIN STAGE FOR YOUTH EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Unemployed young people make up almost half (43.7 per cent) of the world's total unemployed. Young people are more than three times as likely to be unemployed as adults.[1] Lack of opportunities and underemployment push millions of rural youth like Bing to seek a living in the cities.

Rural migrants often assume that employment opportunities are better in big cities; they are often right, although the people in search of work usually outnumber the opportunities, and rapid urban population growth pushes up unemployment rates. In addition to urban migration, natural increase in cities themselves is bringing large numbers of young people into the labour market, contributing to high youth unemployment.

Many young job-seekers resort to "forced entrepreneurship" and self-employment, and in some countries employment in the urban informal sector has risen sharply over the past decade as a percentage of total employment.[2,3] According to the International Labour Organization, approximately 85 per cent of all new employment opportunities are created in the informal economy. As Bing's story shows, this is risky, but it contributes to flexibility and helps drive economic growth.

Most young people working in the urban informal sector live in slum areas, for example, 75 per

cent in Benin, and 90 per cent in Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad and Ethiopia.[4]

At the same time, the proportion of working adolescents has dropped in many countries in the past few decades.[5] For instance labour force participation rates for boys 15-19 in Argentina dropped from 51.6 per cent between 1980 and 1984, to 36.9 per cent from 1995 until now. Similarly, female labour force participation rates for this age group declined from 27.8 to 24.2 per cent. In Thailand male and female labour force participation rates for 15-19-year-olds declined from 70.6 and 71.4 percent respectively, to 40.4 and 34.1 per cent for the same time periods.[6]

Yet many young people in developing countries still work too early and too long. They do not have the opportunity to finish their education and acquire the life skills they need for healthy development. Young children and adolescents are exploited in the job market, often working for low pay, under hazardous conditions, and with few prospects. Exploitation, frustration and exhaustion can cause disillusionment and alienation among young workers.[7]

For other young people there is no transition from school to work. They drop out of school early or never attend, and do not work either. A survey in urban areas of Zambia found that most young people had no source of livelihood: 70 per cent of males and 83 per cent of females ages 15 to 19 indicated they were neither in school nor held jobs.[8]

When young people seeking work fail to find productive, decent livelihoods, they can enter or continue a cycle of poverty, with with high rates of unemployment across their life spans. There has been increasing concern among policy-makers that the frustrations accompanying long-term unemployment among large populations of young men in urban areas may feed political and ideological unrest and provoke violence. High levels of unemployment among young people, particularly in urban areas, indicate that cities are unable to absorb labour, which in the long term has a direct impact on economic growth and poverty reduction.[9] The importance of helping youth find productive and decent employment has become a primary motivation of international youth policy-making and development efforts. Young people can make their best contribution if cities provide a social safety net, including housing, health care and education opportunities.

The United Nations Millennium Declaration, adopted by the General Assembly in 2000, reflects the commitment of heads of state and government to develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere real opportunities to find decent and productive work. This objective was subsequently integrated into the Millennium Development Goals; the eighth Goal, which relates to developing a global partnership for development, explicitly refers to creating employment opportunities for young people. The Youth Employment Network (YEN), comprising the ILO, World Bank and United Nations, was established following the Millennium Summit to initiate action on the ground, with the result that the youth employment

issue has gained momentum at the national level.[10] Already, 19 countries have stepped forward as to share experiences, lead the way in formulating action plans on youth employment, and committing to change at the highest political level.[11]

Several of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) completed by developing countries in the past few years have outlined youth employment strategies focusing on youth entrepreneurship training, microcredit schemes, the development of vocational training and career guidance services, youth leadership training, youth-targeted labour-intensive programmes, and the acquisition of ICT skills.[12] Other countries could follow this example and create more employment opportunities for young people.

The skill sets and opportunities for long-term economic security are established in early adolescence; there is an immediate need for expansion in livelihood skills. Adolescents and youth need a chance to make the most of their productive potential through quality education and decent employment. At the same time education provision should be coordinated with labour market needs now and in the foreseeable future.

Over the next 10 years, 1.2 billion young women and men will enter the working-age population. They will be the best-educated and best-trained generation ever, with great potential for economic and social development, if countries can find uses for their skills, enthusiasm and creativity, otherwise they will be condemned to poverty, like many of their parents are.

Geeta•

FROM PAVEMENT DWELLER TO COMMUNITY MOBILIZER — MUMBAI, INDIA

She didn't like her parents' village. Geeta was just five years old when they took her there the first time. It was in Karnataka State, in Southern India. She spent the entire visit waiting to return to the city; there were always too many people in their village house: aunts and uncles, her grandmother, her cousins. It wasn't like her house in the city. Geeta did not understand that what she called "her house in the city" was a hut in the middle of the street: two pieces of cardboard and a sheet of black plastic for a roof; two cots and a few pots and pans. All the city houses she knew were just the same.

Fifty years ago, Mumbai had three million inhabitants. Now there are more than sixteen million, six million of whom live in slums. More than one hundred thousand live in the streets, in huts they put up in public spaces – on sidewalks, railroad tracks, trash dumps. They are the poorest of the poor. Geeta was one of them; she shared the hut with her father, her mother, her two younger sisters and her brother.

But don't think that my parents didn't work. They both worked. My mother cleaned houses and my father took children to school.

In a rickshaw?

No, on a bicycle. He could take two or three at a time on his bike. He had a lot of experience.

Many public schools don't accept pavement-dweller children. They don't have official addresses, so officially they don't exist. The teachers say they don't study; they don't pay attention; they are dirty. But Geeta's mother managed to enrol her in a private school; she knew a teacher who offered to pay for it.

Geeta's memories of her childhood are not unhappy: she went to school, played in the street, and every night she ate the leftovers that her mom brought from the houses she cleaned. Geeta and her family did not have a bathroom, electricity or running water. Every morning at 5:00, Geeta or her mother had to go to a neighbouring workshop where the workers let them take some water from the faucet. Her mother used to bring her family old clothes that her employers gave her: until she was fifteen, Geeta never wore a new t-shirt. But she liked studying, and often she'd read late into the night, by a candle or a streetlight.

Her life was fairly peaceful, but the menace of demolition always lurked. Every so often, the neighbours complained, and city authorities came and destroyed her hut and the ones nearby. Geeta and her family would wait until the demolition workers had left and then build their house back up in the same place.

We would go back, but we were always threatened. That was not good. Some neighbours said that the pavement dwellers were dirty, that we were thieves. And anyone could walk up to us and insult us for no reason. We were just there, defenceless, in the street.

When she was ten, Geeta began to help her mother at work, though she kept going to school. Things got worse when she was fourteen: her father got lung cancer and her brother had kidney stones. Because of the conditions they live in, pavement dwellers are often sick and often short-lived.

Drugs and doctors were very expensive, and Geeta's family fell into debt. Geeta had to work in three houses to help pay off their debts, and she couldn't go to school any more.

I had always thought that I was going to be a good student. But suddenly all of that was over, and I hardly realized it. All I cared about was buying medicine for my father and brother, and helping my mom. I stopped thinking about the future…

At that time, her mother got in touch with some women from Mahila Milan. Mahila Milan –Women Together, in Hindi – had started working some years earlier, in 1986, when a few young social workers decided that what they were doing was not nearly enough. They formed a partnership with a NGO called SPARC –Society for the Promotion of Area Resource Centres. They thought it was crucial for street women to have a space of their own, a setting in which to gather, discuss their problems and seek solutions – "area resource centres."

Active citizenship encourages collective action, which can yield more effective and better-targeted public services

They encouraged the women on the streets to undertake new forms of political action. When 500 street women opposed eviction from their huts, the young social workers supported them and so Mahila Milan came into being.

Soon after, the women got ration cards. In India, slum dwellers have a right to state-subsidized food, but, until Mahila Milan, with SPARC's help, started to demand this benefit, pavement dwellers never got it. This was their first victory. At about the same time, they got in touch with the people from the NSDF, the National Slum Dwellers Organisation, who gave them strength and new ideas.

One day, when Mahila Milan already had several hundred members, the women from SPARC came up with another idea. One of the pioneers explained, years later:

They asked if each of us could save a rupee a day. Yes, we can, we answered. OK, then we can help you to organise a sort of mortgage bank so that you can build houses for yourselves. We all agreed. And this is how our savings and loans system began.

The savings system was organised gradually. Every day, the women saved what they could. One of them would visit the houses of some twenty or thirty to collect the money. Though many were illiterate, their bookkeeping was careful. This money was used for emergencies – a sickness, a death, a bail payment – or to make a small loan to one of the participants to start a business. And, when they could, they tried to save bigger amounts – which they kept in a bank account – to build, some day, houses of their own. Sundar Berra from SPARC explains:

Savings are a tool for organisation and mobilisation. The aim was to empower the poor so that they could negotiate with institutions from a different standpoint. The poor should not beseech the government, be reduced to the "gimme, gimme" position. Collectively, they have to save, look for land and think up projects for housing.

Now the three organisations have been working together for many years: NSDF, the oldest, founded in the 1970s, organises and mobilizes the urban poor; Mahila Milan administers and manages the community's resources, and SPARC provides technical and logistical support. Their Alliance works with more than 200,000 slum families.

Geeta met the women from Mahila Milan and SPARC when she was sixteen, through her mother. They asked her if she wanted to work with them. She would have to collect savings and do some bookkeeping. Geeta was excited; she could help her community, earn a small salary – just over a twenty dollars a month– and give up cleaning houses.

What did you do with your free time?

I never had free time. When I finished working I had to look after my house, my sisters, and my sick father. I was always busy.

She would have liked to keep studying, especially dance. But she was never able to.

Five years ago, when she was twenty, Greeta and her family moved into a three-by-four-

- Formerly known as Bombay, is with a population of over 16 million the most populous city of India

- 28% of the population in India live urban areas

- 55% of India's urban residents live in slums

- 42% of India's urban residents have no access to a safe water source

- Mumbai is the most densely populated city in the world with 29,650 people per square kilometre

- Mumbai is projected to be 2nd most populous city in the world by 2020 with over 25 million inhabitants

meter room in a *chawl*, a tenement where each family occupies a room with no bathroom nor kitchen. Geeta kept working at Mahila.

What is the advantage to the fact that Mahila Milan is a women-only group?

First, in my country, if men and women are in a group together, the men decide everything. But there is something else. Husbands would often hit their wives if they went out after dark. When they got together at Mahila, the women were able to leave their houses. At first the men resisted, but when they saw that their wives were able to solve certain problems or bring a demolition to a halt, they kept quiet. And they started to look at them differently: after all, they were the ones that got things done.

And they stopped beating them?

Well, not entirely, but they beat them less. Now, if a man beats his wife, the women from the committee go to their house and try to work things out, to convince the man not to do it anymore. And they are often successful.

A few months ago, Geeta was able to move into a place of her own: a twenty-square-meter room with a bathroom in one of the eighteen buildings that the Alliance is building in Mankhurd, on the outskirts of Mumbai. Almost two thousand families are living in the new neighbourhood.

We were around throughout the construction to make sure that they were doing a good job.

One of the women from Mahila says:

We learned in the process: if we were not around, they deceived us, using less cement or rubble instead of sand. But we kept a close watch. We didn't want a house for just three years. We wanted a real house.

They got what they wanted, and they are pleased: having a house has changed their lives. They feel different now:

On the street, no one respects you. Here, you have your own house, it's yours and they have to respect you. Here, even if you don't have a thing to eat, you have your own place in the world.

–says one of the women.

Another explains how drastically the life of her children has changed:

They are no longer ashamed, they can say where they live. And it's going to be easier for them to find someone to marry. We all feel better, more confident.

Living in a house also improves access to health and education, so the children of these women are likely to get better jobs. But they also face new problems:

The street was so noisy that you could not hear the noise the kids made. Since we moved here, they seem to be shouting all the time.

And some more serious ones: they have new obligations – maintaining the building, paying the electricity bill, taking out the trash, looking after safety – and new complications: many of these men and women work downtown, as food vendors, recyclers, labourers, maids. Now, they live faraway and have a long commute; in some cases, they have lost their source of income. But they do not give up.

Neither did Geeta. She is still working at Mahila, where she is in charge of the bookkeeping for many groups, earning almost US$70 a month. But she still doesn't have any time for herself. She has to take care of her mother, her unmarried sister – who is studying – and her younger brother. Her father died a few years ago and her other sister got married, which was a relief:

Was it hard to get the dowry together?

No, because it was a love match, not an arranged marriage. We only had to give a chain and some gold earrings.

When she has a little free time, Geeta goes to the movies with her friends or has a picnic at a temple.

And you don't want a boyfriend?

No, I have never been interested in that, have never had time. I have had candidates, but I am not interested. Besides, my girlfriends tell me that having a boyfriend can be a headache.

Why?

You have to have time to see him, you have to listen to him, to go where he tells you to. It's a waste of time. If I want to get married one day, I'll ask my family to choose a suitable boy and arrange the wedding. And if not, I'll stay single.

Geeta has a sweet look in her eye, shining white teeth and gnarled feet. She does not wear any jewellery and her red and black sari is faded.

I can earn and eat, and marriage is not the only purpose of life. Besides, I don't want to have dreams of happiness: if they didn't come true, I wouldn't be able to stand it.

YOUTH CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

International conventions and agreements have enshrined a set of human rights, state responsibilities, and principles for democratic governance. Some – like the Convention on the Rights of the Child; the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development; the World Programme of Action for Youth, and the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements – have sought to establish young people's rights and create the conditions in which to exercise them. Young people's rights include the right to adequate housing, the right to a safe living environment, the right to education and health care, and the right to basic services such as sanitation and clean water. Freedom of expression and association, and participation in decisions that affect their lives, are also part of young people's human rights..

Despite international conventions and agreements, the rights of young people in many countries have not moved from paper to practice. Large numbers continue to live in poor conditions, without access to basic social services, existing from day to day. Poverty excludes many young people from civic participation. They have no access to decision-making forums, nor are they acknowledged as partners in the decision-making process.

Opportunities for participation are important both for the development and socialization of individuals and for the political and economic stability of the larger society. Participation ensures the sustainability and strength of democracy.[1] Young people's experience of citizenship and community involvement affects the extent and kind of civic participation throughout their lives.[2]

Research suggests that young people today are more likely than older adults to participate in community organizations.[3] Some low-income countries, including China, India and Nigeria, show evidence of increased youth civic and political interest,[4] though opportunities for public engagement are generally higher for urban youth than for their rural counterparts, and for the educated and the better-off.

With the global expansion of information and communication technologies, new forms of engagement reach beyond local and national boundaries. Many young people have access to the Internet through schools, cybercafes or personal computers, and connect with their peers around the globe through online community forums, where they can find information and inspiration, and get involved in their local and global communities.

Active citizenship encourages collective action, which can yield more effective and better-targeted public services. At the local level, community involvement has been particularly effective in managing such local public goods as water supply, sanitation, roads, schools and health clinics.[5]

Geeta's story shows that active citizenship and community participation can empower previously excluded groups and bring opportunities for personal wellbeing and higher living standards. In a growing number of countries, federations like Mahila Milan, formed by the urban poor themselves, are demonstrating new, cost-effective programmes that transform the lives of thousands of their members.[6] Many of their initiatives recover their costs, and the profits go into new programmes.[7] In many urban settlements young men and women are playing a key role in leading such initiatives. Young people also tend to lead the protests when bureaucrats or developers try to clear slum areas without alternative housing for the residents.

Gender disparities in levels of public participation still exist in many countries. Girls often have fewer opportunities than boys to participate and exercise their civic rights. Among urban slum dwellers in Rio de Janeiro, boys score significantly higher than girls on every dimension of citizenship, including political participation; membership in community or civic organizations (excluding churches); seeking out government agencies, and having official legal documents.[8] In many societies there are significant and pervasive gender differences in the ability to own, inherit, or acquire property, an asset critical not only for economic prosperity and security but also for domestic power relations, social status and individual sense of agency.[9]

Successful municipal initiatives throughout Latin America have demonstrated that active con-sultation with young people helps to develop solutions for their concerns.[10] Karachi, Pakistan; Capetown, South Africa, and other cities have involved young slumdwellers in surveying, documenting and mapping their urban communities, generating essential data and information for city authorities. These initiatives have helped to build partnerships with official agencies in ways that strengthen and support young people's participation, and have influenced the planning, finance and management of urban infrastructure.[11]

To improve the lives of urban young people, countries need better governance, especially at the urban and local levels; policies should promote the decentralization of resources and responsibilities to the lowest possible administrative level; improve security of tenure and property rights for the poor; and strengthen youth participation in policymaking.

Legal identity should be available to the millions of young people whose births were not registered and who lack formal papers.[12] This basic move both increases their sense of belonging to society and improves their access to social institutions and services. Accountability in government, broad access to justice, and civil society advocacy and participation can help young people make choices based on a sense of self and personal competence, and allows them to contribute to the collective well-being as citizens and members of their communities.

Reham•

AN ESCAPE FROM URBAN VIOLENCE — CAIRO, EGYPT

It might have been a meaningless incident, just one of those things that happen in the city. But Reham says that those few minutes changed her life.

It happened just as Reham was leaving work at a programme called Dreams of the Girls, in Qalyobeya, a suburb of Cairo. She teaches girls who haven't had the opportunity to go to school how to read and write and learn marketable skills.

This project made me deal with a group of people I had only heard of, girls whose only aim in life is to eat, drink and sleep. And the feeling of being able to help them is wonderful.

Reham was born in Suez, Egypt in 1982. She is the eldest daughter among four children. Her father owns a small transport company and her mother is a public employee. Her family moved to Cairo when she was ten.

Reham doesn't remember any major problems in her life; she always liked writing in her diary, reading, drawing, and when she was a teenager she enjoyed going to the movies and to the mall with friends, listening to music and dancing. And she always felt that, as a woman, she had the same rights as men.

But in Egypt there are still relatively few women in parliament, in the government, and as judges.

True, Egyptian women don't have access to certain positions of power, but in daily life we are equal to men.

Her education was like that of many urban middle class girls: a secular school, television, learning the basics of Islam, though neither her mother nor her father is particularly religious. Reham would have liked to study psychology or literature at college, but her grades weren't good enough. Of the available options, she chose social work.

In the beginning, she was not very interested. Little by little, though, she became enthralled with the idea of helping other women. Shortly after finishing her studies, she found the job in Qalyobeya. She had already been there for three years when the decisive incident happened. That afternoon Reham left work with a friend.

It was hot that day, really hot.

It was just after three in the afternoon and they were walking down a narrow street. Reham was wearing jeans, a blouse and her usual scarf. Suddenly, a hand grabbed her from behind. Reham shouted and pushed it away, but now two hands were moving over her body. Reham kept shouting and the young man kept grabbing at her, trying to drag her away. Reham resisted until her screaming got the attention of passers-by and the boy ran off. The whole thing lasted a few seconds.

Reham fell to the ground, crying. The boy stopped at the corner and looked at her as if he were waiting for the right moment to do it again. For days, Reham couldn't go out for fear of new attacks.

I couldn't walk in the street, I felt really frightened.

It is very difficult to get figures about this kind of casual sexual harassment: in big cities, generally speaking, it is not reported, not computed, and its perpetrators often go unpunished. But in a recent survey of women in Cairo published in the Arabic magazine *Nesa'a – Women* – one third of the women said that they are subject to it every day.

Sexual harassment knows no bounds; women of all countries, all ages and social sectors have experienced it. Harassment can consist of touching, stalking, offensive words or flashing, and

the degree of violence and aggression vary. But one thing is certain: for many women the city is a hostile place where no one and nothing defends them.

Sometimes covert harassment bursts into the open. In October 2006, at the end of Ramadan, hundreds of men pursued and harassed girls in one of Cairo's main streets. Some of the girls were wearing trousers and T-shirts; others were wearing the long loose dress called *abaya*. The police did not intervene. The press didn't report the incidents, and the story only came to light through bloggers' reports. Even then, some newspapers claimed that the whole thing was a lie.

Reham had already experienced harassment before that afternoon in Qalyobeya. And more than once she had felt guilty.

Urban environments appear to offer greater anonymity to perpetrators of violence against women and girls

Guilty of what?

Guilty of wearing tight clothes, of making people talk about my body. I felt bad, I didn't feel happy about it.

Is it so aggressive to wear trousers?

I am a little big, and I just wore whatever style of clothes I liked. But some people weren't convinced that that was the way I wanted to dress; they just

thought that I was wearing this kind of clothes to provoke them. Maybe there are people who think wrong, who have problems, but I was making it worse for them with wearing tight stuff.

That was not the only reason Reham had begun, almost a year before, to think about completely changing her image and starting to wear an *abaya*, in addition to the scarf she had worn for years.

In the beginning I thought of this dress as a new style of clothes. I found it cool! It was like something fashionable. But then my friends told me there is commitment to religion related to it, so I didn't put it on immediately because I'm the kind of person who does things only when I am convinced. I thought that if later I changed back to tight blouses and trousers, it'd be a sin, so I thought it was better to wait till I was ready.

The incident in Qalyobeya probably wouldn't have been decisive if Reham hadn't had another fright just a month before. One afternoon during Ramadan, Reham and two others were in a *tuk-tuk*, a motorcycle taxi. The driver made a wrong move and the vehicle turned over. Though she suffered only a minor head injury, when the *tuk-tuk* went out of control she thought she was going to die. She was frightened: she was, she thought, too far from God.

I discovered the most important thing: when God loves someone, He gives them many warnings to

come back to Him. I could have died, I thought, and I didn't even use to do the simplest thing for God: pray! As humans, as Muslims, we think about God all the time, but the devil gets into your head, so God gives you signs and warnings to tell you come back to Me, read the Koran, pray. That's because a human being only starts thinking about God when there is a stressful situation. For example, when you are going to take a test, you pray. It's just human nature: humans forget, so God, for our sake, has to put us in a situation which hurts us a little, so we come back to Him!

Reham decided to pay more attention to her religious duties. This also brought her closer to her fiancé: Reham had become engaged a few months earlier to a computer engineer. Her fiancé, though deeply devoted to his religion, didn't demand that Reham be as observant as he; but he was pleased when he saw the changes in his future wife. So that day, when the boy attacked her on the street, Reham thought that she had been duly warned:

I still didn't change my clothes after the first accident, I didn't learn from it, so God sent me another warning. And then I decided to do it.

Her decision was a thorough one, and Reham is sure that there is no turning back. Since the end of 2006, Reham has worn her scarf and *abaya*, which covers her entire body. She says she will keep wearing them her whole
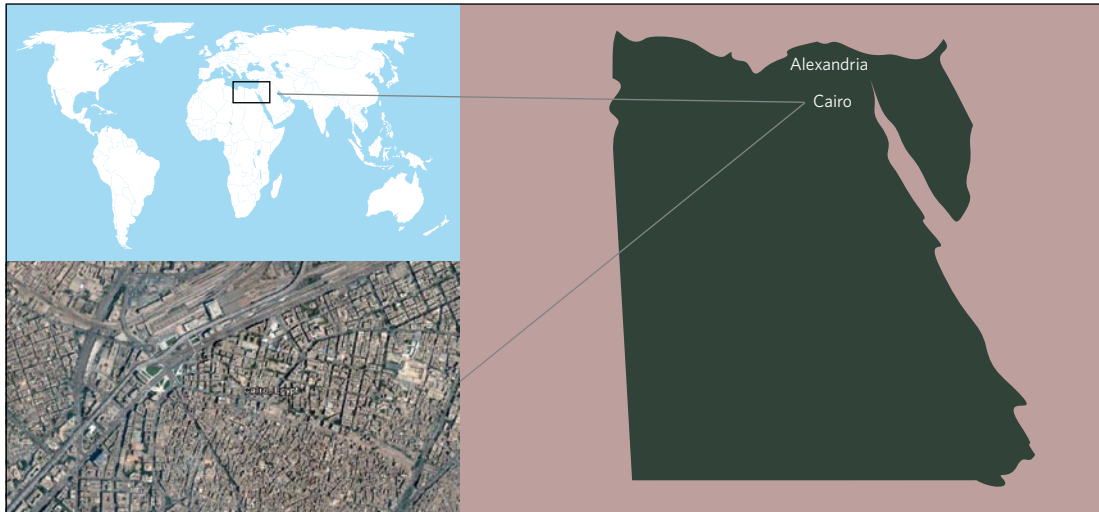
- Cairo has some 12 million inhabitants

- Young people aged 15 to 24 make up 21% of Egypt's population

- Lack of satisfactory and affordable housing for a rapidly growing population has forced millions poor Egyptians to make cemeteries in the City of the Dead as their permanent homes

- 95% of urban women, aged 15 and over, in Egypt have undergone female genital mutilation

- Due to concern for female comfort and safety, the first two cars of each train of the Cairo Metro are reserved for women only

life. She is not the only one: many young Muslim women feel safer wearing traditional clothing. It is a way of putting up a double barrier between potential aggressors and their bodies: their clothing says, on the one hand, that they don't want to engage in any sort of seduction and, on the other, that they are protected by a community and a tradition.

And you feel very different now?

Well, I am the same person. Maybe I'm not as nervous as I used to be, I think more before taking action. Maybe now I consider more what is halal and haram *– allowed and forbidden in Islam – but I am really the same. Clothes won't change you from right to left, or vice versa. They didn't decrease my amount of freedom, my possibilities in work or*

hanging out, my life is just the same. Nothing has changed. I am 24, I am a normal person, I have my way of thinking, and that's still there now that I wear this dress. People always thought I was a funny person, and I still am.

Reham faced opposition from her mother, who didn't want her to make the change. She said it made her look older, less pretty. Reham went ahead anyway and discovered, she says, "that I have a strong personality." And now she feels more comfortable, more relaxed. She says that since she started wearing the *abaya* she is harassed less on the street, and that her new religiousness has brought her much closer to her fiancé.

But her opinion is still the same about certain topics. She insists, for example, that in Islam women are equal to men and says that

personally she wouldn't be able to tolerate it otherwise. Reham and her fiancé are getting married later this year and she is happy about it. She wants to have several children, take care of the house and her husband, and keep working to continue to make girls' dreams come true. And she is not sorry to have left certain things behind. She no longer dances at parties, for example, because her fiancé wouldn't like it. "It's a matter of Eastern men's traditions, and I agree with that," she says.

And still, these kinds of things don't change me at all. I'm always the same person. Or even a better person, I think, now.

URBAN VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

It is almost a universal experience: in cities all over the world, girls and women feel unsafe alone in the street. At some point in their lives many have had to or will have to face sexual harassment, abuse and violence in urban settings, only because of their gender. Reham's experience changed her life – but it was only one of millions of acts of random urban violence that affect women and girls.

Violence against women and girls cuts across lines of income, class, culture and residence. Some forms appear to be more prevalent in rural areas, for instance child marriage and honour killings; others in urban areas, such as sexual harassment in public places, forced prostitution and economically coerced sex.

Physical, sexual and psychological violence can be a daily feature of women's interactions in their neighbourhoods, on public transport, in workplaces, schools, sports clubs, colleges, hospitals, and in religious and other social institutions.[1] Unsafe spaces abound in cities and surrounding areas – deserted streets, dark lanes, isolated bus stops, or public latrines.[2] Urban environments appear to offer greater anonymity to perpetrators of violence against women and girls. There is a causal link between domestic violence and urban violence, attributed to changes in social controls,

in particular the breakdown of social bonds at neighbourhood level.[3]

Violence is generally underreported and reliable statistics are hard to come by. Women tend to feel shame, stigma, lack of confidence in protection by the law and fear of retribution.

Many adolescent girls' first sexual experience is forced on them. For example, according to a survey in Ghana, the first sexual experience of female adolescents in urban areas was significantly more likely to be coerced than among their counterparts in rural areas.[4] A study in Cape Town, South Africa showed that 72 per cent of young women who were pregnant and 60 per cent of those who had never been pregnant had reported experiencing coerced sex.[5] A similar study in Lima, Peru found 41 per cent of young girls between the ages of 10 to 24 had experienced coerced sex.[6] And a multi-country WHO study found that in Bangladesh 22 per cent of female respondents in cities as against 11 per cent of those in the provinces had experienced physical or sexual violence after the age of 15 by someone other than their partner; in Brazil 24.5 per cent of female respondents in the city and 15.9 per cent in the provinces reported violence.[7] The same study found high levels of domestic violence in most cities and provincial areas.

Data also suggest that violence against girls is very prevalent in schools.[8] Research in Nepal and Papua New Guinea demonstrated girls' fear of being sexually harassed in schools by male peers, as well as teachers.[9] In one Kenyan study, nearly two thirds of girls who reported non-consensual sex named a teacher as the culprit.[10]

Violence against women and girls compromises the health, dignity, security and autonomy of its victims. It can leave deep physical and psychological scars. It undermines girls' development by making it difficult for them to remain in school, destroying their confidence in adults and in peers, and putting them at risk of unwanted pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV. Research in Rwanda, South Africa and Tanzania has shown that young women who experience violence are three times more likely to be infected with HIV. [11]

Male adolescents and adult men often tolerate or even condone sexual coercion. Young women, too, may view sexual violence or sex that is obtained through force, fear or intimidation as "normal". These attitudes reflect perverted gender norms in some communities or societies. Victims of sexual violence often feel at fault, which can lead them to reactions such as a drastic change in life styles and submission to more traditional

norms. Studies in cities of Peru and South Africa have found that both girls and boys believed the victim of a sexual assault was to blame and may even have provoked her own assault.[12] Another study found that in many countries a large proportion of women believe wife beating may be justified for reasons such as refusing to have sex or failing to complete housework on time.[13]

Values and attitudes that perpetuate gender inequalities are instilled in childhood; adolescence may offer a last opportunity to offer alternatives. On this premise, the Guy-to-Guy Project by *Instituto Promundo* in Brazilian cities engages young men as change agents in the prevention of gender-based violence and the promotion of sexual and reproductive health. The change agents, or peer promoters, are young men from low-income areas of Rio de Janeiro who reach other young men with educational materials, condoms, a lifestyle magazine, and a play about reducing violence against women. Through the project many of the targeted young men have come to question men's violence against women and girls.[14]

Similarly, in Mumbai, India, the men's organization MAVA, Men Against Violence and Abuse is making strides in the fight against violence against women and girls. MAVA primarily targets young men and adolescent boys through mass awareness

programmes on gender issues, through counselling services, and workshops. It uses innovative media like street plays, essay and poster-competitions, wall newspapers, radio plays, and discussion groups. It provides premarital guidance and counselling to young men and women and closely partners with women's groups in Mumbai, including referral of cases of domestic violence and joint activities to tackle specific gender issues.[15]

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence is an international campaign initiated by women that runs yearly from November 25, International Day Against Violence Against Women until December 10, International Human Rights Day, emphasizing that gender violence is a violation of human rights. Individuals and groups around the world have used the 16 Days Campaign to call for the elimination of all forms of violence against women and girls and to raise awareness and call for action at the local, national, regional and international levels. The campaign demonstrates the solidarity of women and girls around the world organizing against violence, and puts pressure on governments to implement their promises to eliminate violence against women and girls.[16]

At the fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March 2007 the member

states of the United Nations discussed "The elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child" and firmly recommitted themselves to international human rights instruments, including CEDAW, the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women.

The challenges now are to make sure that these international agreements and laws are enacted and enforced and that policies are implemented to end violence against girls and women. Partnerships should be strengthened and should make ending violence against women a public health priority. Community attitudes must change and communities, including young people, must be engaged in the process. The prevention of violence against women and girls should also be an explicit element in urban planning, and in the design of buildings and residential dwellings. Improving the safety of public transport and routes travelled by girls and women, such as to and from schools and factories, should be part of prevention work. Training for health care providers, teachers, law enforcement personnel and social workers should include a comprehensive understanding of the causes and consequences of violence against women. The media can play a powerful role in changing mindsets and social norms that tolerate violence against women and girls.

Freddy•

FORMER GANG MEMBER FINDS IT HARD TO ADJUST — SAN SALVADOR, EL SALVADOR

The first time he saw a deportee from Los Angeles, Freddy was struck by the man's tattoos –and the respect everyone paid him. The man looked different from the others.

By the 1990s, the first Salvadorean gang members had returned to the country, deported by the USA. Nobody could guess what was coming.

At 21.000 square kilometres, El Salvador is the smallest country in Central America. During the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of Salvadorean natives emigrated illegally to the USA: they were running away from civil war, from hunger caused by war or simply from chronic hunger.

Most of them settled in Los Angeles. They had a hard time adjusting to life in the enormous, unfamiliar city. Their children struggled to fit in and often suffered the violence of the neighbourhood gangs, one of the distinctive features of contemporary urban culture. In time, Salvadorean boys joined two of the most powerful gangs: the Mara Salvatrucha-13 and the Mara Calle 18 –and eventually ruled them. *Mara* comes from *marabunta*: an invasion of out-of-control killer ants.

The *Maras* represented a society of their own, an alternative to the society that had rejected or disdained them. In the face of the uncertain and hostile, the Maras asserted their roots and became a collective, organized way of maintaining a common identity.

As the Maras prospered, the local authorities grew concerned and deportations began. The gang members – migrants' children – were forced to go back to their parents' country, a country many of them hardly knew. They brought a particular culture back with them.

In San Salvador, small neighbourhood gangs already existed, but their quarrels began with break-dance and, at their worst, ended with knives. The deportees from Mara Salvatrucha and Calle 18 introduced baggy pants, shaved heads, tattoos, guns and much more cruelty, together with a number of "entrepreneurial" strategies that turned the local gangs into big business units.

Freddy was ten at the time. In his house there were no yells, fights or blows, unlike many of the neighbours': his mother didn't have anyone to fight with. She used to tell Freddy that when he was a baby, his father tried to stop a friend from beating up his wife, the friend stabbed him and Freddy's father bled to death alone in the street. But Freddy was never sure if his mother was telling the truth.

He didn't go to school very often; his mother tried to send him, but he didn't see the importance of attending classes. Most days he would just skip school and hang around. His mother was a maid, working all day in other people's houses. His two sisters took care of him, spoiling him and turning him into their little plaything. His neighbours called him a faggot, a wimp. When he was eleven, Freddy decided it was time to show them he could stand up for himself. He said he joined the Maras to belong to a respected and powerful institution.

In my neighbourhood there were some guys that had joined the Maras, and everybody respected them. The guys used drugs and stole, everybody was afraid of them. And I started hanging out with them, so that I'd get respected too.

Those guys were part of the Mara Salvatrucha –and they made Freddy wait for years until one day they finally accepted him. That day, four of his buddies beat him up for thirteen seconds. Freddy was fourteen: if he cried or complained, he wouldn't be accepted. He took it like a man and they started calling him Kruger. And so he became one of them, a homeboy or homie.

They were my family, the people who love you, take care of you, risk their life for you. They taught me good things: how to show respect, stick together, help each other out. And also bad things, like to kill, to steal, to use drugs and sell them.

Rapid urban growth, in combination with economic crisis and weak institutions, contributes to youth violence and crime

The first time he was about to stab someone, Kruger hesitated. They had ambushed an 18 gang member in a payback job – there were always paybacks to take care of – and his buddy told Freddy to slash him. Kruger thought of those movies where it seemed so easy, but he couldn't do it. One of the *homies* forced his arm against the other guy's flesh, and they called him a wimp and a faggot once more. He never hesitated again. He moved on from glue and marijuana to crack and cocaine, he lost all sense of compassion, he covered his body with the insignia of his *barrio* – his gang.

The tattoos mean I'm gonna be there forever, and I won't betray them. They mean I don't turn my back on my friends or myself: if an enemy stops me in the street, I can't say I'm not MS, because it's written on me.

The gang is a territorial institution. Its identity is based on a permanent state of war with the enemy gang. Its goal is to keep the neighbourhood under control, beating up or killing intruders, as a matter of pride and for commercial reasons, to keep their extortion and drug businesses running. For the homies, stepping out of their gang territory into another part of the city is a very dangerous ride, a military operation. The enemy can attack or kill them at any moment. The gang codes are grounded in violence: in order to earn "respect", the gang members have to show off their courage – or insanity. Kruger speaks now, quite respectfully, of a homie who burnt his sister-in-law alive.

Were you afraid of dying, at that time?

No. I thought more about my gang than about myself. I didn't have kids, I had nothing. The only thing that mattered to me was showing my homies I could be really bad, I could be trusted. I never thought I was gonna live. I knew I could get killed any second and I never thought about what I was gonna do later on. I never imagined I could live this long. I only thought, hey what am I gonna do right now, I'm running out of crack, I gotta get some more.

Freddy looks much older than his real age, twenty-six. He says he actually feels like he's been alive for centuries, but now he thinks "Yes, maybe I'll become an old man, like forty or fifty." Those years in Kruger's life were full of secret stories, punctuated by the death of friends.

Kruger was completely addicted to crack, he did some time in prison, he got out. One day one of his best buddies asked Kruger to second him in a fight. Kruger didn't go because he was too high on crack and his friend bled to death. The cops who arrested him simply refused to take him to the hospital. That night Kruger decided to quit the drug. He thought it was a way of making his friend's death mean something.

By the end of the 1990s, Kruger contacted a local organization called *Homies Unidos* that works with "non active gang members", trying to help them give up violence. There he met Ringo, a famously tough guy, who made him think he might be on the wrong path. Then Ringo too was killed by a bullet; but in those meetings Kruger met a nurse, moved in with her, and they had a son, and, three years later, a daughter.

During this time, he was on and off the streets; sometimes he was away, sometimes he was back. Sometimes his son asked him for candy or a soda and Freddy couldn't give it to him. He was demoralized: he couldn't get a job, he had no money. And so he started stealing again: if he had stolen for drugs, he said, why wouldn't he steal for his child? Reintegration into society is tough for *mareros*, and Freddy has his past written on his skin.

When you're marked, nobody wants to give you a job. They even made this law that any man with a gang tattoo can be arrested, even if he's not doing anything.

San Salvador, El Salvador

- With some 1.5 million inhabitants, San Salvador is the 2nd largest city in Central America

- It is home to one-third of the country's population and one-half of the country's wealth

- 35% of urban residents live in urban slums

- 21% of the population is living below $1 a day

- San Salvador has experienced rapid population growth that has strained its economy

- San Salvador has suffered from recurrent and severe earthquakes and has been frequently rebuilt

In 2003, the Salvadoran government enacted the "Iron Hand Law", which allowed the police to detain any person bearing a tattoo or minors involved in violence. In the meantime, the law has been declared unconstitutional.

At the same time, the Maras continue to grow in the cities of Central America and their numbers are in the hundreds of thousands. They charge "protection" to merchants, neighbours and transportation workers, and they're said to be very active in drug, weapon and human trafficking along the frontiers. The international expansion of their businesses allows them to escape to neighbouring countries to hide out with fellow Maras- or bring in gang members from other countries who are unknown to local police.

In 2005, El Salvador had the highest homicide rate in Latin America: 54,7 per 100.000.[1] The government blames the Maras for two thirds of the murders. In El Salvador, anybody can get a weapon. Many bars and restaurants show signs prohibiting clientele carrying guns. City-dwellers ask for more security.

Four years ago, Kruger and a friend were shot in the street. His friend died and Kruger took a bullet in the chest. He spent days between life and death. He thought that if God had decided to save him, it was because he wanted him for something else, so he had to start a new life.

God didn't allow me to die. My friends are all dead, but not me: if I'm saved, it's for something. It must not be for a bad thing, because God is a good guy; he lets bad things happen to you so that you learn.

Now Freddy is afraid of death, of not being there when his children need him, of not being able to stop them from becoming like him. He's very concerned that they should not be like him. His marks prevent him from getting a regular job: he drives a taxi in the city and says he dreams of having a car of his own. Sometimes the police stop him, and when they order him to pull up his sleeves and see the tattoos, they threaten him and take all the money he made in the day. Freddy is constantly on guard:

My problem now is that the MS homies may want to kill me, because I left them. Or the 18 guys could

catch me in the street and kill me for the tattoos I have. Or the police can set me up with a story they invented. I'm still a gang member. The day I get killed the papers won't say a taxi driver was killed, they'll say a gang member was killed. So why fool myself and think I'm not anymore one of them, if I'm marked forever. No, I'm a non active gang member.

Did you consider leaving the city, going to a safer place?

Yes, sometimes I think of going to the countryside, try to start a new life there. But the truth is I wouldn't know how to live there, what to do. I'm so much of a city man, you know…

YOUNG, MALE, URBAN, AND VIOLENT

Crime is increasing in most of the developing world's cities. With the rapid growth in the numbers of young people, youth crime in particular has increased, and has become increasingly violent.[2] Crime rates have also risen dramatically in countries in transition, where in many cases juvenile crime levels have increased by more than 30 per cent since 1995.[3]

Juvenile delinquency is largely a group phenomenon[4] and youth gang violence has become pervasive in many cities, particularly in Latin America and southern Africa.[5] Most youth gangs are dominated by young men, but young women have increasingly become members too.[6]

Long periods of unemployment, dropping out of school or marginalisation are recurring causes of delinquency in urban youth.[7] Poverty and inequality is also linked with violence and crime. Urban violence is often connected with alcohol and drug abuse.[8]

Studies have also found that rapid urban growth, in combination with economic crisis and weak institutions, contributes to youth violence and crime.[9] Escalating demand and shortage of resources for urban services, law enforcement and violence prevention programmes have overwhelmed urban management.[10]

Excluded and marginalized young men like Freddy join gangs like the Maras to get a sense of identity, inclusion, protection and solidarity. Gang membership provides status or prestige among their peers and offers young boys a way to become economically and socially self-sufficient.[11] Young people who feel marginalized or stigmatized, and who have been socially, politically or economically excluded, may resort to violence as a way to rebel against authority. Gangs may coerce young men who live in areas of high gang activity into active or passive participation.[12]

The increase in crime and violence has contributed to a general feeling of insecurity, especially among the urban poor.[13] They feel abandoned and powerless against shocking crime and the increase of minor acts of delinquency or vandalism. A general feeling of uncomprehending fear can create a climate that may threaten the democratic foundation of a community or society.[14] The perception of insecurity has resulted in the abandonment of certain neighbourhoods, the stigmatisation of districts or communities, and the withdrawal or the refusal to invest in some cities.[15] More positively, however, the perception of insecurity has also led to the development of forms of self-defence and neighbourhood protection and new social practices.

Crime and insecurity affect all social classes; but the poor in particular lack the means to defend themselves. Vulnerability to urban violence erodes the social capital of the poor, and breaks down their socio-cultural bonds, thwarting social mobility, especially for young people.[16]

Over the past decade, UN-HABITAT has been working to tackle urban violence in Africa through its Safer Cities Programme, launched at the request of African mayors. The programme focuses on building capacities at the city level to address urban insecurity and create a culture of prevention.[17] For instance UN-HABITAT, in collaboration with the city of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, has developed a local crime prevention strategy, promoting a culture of adherence to law; reducing unemployment among at-risk youth; helping urban residents to develop to their own strategies to fight crime; community-oriented policing; and re-establishing ward tribunals to expedite law and by-law enforcement and trial of minor offences. Sensitisation and awareness campaigns have been conducted to mobilise local partners and encourage civil society participation in violence reduction.[18]

To prevent, reduce and eliminate urban youth violence and crime, governments, including local authorities, should promote prevention through social development. They can help communities deal with the underlying factors, including the marginalization, social inequalities, discrimination, lack of opportunities, and hopelessness that afflict young people. The justice system should offer young offenders the possibility of restorative justice, rehabilitation and reintegration.

Social investments in young people, particularly in education, employment and health, as well as conflict resolution and leadership skills, can help the young and vulnerable develop positive identities and a sense of belonging to their communities. It can go a long way in dealing with issues of violence among them.

Maty•

FIGHTING AGAINST SEXUAL VIOLENCE: HELPING GIRLS PROTECT THEIR HEALTH — RUFISQUE, DAKAR METROPOLITAN REGION, SENEGAL

When she woke up, Maty didn't know where she was. She was six years old, scared and hurt, and her mother was repeating the word "easy, easy" over and over again. A doctor was speaking, his voice deep and sombre.

That's all I remember. And I remember that that morning, at my house, a neighbour man had told me come with me, I'll give you a chocolate. After that, I don't remember a thing, until I woke up at the hospital.

When they took her back home, her life had changed. The rapist neighbour was no longer there; later, she would find out that her parents didn't want to call the police, and so they reached a "friendly agreement": the parents of the twenty-year-old guy sent him to live elsewhere, and that was it. Now, fifteen years later, Maty still hasn't forgiven her parents for not having turned the rapist in, for letting him go unpunished.

They didn't have the right not to press charges against him, to leave things like that. Maybe they were ashamed, but what was really shameful was what they did.

Maty was six, and her life had changed. Her siblings, her neighbours, the local kids made fun of her; when they saw her, they repeated the same word:

They would call me sekou, sekou, which means parrot because that was the nickname of the guy who did that to me. And among the kids who made fun of me there was one girl that had suffered the same thing, but since they didn't take her to the hospital, no one found out, so she still acts like nothing happened …

I don't understand why they made fun of you. That's very cruel.

Life is very cruel. I understood it right away.

Maty stopped hanging out with the other kids. When she went out she answered their mocking and fought back, so she didn't have any friends; she spent her time at home, watching TV, reading, studying. In Senegal – like many other countries – there are no statistics about rape, but the media and visits to hospitals and health centres show that Maty's case is one of many thousands.

People say that a girl has to be a virgin, has to be pure. They say she has to keep her honour for her man until she gets married. I like that word, honour…

…she says with a sad smile. She also says that it no longer bothers her, but at the time she felt she had lost her honour. She felt that she was dirty, that everyone knew it – and she couldn't stand it.

Maty lived – and still does – in Rufisque, a city of 200,000 inhabitants on the outskirts of Dakar, the capital of Senegal. She has three sisters and five brothers. She is the middle child. Until he retired, her father was a driver for a big company; her mother looked after the home and the children. Though modest, they always got by. At school, Maty also got into fights, but she was a very good student, and her father spoiled her.

My dad always gave me everything I wanted. If I walked into a store and said I liked something - a dress, some shoes, whatever- he would buy it for me. Probably because he felt guilt about what had happened.

And your mother?

No, my mother was different, just the opposite. I sometimes tell her that I don't have a mother, only a father.

In later years, Maty never told her parents how she hated the way they had acted; in fact, the family never spoke of the rape again. Her parents acted like they had forgotten and, for a long time, she tried to do the same.

Did you ever see the Parrot again?

I saw him in the neighbourhood a few times and I would say things to him, but he looked the other way. And I preferred not to put up a show. But I'll never see him again. He died a few years ago. They say it was a car accident. And my mother wanted me to send my condolences to his family. You have no idea how I shouted at her.

Staying healthy and delaying family formation is key for adolescent girls to live out of poverty

Maty says that she was happy. No, she says, she didn't ask God to kill him, but she is happy to think that at this very minute he is burning in hell. Although, she says, she knows that this is not good; a proper Muslim does not wish harm on anyone. But anyway, she is the way she is, a fighter. When she was a teenager, Maty spent a lot of time alone or fighting with her siblings. To make her angry, they would call her "the French" because she was withdrawn, haughty; she didn't take part in their games or conversations. She preferred watching TV or, especially, reading and studying, while they were growing up to be fishermen and workers.

I spent a lot of time alone because no one could stand me. I am quick-tempered and irritable. I get angry easily.

Maty felt different, misunderstood; she only got on with her soul mate, a neighbour three years older than her, "the only one who understood me" because she had a similar past. She and her friend like the same things and have the same ideas. They understand each other without speaking, though they can also talk for hours.

When she was eighteen, Maty started dating a boy from the neighbourhood. A pleasant, big guy, he was a basketball player who had been pursuing her for months. He was a little rough and a bit of a womaniser, but Maty thought she might change him. The arguments started when he demanded that she sleep with him. Maty refused, and he threatened her: if you don't want to, then I am going to do it with so-and-so. Maty got even angrier and less interested in sleeping with him. One day, in the middle of an argument, he forced her.

It was the worst thing he could have done. That's when I told him I never wanted to see him again.

He apologized; he said he didn't know what he was doing, she was so sexy, so desirable that he couldn't control himself: in a way, he told her it was all her fault, and Maty believed it, just as she had, if less clearly, the first time. The nightmare was back.

Soon after, Maty saw a documentary on TV about sexual violence in Africa. It said that many girls who had been raped suffered irritability, isolation, inability to concentrate, headaches: it was like they were talking about

her. And the idea that she was not the only one encouraged her to visit the social worker at the teenage guidance centre in the city's physical education and sports department.

In Senegal there are eight teenage guidance centres, set up by the Youth Ministry; these centres offer reproductive health services in the largest cities in Senegal. Had Maty lived in a small town or in the countryside, such services would not have been available. Maty had often gone to the Centre before to prepare reports for school. Though she had never asked herself why, she says, she had always been interested in these issues: gender equality, unwanted and teenage pregnancy, STIs, HIV-AIDS, violence. And she would often read and cut articles about rape out of the paper. But, she says, she never connected these things with her life. She had tried to forget and, until that day, she believed she had.

When Maty told the social worker about what had happened with the basketball player, she convinced Maty that she had done nothing wrong: he is the only one to blame, she told her, he is a coward, an idiot, a nasty person. It was as if an enormous weight had been lifted. But when the social worker told her to see a psychologist, Maty didn't want to: that's for crazy people and depressives, not for me. She did, however, begin to participate in the Centre's activities. Since then, Maty and her friend have organized forums, film screenings, and meetings to discuss reproductive health and rights issues with young people from her city. Maty has learned, among other things, that

Dakar

Kaolack
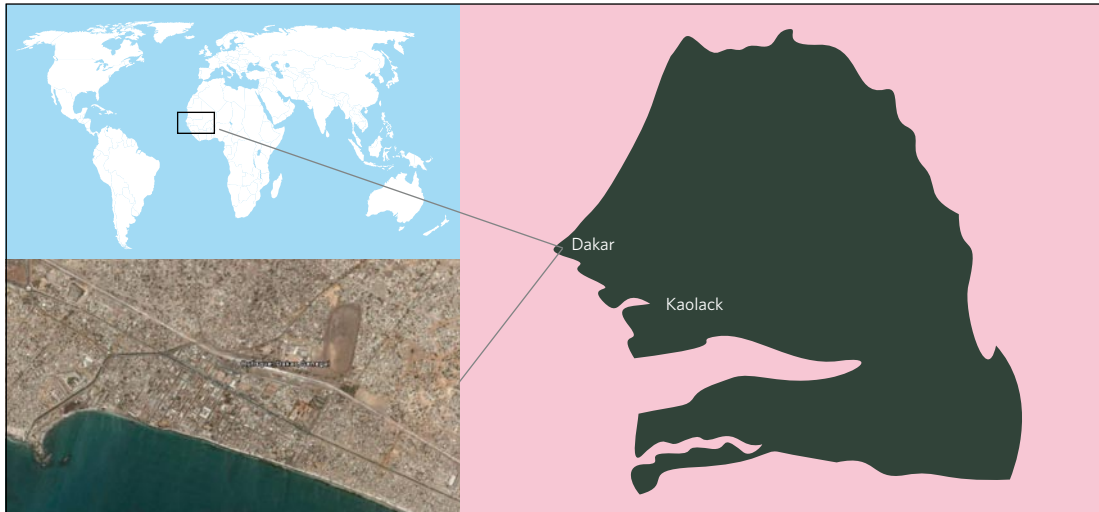
- The population of the Dakar metropolitan area, encompassing Rufisque, is estimated at some 2.4 million

- Young people ages 15-24 make up 21% of Senegal's population

- 12% of adolescent girls have begun childbearing between the ages of 15 to 19 in urban areas, while in rural areas 30% have

- In urban areas the modern contraceptive prevalence rate for women between the ages of 15 to 49 is 18%, in rural areas only 3%

you shouldn't tell young people that you are going to give them advice but rather exchange ideas with them, "because no one likes to be told what to do."

All of this has changed me for the better. I learned how to speak in public, how to listen, not to get angry, to look people in the eye. Now I interact with the world much more.

In early 2006, the Guidance Centres set up their own voluntary HIV counselling and testing centres. The project was a success: the eight centres performed 20 per cent of all the HIV tests in the country, though there are another 120 VCT centres. Young people are willing to go to the centres because they are familiar places where they already engage in cultural, social, and sports activities, so going there bears no stigma; if someone sees a

young person walking into a physical education centre, she or he has no reason to think that that person is going to get an HIV test.

The most important thing that happened to me at the Centre was gaining self-confidence. Before, when I walked down the street I had the feeling that everyone was looking at me, judging me and I didn't want to go out. Now it is just the opposite: I have changed my demeanour, and now others are bothered by my presence because I show them I am better.

Why are you better?

I don't know, but they seem to think so…

…she says with a laugh. Maty is finishing an undergraduate degree in Geography at the Cheikh

Anta Diop University in Dakar. She gets very good grades, has a grant, and intends to keep studying and to complete her masters and doctorate degrees. And to work, probably on climate issues. She still lives with her parents and all her siblings; the oldest, who is over thirty, just married a sixteen-year-old girl. Maty still reads a lot -- books from school and all sorts of novels. "As long as I learn something," she says.

That's why I don't like erotic novels: they don't teach you anything.

Well, they teach you about those things.

That's of no use. I want to learn the important things in life. That is not life. If life is a cake, that is just the cherry on top.

Do you think you'll ever get married?

I don't know. I'm already twenty-two, a little old to get married. Now sixteen- and seventeen-year-old girls are the ones who get married, and they are usually pregnant. I'm old, and I'm not pregnant. Besides, I'm pretty hard to take, so…

Recently a forty-year-old neighbour who is married and has two children proposed to her; he wanted her to be his second wife.

According to our Muslim law, it is permissible, but I don't want to be anyone's second wife. I didn't tell him that I wouldn't even want to be his first wife, but maybe he could tell. In any case, I am against polygamy.

Sometimes Maty thinks it would be better not to get married; other times she thinks she'd like to.

The problem is finding the kind of man I want. I don't trust anyone, and I need to find someone to trust. Besides, I've been very spoiled: I don't know how to cook, clean, look after the house. If I get married, that will be a problem. Why get married? So that a man can tell me you don't know how to do this, you don't know how to do that? I don't need that. I don't want to be given orders. I don't want to be anyone's slave. I want to find someone who loves me for what I am, who accepts me, who believes in me. Men always tell you that you are so pretty, so sexy. That's what my boyfriend, the basketball player, told me that time. I don't want to be desired. I want to be loved, which is very different.

GROWING UP IN CITIES, PROTECTING SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

Teenage guidance centres like the one Maty visited are critical for empowering young women to exercise their right to a life free of violence; to protect themselves from unwanted, non-consensual sex; and to have access to information and services to prevent HIV infection and unwanted pregnancy. Staying healthy and delaying family formation is key for adolescent girls to live out of poverty. Compared to their rural counterparts, young people living in urban areas have better access to sexual and reproductive health services. Clinics, hospitals, voluntary HIV testing and counselling services, and other health care facilities are more often located in urban settings. Births in urban areas are more likely to be attended by a skilled birth attendant. For example, 78.1 per cent of deliveries in urban settings in Bolivia, 60.6 per cent in Pakistan, 52.8 per cent in Angola and 46.9 per cent in Yemen are attended by a skilled birth attendant. In the same countries, deliveries attended by skilled personnel in rural areas are two to four times lower.[1] Young, educated city dwellers are also more likely to use contraception.[2] Surveys from Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Mozambique, and Tanzania suggest that condom use among urban young men aged 15 to 24 is considerably higher than among rural men of the same age.[3] This may also have to do with knowledge and availability: only about half of young men living in rural areas of Nigeria, Bolivia,

Mozambique, and Vietnam knew where they could obtain condoms.[4]

At the same time, greater availability and closer physical proximity to health services in urban areas does not automatically translate into better sexual and reproductive health for young people: health services may simply be unaffordable; there may be no services in some neighbourhoods; and gender inequalities may make it harder for young women to protect themselves against infection, unwanted sex, and pregnancy.

The age of marriage is rising, and sexual activity outside marriage is increasing in urban areas. Young women find themselves at risk of forced sex, unwanted pregnancies, unsafe abortion, and sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV. Contraceptive use, though higher among urban youth than their rural counterparts, remains infrequent. Continued high levels of unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion indicate a considerable unmet need for family planning among young urban women.

Every year, some 14 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 give birth.[5] The highest rates of adolescent fertility are found in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.[6] Based on data from 56 countries, both urban and rural girls aged 15 to 19 from the poorest groups are three times more likely than their better-off peers to give birth in adolescence.[7] They bear twice as many children, and are two to five times more likely to die from pregnancy-related complications than women in their twenties.[8] Their babies are also less likely

to survive. In every region of the world, rural girls have children earlier than urban girls,[9] yet in the cities of Namibia, Nepal, Nicaragua and Nigeria, one in every five girls gives birth before her eighteenth birthday.[10] In addition, girls aged 15 to 19 account for at least one-fourth of the estimated 20 million unsafe abortions performed each year. A study among 20 to 29 year olds in Yaoundé, Cameroon found that 21 per cent of urban young women reported ever having an abortion and 29 per cent of urban young men reported ever having a girlfriend who terminated a pregnancy for which they were responsible.[11] The study also noted that abortions obtained before the age of 20 were more likely to be self-induced or performed by an untrained person in unsafe circumstances than were abortions after the age of 20.

Research from around the world shows that young people still know alarmingly little about HIV/AIDS. Urban youth tend to know more than rural youth, and knowledge improves dramatically with increased education and economic status. A multi-country study in sub-Saharan Africa found that the proportion of young women and men aged 18 to 24 with knowledge of modern family planning methods was substantially higher in urban than in rural areas.[13]

Even if young people have the information they need, they may find it impossible to protect themselves. About half of all HIV infections worldwide, some 6,000 a day, occur in young people aged 15 to 24. Across the world, urban youth are more affected by HIV/AIDS than young people in rural areas. In Zambia, one of the

countries most severely affected by the virus, the prevalence rate in young people aged 15 to 24 living in urban areas is 10.5 per cent, about twice as high as the HIV prevalence rate in rural youth in that age group.[14] Pervasive gender discrimination puts girls in urban settings at higher risk of HIV infection: 15.2 per cent of urban young women aged 15 to 24 in Zambia are infected with the virus, compared with 3.7 per cent of urban young men in that age group.[15] This trend is common throughout sub-Saharan Africa where, on average, three young women are HIV-infected for every young man.[16]

UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health of Peru and the San Juan de Lurigancho VII Health Network, is implementing the project "Stronger Voices for Reproductive Health", in San Juan de Lurigancho, a very poor community made up of rural indigenous migrants in metropolitan Lima. The project aims to improve the quality and friendliness of sexual and reproductive health services for young people, in particular adolescent girls. The project organizes information campaigns and direct partnerships with health care providers. Consultation with groups of young people influences the way services are delivered, and makes them more attractive to young people. The initiative has enabled adolescent girls and boys to articulate their reproductive needs and exercise their right to a life without violence and with access to health services.

UNFPA employs a multisectoral approach that considers reproductive and sexual health issues

as one aspect of personal development, with links to a range of other health and social services. In some cities, youth centres provide safe spaces for girls, offering recreational activities as well as counselling. Girls may find guidance about family issues; violence against women and girls; jobs; relationships; and reproductive health.

Young people need appropriate information, education, and health services. Promoting knowledge of sexual and reproductive health and conflict resolution and negotiation skills can help young people protect themselves from non-consensual sex, unwanted pregnancies and STIs, including HIV. It can also help them make responsible and informed decisions about their lives. Education should also focus on issues of violence against women and girls, to raise awareness and help avoid damaging experiences like Maty's. It should also address the special needs of married girls, girls at risk of HIV, and girls and boys at risk of dropping out of school. Great importance should also be placed on non-formal education, which can reach marginalized and vulnerable youth who are not in school. Sexual and reproductive health services should be youth-friendly, honour confidentiality, offer convenient hours and locations, and keep fees affordable. But sexual and reproductive health is only one aspect of young people's development; interventions should be linked to other programmes, including those that deal with employment and livelihoods programmes.

Shimu●

FLEEING FROM CHILD MARRIAGE, FINDING FREEDOM IN THE CITY — DHAKA, BANGLADESH

Shimu doesn't have a birthday: she has never known what day she was born. Nor does she know how old she is. She thinks she is 22 or 23, but when she tells her story it seems like she might be older than that.

Don't you want to pick a day, say that that is your birthday and celebrate it?

No, what for? I'm poor. It's so expensive to celebrate a birthday. I'm lucky not to have one.

Shimu does know that she was born in a village in the Natore district in northern Bangladesh, where her father farmed half an acre of land. He didn't always have enough to feed the family. She also knows that her mother died when she was three or four years old, but she doesn't know how or why. Shimu thinks she got food poisoning from a fish that her grandfather had caught, but she's not sure. And she knows that afterwards she went to live with an aunt and then back with her father and his new wife, and finally with an older sister and her husband.

There, when she was 9 or 10, Shimu discovered, in a neighbour's home, a strange box with people who moved, talked, did

things. She was shocked. The first time she saw someone die on TV, Shimu cried; no one had told her that it was not real, and no one would until long after she was married.

At that time, Shimu started going to school, but after few months her sister took her out. If she spent so much time in class, she said, how would she be able to help her with the housework and with her child?

Didn't you try to keep going to school?

No, I liked not going. I didn't have to study, I had lots of time to play with my friends and dolls.

And also to look for firewood, wash clothes, sweep the tiny house, go to the market. At the market there was a molasses salesman who would look at her. Sometimes Shimu looked back. One day he approached her and said that he wanted to talk; they sat down and he said he wanted to marry her. The boy was 17; Shimu was 11 or 12, and didn't really understand. Marriage was a word she had heard here and there, on television and in neighbours' conversations, that was about it.

In Bangladesh, the median age for women to marry is 15, and it is lower in poor rural areas.

But parents arrange most of these marriages. Shimu didn't know what to do that afternoon; she told the boy she would talk to her sister and brother-in-law.

They are my guardians, they are the ones to decide.

The boy went to see them about his proposal: he was willing to marry Shimu without a dowry because he liked her. In rural Bangladesh, marriages involve a dowry in money or goods that the bride's parents pay to the groom. This is a new "tradition" – maybe half a century old – which, though illegal, is still practised in three marriages out of four.

Shimu's guardians agreed, but on one condition: since the bride was so young, the groom would have to wait two years before he could take her home. The boy accepted and the celebration was brief; Shimu was officially a married woman, but her life had barely changed.

That was not going to last: a few months later, Shimu's husband started to demand a dowry; his friends were getting married and they were all getting something, he said. His reputation would be affected if he didn't. His demands became more and more violent.

When he understood that there was nothing to get, he said that since they didn't give him a dowry he would take his wife by any means necessary.

Did you want to go with him?

I don't know if I wanted to or not. He was my husband and so it was my duty to go wherever he told me to.

Her husband lived with his mother, siblings, in-laws, nieces and nephews – and Shimu had to do most of the housework. At first, she didn't mind: she was used to it. But her husband treated her worse and worse. He said she was stupid, complained that her family never gave him gifts, shouted at her, and started beating her. Shimu thought that it was somehow her fault.

> Young women with autonomy over their earnings have more freedom to decide when and whom they marry, and over the timing, number and spacing of their children

Because we were so poor that we hadn't given him anything. That was my fault.

A few months later, Shimu started to feel funny: something was moving around in her belly. A neighbour told her, "Of course, girl,

you're pregnant." No one had ever explained anything to her, so she didn't realise it for four or five months. When she told her husband, he didn't seem particularly interested; Shimu only thought that she wanted her baby to be pretty. But on the day of the birth, when the midwife announced it was a boy, everyone congratulated her:

I was happy. I wanted a boy because that was what my husband wanted. Having a son gives you a lot of prestige.

Those first few days her in-laws helped out and took care of her; a few weeks later, though, everything returned to normal, and her husband hit her harder than ever. Now and then a neighbour, startled by the shouting, would come by. Shimu's husband would tell them that since she was his wife, he could do whatever he wanted with her. Like, for example, tell her to leave so that he could marry a woman who would give him money.

Sometimes he would feel sorry about his behaviour and invite Shimu out to the movies. Those times, Shimu would think that maybe she could have a family after all. But the illusion was short-lived, and soon there were more blows and insults. At a certain point her mother-in-law stopped feeding her, and Shimu had to start working in other houses to pay for her food.

Time went by and she continued to suffer. After four years, Shimu got pregnant again and

had another son. But this time no one cared. Her husband wanted to get rid of her and he accused her of cheating on him with his brother. Shimu swore on the Koran that this was not true, but he hit her furiously with a bamboo stick; wounded, Shimu sought refuge at her sister's. Her husband went after her and Shimu went back because her sons needed her.

One afternoon, Shimu was on her way home from work and she stopped to rest a little. Her husband passed by, saw her and accused her of waiting for a lover. He hit her on the street. Shimu had put up with almost everything, lack of food, insults, blows. But she would not be dishonoured:

You never cared that I had to work for other people. But you see me there on the street and accuse me of being a whore.

Shimu told her husband not to come after her ever again and she went to her father's house. The next morning, she was planning to go to court to file for divorce but, in the end, she didn't dare. Shimu was 18 or 19, had two children and no way to support them. Her stepmother told her that all she could do was leave the children with her and go to work in the city.

She was right. In the village I had no way of making money. There was no work and I needed to earn money for them.

Dhaka, Bangladesh

- Dhaka's metropolitan area has a population of some 12 million

- Young people ages 15-24 make up 20% of the country's population

- In Bangladesh some 20% of rural girls aged 16-20 attend school, whereas this is 40% in urban areas

- Dhaka is projected to be the world's 4th most populous city by 2020 with 22 million inhabitants

- Cycle rickshaws and auto rickshaws are the main mode of transport for the inhabitants of the city, with close to 400,000 rickshaws running each day — the largest number for any city in the world

The only city Shimu knew about was Dhaka; she had seen it on television: a big place, full of cars and rickshaws and people. Dhaka is indeed a big place: Bangladesh's capital has around 12 million inhabitants. When she arrived at an aunt's house, the city seemed even bigger, noisier and more foreign than she had imagined. She was frightened. But she also liked walking down the street without anyone looking at her or knowing who she was. In a few days, Shimu got a job at a garment factory and everything seemed off to a good start.

The garment industry provides 70 per cent of Bangladesh's exports and it employs two million people. Many of them are rural migrants, and four out of five are women. Shimu started working as a helper for 700 taka a month which,

at that time, was around US$15. The factory where Shimu works is a seven-storey building in the centre of Dhaka. From the outside, it looks like an apartment building. Inside, each floor is a large workshop with dozens of employees, sewing machines and cutting tables where all sorts of clothing are made. Shimu was pleased: she had a job, she was learning and her mates were helping her. For the first time in her life she had got rid of her husband, her in-laws, her village and their burdens. A few months after she arrived, Shimu, now able to support her children, mustered the courage to return to her town and file for divorce.

After a year she was promoted to operator. The first time she had a sewing machine to herself, she says she felt like a real person.

One afternoon, two years later, her supervisor told her to go back to her village because her younger son was ill. When she arrived after the long journey they told her they had buried him. Shimu cried and cried. But she thought God must have his reasons, and she went back to work.

Now, six years after her arrival, Shimu is still an operator. She earns 2,100 taka – US$30 dollars – a month for eight hours of work, six days a week. It is well known that the garment industry prospers among others things because of these wages: the cost of labour is just a fraction of the retail price for a shirt or pair of trousers made in Bangladesh.

Do you feel that you have changed a lot in these years?

Yes, very much. I'm not so skinny anymore. I have more self-confidence. I can send money home so that my son can go to the madrassa *– the Islamic school– and get an education. He is 11 and doing very well.*

Do you send him to the Islamic school because you are religious?

Yes, I always wanted to send him to the madrassa.

Shimu continues...

I suffered a lot, but God determined this fate for me, so I must deserve it. For there to be happy people, some of us have to be unhappy. By the luck of the draw, I didn't have anything: no money, no education. But now my fate is looking up; I'm making money and sending my son to the madrassa.

Shimu speaks slowly and firmly: she doesn't hesitate. Living in the city has allowed her to make a break from traditional networks. True, she sometimes feels lonely and doesn't know what to do. But she does know that she doesn't have to do what her relatives and elders say.

I'm satisfied. My dream is for my son to get an education and a good job.

And what do you want to do in the future?

I don't have an education. I'm illiterate. The best thing I can do is work my whole life as an operator. If I had an education, I could think about something else, but I don't. I'm not worried. I just want to earn a little more.

Shimu prefers living in Dhaka because "it is safer, and here I can earn a living, live and think my own way", she says. In her village none of this would have been possible. But she thinks that when she is older she will go back there. She plans to buy a piece of land and settle there. She has already managed to save 20,000 taka –almost US$300.

But if life is better in Dhaka, why go back to your village?

Because here, if I don't work I won't have enough money. In the village I will. And anyway, when I am old no one will be able to put pressure on me to do anything I don't want. So then I will be able to live in my place.

THE CITY EMPOWERING YOUNG WOMEN

Girls and young women face many challenges in rural settings where they have fewer resources, assets, and income opportunities than men. Some of these factors have pushed girls and young women like Shimu to migrate to urban areas. They find that urban life offers better economic opportunities; It may help them get away from restrictive gender norms and traditional practices, and gain a sense of autonomy and control over their lives.

The urban-rural divide starts early in life. One of the most visible disparities is in girls' access to education. In developing countries, school attendance for rural girls between the ages of 10 to 14 is 18.4 per cent lower than for urban girls of the same age group. The gap is 37.5 per cent for girls ages 15 to 19.[1] Though there is also a rural-urban disparity in access to education among boys, it is less pronounced. The highest rural-urban inequalities in girls' access to schooling are found in the Middle East and in Western and Central Africa, with respectively 54.6 and 46.9 per cent lower attendance rates for 15-19-year old girls.[2] In rural settings, many girls start work at a young age to help support their families and as a result education for them is often cut short.[3]

Child marriage is still prevalent in many rural areas. As Shimu found, child marriage jeopardizes girls' opportunities. It disrupts their education, violates their human rights, and can have severe

consequences for their health – especially their sexual and reproductive health.

In sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia about half of all rural girls are married by age 18, about twice the rate of their urban counterparts.[4] There may be wider disparities depending on age, and in some regions and countries. For instance a survey in the rural Amhara region in Ethiopia has found that as many as half the girls were married before their 15th birthday, usually to men considerably older. The vast majority of these girls did not know their husbands before-hand. They were introduced to sex by force, often before their first menstruation.[5]

Girls often flee to urban areas to escape their fate. A parallel survey in slum areas of Addis Ababa found that one in every four female adolescent migrants aged 10-19 came to the city to escape early marriage.[6] This study also found girls had other reasons to migrate to the city, in-cluding the search for education and work. More often than not, these girls end up trapped in the poverty net of urban slums. Even under poverty conditions, many girls like Shimu make their own money, which gives them a degree of autonomy they wouldn't have in the village.

A study in Bangladesh of adolescent girls who had migrated from rural to urban areas for work has shown that 31 per cent were married by age 18, compared to 71 per cent of their peers who stayed behind.[7] There are several reasons why young women in urban areas marry later. The most important are education and participation in the labour force, which give them a better social position. Young women with autonomy over their earnings have more freedom to decide when and whom they marry, and over the timing, number and spacing of their children.

Nevertheless, girls and young women in urban areas still face many challenges because of their gender. In many developing cities, young women are more likely to be unemployed than young men, evidence of gender discrimination in access to education and job opportunities.[8] More young women than men are forced by lack of education and training into the informal sector and subsistence activities.[9] Many adolescent girls come to see their bodies as one of their few marketable assets. Impoverished girls on their own or managing HIV-affected families are frequently under pressure to exchange sex for gifts, money, or shelter.

Biruh Tesfa, or Bright Future, is a programme for poor urban girls at risk of exploitation and abuse in Addis Ababa, developed by the Ethiopian Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Addis Ababa Youth and Sport Commission, with technical assistance from the Population Council and support from DFID, the United Nations Foundation and UNFPA. Implemented in a slum area of Addis Ababa, the project targets out-of-school girls aged 10 to 19, most of whom are migrants, living away from parents and family members, and unlikely to be reached by other programmes. *Biruh Tesfa* provides girls a safe space to build support networks with other girls and women and promotes functional literacy, life skills, livelihoods skills, and reproductive health education.[10] The programme has been well received by the community with currently more than 600 girls participating, half of whom had never had any schooling before.[11]

Education is crucial to changing the attitudes and behaviours which perpetuate gender inequali-ties. Education, both formal and informal, as well as livelihoods and mentoring support can make fundamental contributions to improving girls' and women's health, well-being and economic opportunities. Interventions for adolescent girls should also address sexual and reproductive health and use a skills approach to equip young people to apply knowledge in practice. Action is required to raise awareness amongst parents and communities of their daughters' needs and rights, underscoring the importance of delayed marriage and keeping young girls in school.

Angelo•

FINDING THE RIGHT BEAT: A MATTER OF URBAN SURVIVAL — RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL

When he was a child, Angelo didn't like to play football. That made him different from the other kids in Vigário Geral, but just a little. He did share with them poverty, broken homes, sporadic schooling, early jobs, and marginality. Vigário Geral is one of the 500 or 600 *favelas* in Rio de Janeiro. Figures vary, but it is generally thought that one-fourth of the inhabitants of the Rio de Janeiro urban area -more than 3 million people- live in these slums. The age and level of development of the *favelas* in Rio fluctuates; Vigário Geral is over forty years old. It has sturdy houses, paved roads, and running water. Angelo didn't like football, but he enjoyed playing and fighting in the street with the other kids. Only he didn't have much time for that.

Angelo is the oldest of four children. In 1994, when he was eight, his father left. The money his mother earned cleaning houses wasn't enough to support the family, and Angelo had to start working.

She didn't make me, she didn't say anything. But I saw our situation. Sometimes we didn't have anything to eat and, since I was the oldest, I realised I had to do something.

Angelo found out where to buy candy and lollypops, and he started to sell them on buses, trains, and at traffic lights. He sometimes wondered why he had to do this when so many other kids didn't have to work, but he couldn't come up with an answer. Nor did he understand why there were people so rich, and why they didn't do anything to help those who had nothing.

Now I think they are afraid of us. They believe black people from the favelas are dangerous, bad people.

Some days Angelo could go to school, but not always. But every day, he would say later, he had the satisfaction of seeing how his hard work helped his mother and siblings get by. Sometimes, though, temptation lurked.

In Vigário Geral temptation is always present. Even today, drug dealers go down the street showing off their expensive clothes, their name brand sneakers, their big, gleaming weapons, their pretty girls, and their impunity. When Angelo was a teenager, many of his friends wanted to be like them. Sometimes it seemed like the only way out; all the city offered them was rejection and marginality. But, like the other

kids in the *favela*, Angelo had also seen the dark side of that life: the arrests, the shoot-outs, the frequent deaths. That's why every time a *bandido* –a neighbour, a friend– approached him with an offer, Angelo turned it down.

I knew that at first violence seems easy, a sort of game, a way of outsmarting the rest. But then you have to pay. Even if they don't kill you, you are never at ease. You always have to be on the lookout; the threat is always around.

But sometimes, on those afternoons selling candy beneath the implacable sun, on those nights when there was little to eat, his conviction wavered. Until that day when he was thirteen, and he heard the AfroReggae boys for the first time.

AfroReggae was born out of chaos...

...says José Júnior, its founder. In 1993 José Júnior was a DJ from a poor background who had made a name for himself on the Rio music scene. Around that time, the police had killed 21 young people in Vigário Geral. Many believed this was retaliation for the murder of four military police officers killed

by local drug dealers. When one thinks of urban youth culture, one thinks of music; cities are the places where young people find their own forms of expression, which often involve rhythm. Júnior was determined to use music to draw youth away from crime, drugs, and violence. First, he created a magazine that dealt with reggae, rap, hip-hop, and other black culture issues. The people involved in that project founded the first *Núcleo Comunitário de Cultura* -Culture Community Centre- in Vigário Geral. That was where the musicians of AfroReggae band -the most public side of the NGO- would be trained.

Now, the band gathers funding and gains visibility for its project by means of songs and shows about life in the *favelas*, violence, racism, police brutality –and possible alternatives. It has recorded several albums, toured the world, and received the support of major artists like Caetano Veloso and Regina Casé. José Júnior is proud:

Through our music, Vigário Geral went from the crime section to the culture section in the newspapers.

That evening, June of 1999, when Angelo heard AfroReggae, he got excited and wanted to be like them. Like them, he could make something of his life. When he returned to his house, he began to bang on an old tin, and he found that he had rhythm in his body, "in his heart," he would say later. Angelo was fascinated. He spent all of his free time banging on tins. When he thought he started to sound good, he invited three or four friends to play with him. The group started to take shape, and one day they decided they should give themselves a name.

We weren't sure. We thought of several possible names and finally we came up with AfroLata. Afro because we are afro, that's where we come from, we have it in our blood. And Lata (tin) because that's what we played. I mean, we did the same thing as AfroReggae, but since we didn't have money to buy real instruments, we made do with old tins.

Angelo and his friends had turned trash into musical instruments and precariousness into art. AfroLata became a part of the AfroReggae project. In addition to the main band, the NGO has a dozen groups of young people who are involved in music, dance, capoeira, theatre, and circus. Angelo and his mates began to play in different places, first around the city, then around Brazil. They were even invited to a festival in the Netherlands. Angelo stopped selling candy on the street; AfroReggae had gotten him a grant that allowed him to concentrate on rehearsing and playing with

AfroLata and another young band, Makala, and on teaching percussion.

It's good to teach music and dance to the kids from the neighbourhood. We give them something to be interested in, and they spend less time on the street. They are less vulnerable to the temptation of drugs and crime, and they study. You should see them. When they come to us, the kids change; they are transformed. And it makes us proud to think that these kids are not going to be hoods, that they are going to make something of their lives.

AfroReggae has opened Culture Community Centres in four other *favelas* in Rio. So far, they have carried out sixty projects involving 2,000 young people and, between employees and grantees, they employ 175 people. But their main centre is still in Vigário Geral, where they are building a million-dollar, three-storey building -the biggest one in the neighbourhood- with the support of several sponsors. They hope to open it in January 2008, when the spaces for rehearsals, recording, computers, meetings, and administration are finished, along with the auditorium on the deck. Currently, in the building that has been loaned to them, some 400 young people participate in their activities. In an 8,000-person community, that is a significant number. Vitor, who is in charge of the Vigário Geral Centre, knows that given the magnitude of the problem, it's still very little –but that doing nothing would be worse:
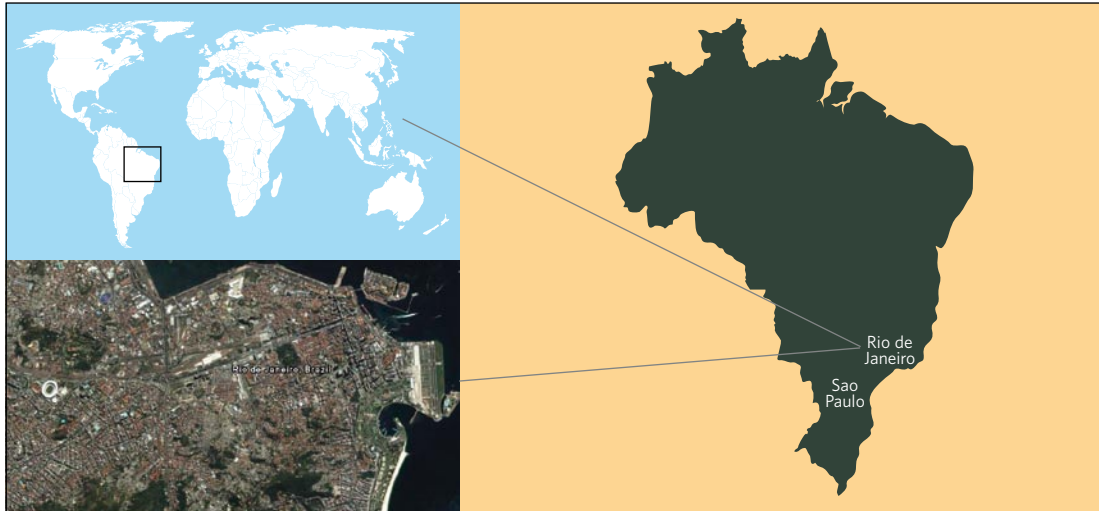
- Home to some 11 million inhabitants, Rio is the 2nd most populous city in Brazil, after Sao Paulo

- 82% of Brazil's population live in urban areas

- 37% of urban residents live in slums, such as the favelas

- The city is known worldwide for its annual carnival: community organizations, like samba schools prepare all year to participate in the carnival parades

- The south zone of Rio has the highest population density of the city and also the highest socio-cultural differentiation

Some say that it is a drop of water in the ocean, that for every kid we offer an alternative to crime there are ten more who still want to go down the wrong path. Sometimes that seems true, but for us it's important to try, to help even just one kid, and to make our problem visible in places where it was once ignored.

Angelo thinks that it is almost a matter of survival:

The world is very unfair, and they want to push us aside as if we didn't exist. They only remember us when there is crime, violence. What we do shows white people, rich people that black people who live in the favelas are not all outcasts, criminals, that we can also do good things, create, bring peace wherever we go. If people realise this, they might start to treat us differently.

Whenever he can, Angelo goes to school at night. He is about to finish grade school; AfroReggae insists that its members keep studying. Now, Angelo earns US$150 per month –plus a small bonus for each time he performs. It isn't always enough to support his family. Angelo is a picture of stability. At the age of 20 or 22, several of his band mates already have two or three children by different women. Angelo started dating a girl seven years ago; he moved in with her three years ago; and they had their first child one year ago.

I am very careful. I use rubbers. I care. When we finally had a child, it was because we wanted to.

Do young people today have fewer kids than before?

No, just the opposite. This place is full of babies. Before, women didn't have children so young, but now, with so much alcohol and drugs and all…

Angelo's hands are full of calluses from so much banging on drums and tins, and he is quick with a smile. Angelo has always lived in Vigário. He loves his community and works for it, but he says that he would like to leave, to take his family away, that he would not stop working with AfroReggae and the kids, but he would rather live elsewhere:

Here there is a lot of danger: shoot-outs, fights between hoods. It is a hard place to live. I hope we can leave and have a better life.

What would a better life be like?

I hope my son doesn't have to go out to work, that he can have the things I wanted but couldn't have.

What things?

I don't know… a car. I always wanted to have a car and a computer. But my greatest dream is for my whole family to be all right, to be together. I imagine us in a nice house, eating next to a pool. Now that would be a good life…

…says Angelo, his eyes sparkling.

And do you think that music will make that possible?

Sure, I hope so. That's what I am working for. But even if I don't make it, I feel good. When I am up there playing, I feel so good. I feel a carnival inside, a whole world. I remember all the people I love, my friends, my family, living and dead, everyone. When I am up there banging on the drum, I feel like a king.

URBAN YOUTH CULTURE: FORGING A NEW IDENTITY

In all developing countries, the certainties of rural traditions are giving way to urban life, with its opportunities and risks, its individual freedoms, and its more complex social demands and frameworks of support. Whereas in traditional rural communities, the extended family and established customs used to guide the transition to adulthood, in the rapidly changing urban environment, young people learn much about what to expect and how to behave, from their peers, and increasingly from mass media. This has led to the creation of a youth culture, that is urban in nature and that serves as a reference point for young people developing their identities, often while challenging their ascribed roles at home, school, and work.

Young people in urban settings often develop a sense of self and identity from their surroundings.[1] These surroundings usually offer far greater social, cultural, and ethnic diversity than rural environments. The close proximity and frequent interactions of young people in urban areas facilitates the creation, adaptation, and dissemination of an urban youth culture.[2] As became clear in Angelo's story, the interactions with the urban environment can have an intense impact on the socialization of young people, exposing them to a multitude of influences as they develop, experiment, question, and assume roles in their societies.

The collective identities of urban youth are shaped by –and expressed through– music, dance, fashion, art, and other cultural forms. Music genres such as hip hop, which originated in poor urban African American neighbourhoods in the United States and represents the lifestyles of impoverished youth, have provided young people with a new form of expression and have influenced their clothing, language, and outlook on life.[3] Other aspects of youth culture are reflected in certain risk behaviours that are especially prevalent among young men in urban areas, including alcohol and drug consumption and engagement in violence.[4]

Globalization has enabled youth culture to become a global phenomenon. Young people are growing up in a world in which goods, capital, technology, information, ideas, and people move swiftly across borders. With the rapid expansion of fast food restaurants, homogenous shopping malls, and young people who dress alike and listen to the same music, city centres throughout the world increasingly resemble each other. Mass media are especially influential in imparting knowledge to young people and socializing them to particular aspirations, values and attitudes, often in contradiction to the traditions of their culture.[5] Watching television, listening to the radio, or surfing the Internet are important not only for the effects they have

on a young person's attitudes and behaviours, but also for signifying inclusion and access to knowledge in an increasingly interconnected world.[6]

Access to the media and information and communication technologies (ICTs) varies significantly by geographic region, social class, and place of residence. Youth living in cities are far more likely to have access to television, radio, and newspapers than those living in rural areas. From 2000 to 2003, more than half of the 269 million new Internet users were between the ages of 15 to 24,[7] with the majority of them living in urban areas. The use of new technologies is often a communal experience, since many youth do not have computers at home, instead they access the Internet at school or in Internet cafés. Though Internet usage and mobile phone ownership are highest among youth in urban areas, many urban youth still do not have access to these new ICTs. Education and socio-economic status are key factors affecting access. In Indonesia, for example, only 16 per cent of urban youth have used the Internet and only 27 per cent use mobile phones for short message service (SMS), whereas 59 per cent of university students have used the Internet, and 95 per cent use SMS.[8] Furthermore, in some countries, young women's access to the Internet is far more limited than that of young men.[9]

Urban youth are targeted as a new generation of consumers who can be heavily influenced by popular cultural icons and media messages. But media messages are not transmitted and received in a vacuum; young people have many resources that allow them to interpret and reshape these messages without completely abandoning their identities.[10] Superficial similarities in youth culture may obscure the huge differences in family structures, behavioural expectations, and patterns of sexuality, marriage, and reproduction.[11] The impact of greater exposure to the media largely depends on the local culture and its response to imports. In many parts of the world, the resurgence of religious movements has acted as a countervailing influence to the more permissive attitudes sometimes purveyed by the media.[12]

A project that positively incorporates youth culture is Dance4Life. This international collaboration uses dance as a way to raise awareness and actively engage young people in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. The project, which is still expanding, currently runs in secondary schools in ten countries. It uses a life-skills approach and consists of numerous activities throughout the school year, culminating with the worldwide Dance4Life event on the Saturday before World AIDS Day. In 2006, nearly 100,000 young people in ten countries

took part in the project. The Dance4Life event involved local artists and bands and connected youth in participating countries by satellite. The project aims to have at least one million young people dancing all over the world by World AIDS Day 2014, making a powerful statement of hope. Dance4Life includes all aspects of young people's culture: their icons, their media, and their favourite music and dance.[13]

Youth cultural understanding, needs and values have an important impact on the social capital of urban communities and neighbourhoods. Youth-specific public spaces should encourage social integration with the other parts of the community and promote the recognition and validation of youth culture.[14] Priority should also be given to decreasing the digital divide and providing greater youth access to media and ICTs. In addition, sports activities, music and art instruction, and recreational pursuits should be promoted to help youth develop a positive self-image and essential social skills. When youth living on the margins, like Angelo, are able to develop a public sphere of their own, they gain a sense of self, personal competence, and a network of peers, which can serve as sources of social capital for a safe and successful transition to adulthood.

Protecting Young People living in Urban Poverty Today and in the Future

The seven stories in this report challenge those who care about young people and the future of our cities. The two are closely linked, especially in developing countries, where half the urban population may be under 25. City planners, political leaders, employers and civil society groups have a common interest in supporting the resourcefulness and creativity of young people, and creating an urban landscape free of poverty and violence.

The first-person accounts of Maty, Freddy, Reham, Angelo, Bing, Geeta and Shimu reflect fragments of the tough urban lives of millions of young people today, and millions more in the future. Two elements cut across all seven stories: a background of poverty, hardship and violence, and hope for a better future, through their own efforts.

The theme of violence common to all the stories except Bing's is not by chance; in any city, in any part of the world, it is hard to find young people living in poverty who have not been touched by sexual abuse, gender-based violence, the violent impact of criminal activity, or random acts of violence.

The expected rapid growth of urban areas in coming decades will inevitably transform the living spaces of all young people, for better or for worse. The children of Maty, Freddy, Reham, Angelo, Bing, Geeta and Shimu deserve a better start than their parents. They have a right to decent housing and sufficient food; to education, health care, and a life free from abuse and violence. Such a future is possible, if cities prepare themselves NOW to absorb and sustain projected population growth. They must focus attention on helping poor people to end their poverty; and above all invest in young people, who are the key to breaking the cycle which hands on poverty from generation to generation.

Policy makers at all levels and all stakeholders, including young people themselves, should be aware of the coming urban transformation and prepare for it. Cities should:

- Ensure that young people have **access to quality education** in the neighbourhoods where they live that will prepare them for the changing needs of the labour market; that schools are free from violence, neglect and sexual abuse; that girls and boys are treated equally; and that they learn in school about conflict resolution, negotiation skills, critical thinking and sexual and reproductive health, including how to prevent HIV.

- In collaboration with employers, **train young people** to develop the skills demanded by the labour market; support the efforts of the Youth Employment Network (http://www.ilo.org/public/english/employment/strat/yen/) and replicate this model as a way to link young people with genuine employment opportunities.

- **Protect young people's health**. Provide young people with easy access to affordable, youth-friendly health services. These should include sexual and reproductive health services, so that young people can protect themselves from unintended pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

- Ensure access to the **clean and safe water, sanitation** and **adequate housing** necessary for a healthy transition to adulthood; and ensure security of tenure and property rights.

- Support young people to be part of **self-help efforts to build appropriate housing** for themselves and their families.

- **Create safe spaces**, in particular for adolescent girls in their communities, so they can navigate their own way through life without fear of violence or sexual abuse; involve young people in crime watch and prevention efforts; and ensure that police stations provide effective protection in poor neighbourhoods, not just in better-off communities.

- **Involve young people in urban planning** including decision-making, monitoring and evaluation of city programmes designed for them; and engage young people as active citizens, supporting them to develop a positive self-image and sense of belonging to society, and allowing them to make positive contributions to the well-being of their communities.

- **Strengthen urban governance**, with support from regional and national governments, to enable these and similar measures.

- **Mobilize support** from the international community.

Action along these lines will be a departure from past policies. Rather than react to urban problems as they emerge, the aim should be to anticipate urban growth and its impacts. These proposed measures both support young peoples' resourcefulness and attack the root causes of poverty. They ensure that young people are prepared to enter the labour market, stay healthy and postpone marriage and childbearing. Together, they represent a strategy for individuals to fulfil their human potential, and for cities to fulfil their function as the engines of national development.

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UNFPA, the United Nations Population Fund, is an international development agency that promotes the right of every woman, man and child to enjoy a life of health and equal opportunity. UNFPA supports countries in using population data for policies and programmes to reduce poverty and to ensure that every pregnancy is wanted, every birth is safe, every young person is free of HIV/AIDS, and every girl and woman is treated with dignity and respect.

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